THE ENTREPRENEURIAL KALEIDOSCOPE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE ENTREPRENEUR – A METAPHORICAL STUDY (SUMMARY)

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THE ENTREPRENEURIAL KALEIDOSCOPE: INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE ENTREPRENEUR – A METAPHORICAL STUDY

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Principal Topic

This paper sets out the results of a decade-long quest to create, test, and utilize metaphor methodologies to study international similarities and differences in social constructions of the entrepreneur. Despite significant progress in studying international differences and similarities in entrepreneurship, it has proved harder to render tractable the nuanced socio-cultural antecedents of entrepreneurial phenomena. These cultural meanings are important because they mould aspirations, social status, practices, and ethics. The scale and rigour of the completed study provides deeper, more surprising and challenging results than anticipated in earlier pilot phases.

Methods

The sample is articles about entrepreneurs taken from national, English-language newspapers in Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, United Kingdom and United States, over a ten week period (Dec 2001 - Feb 2002). Metaphors were extracted iteratively, using multiple researchers. A tripartite methodology developed the theming frame, incorporating extant metaphor themes, a Q-Sort of a structured subsample, and data-driven hermeneutical in-vivo theming. We thus created a dataset of 4,132 metaphors coded in 17 themes, analysed quantitatively and qualitatively.

Results and Implications

The statistical similarities across countries illuminate shared meaning and symbolism carried by metaphors for entrepreneurship. In addition, detailed qualitative analysis adds substantially more insight. One unexpected similarity in socio-constructions of entrepreneurship is the top three ranking of categories “The Road Travelled” (11.5% of the total) and “Homely Arts and Crafts” (12.2%) for all nations. Also high ranked were “Myth, Magic and Mysticism” and “It’s Alive.” Bottom ranking were gambling (last) and “Passion.” This result surprised us, given populist and academic emphasis on these themes.

Comparing individual nations, we found differences in the ranks of themes and the distinct meaning-bundles within themes. Indeed, we find both praise and the dark side of entrepreneurship. For example, USA frontier heroes contrast social outcasts in Canadian discourse.

The results indicate that transnational views of entrepreneurship are richer than earlier cultural studies suggested. Research focusing on risk taking, for example, misses significant questions of journeys and homely arts. For policy debates, the range of metaphors used challenges assumptions underlying decisions and communications. Finally, we see a disconnect between academics’ priorities and the range of metaphors in public discourse.

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