16. Entrepreneurship

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Definition and Background

Entrepreneurship refers to a set of nonlinear practices and activities that create novel business models for goods or services that are either lacking or nonexistent. In terms of design thinking, entrepreneurs design creative, responsive, or niche solutions to problems within the context of a marketplace. Often, entrepreneurs innovate by exploiting opportunities and searching for sources of new ideas or combinations, especially as they emerge from recurrent problems with existing designs (Spinuzzi, 2016). As such, technical and professional communication (TPC) scholars point to the complex communicative processes, identities, and networks that entrepreneurs engage as they attempt to convince others that their innovations have value. Capacities for opportunity vary depending on an entrepreneur's experiential, social, or technological resources. Hence, scholars have been interested in entrepreneurs' identity formation, including how they discuss risk or failure (Lauren & Pigg, 2016; Williams et al., 2016), and communicate this within and for entrepreneurial communities and networks (Fraiberg, 2017; Jones, 2017), which are often global (Fraiberg, 2021). Entrepreneurs usually have extensive knowledge in the area in which they are innovating and develop solutions through approaches like design thinking and ***user-centered design***, using them to create and revise multimodal genres like pitch decks (Spinuzzi et al, 2015) or crowdfunding campaigns (Gerding & Vealey, 2017; Vealey & Gerding, 2016).

Although entrepreneurship often innovates in search of profit, entrepreneurial thinking has led activist entrepreneurs (Davis, 2017) to challenge growth-only models of capitalism, building more progressive or publicly oriented business strategies framed as social or civic entrepreneurship (Peredo & McLean, 2006; Waddock & Post, 1991). TPC scholars have also examined the cultural rhetorics of entrepreneurship. In Natasha Jones' (2017) study of 12 Black business owners, participants achieve rhetorical agency by promoting various narratives that lead to cultural empowerment. And as Steven Fraiberg (2021) notes in a recent special issue of *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* on entrepreneurship and globalization, scholars should more explicitly account for the "translocal systems" of design and innovation happening in cities across the world.

Recent trends in design communities, such as the Maker Movement and open source, offer more complicated entrepreneurial processes. When creators set out to monetize their ideas or objects, they are sometimes described as "digital maker-entrepreneurs" (Troxler & Wolf, 2017) who often arrive at ideas like

most entrepreneurs do: through a mix of serendipity and iteration. However, unlike more traditional entrepreneurs, makers often do not possess *a-prioi* expert knowledge, but instead arrive at **innovations** by accessing social and technological resources via makerspaces, websites, and brokering platforms. These spaces not only provide tools and knowledge but also allow for opportunities to emerge through nonlinear and heterogeneous processes, from bringing prototypes to market via digital fabrication and manufacturing tools, like 3D printers, to creating markets that support product creation through crowdfunding or e-commerce sites. Peter Troxler and Patricia Wolf (2017) provide several case studies of digital maker-entrepreneurs who use computer-aided design (CAD) programs to design popular fan art that is then freely shared on sites like Thingiverse, but also 3D printed and sold on Etsy or Amazon.

Since the motives, resources, and social arrangements of makers often differ from more traditional business models, entrepreneurship scholars have looked at the maker movement as a potential model for the future of small businesses and manufacturing. Some have argued that its strong emphasis on failure and iteration can lead to creative, productive approaches to business (Singh, 2018), while others have focused on the ways decentralized communication leads to more dynamic and diverse entrepreneurial teams (Browder et al., 2019). Most famously, Chris Anderson (2012) argued that the barriers of entry for makers are so low and the demand for niche products so high that any creative person can become an entrepreneur and participate in reinventing the industrial economy.

■ Design Application

Dominant narratives of entrepreneurial success often encourage participation. One example of this is the origin story of Square. A small attachment for mobile devices that captures credit card data, Square exploited a common problem in the shared economy by providing small businesses with a new way to access consumer credit. As Anderson (2012) and other sources (Browder et al., 2019; Holm, 2015) tell it, Square was invented because longtime entrepreneur Jim McKelvey recognized a lost opportunity through his own glass-blowing business. Thanks to a makerspace, he was able to develop a prototype that convinced his partner, Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey, of the hardware necessary for mass-producing the device and allowed him to understand its quirks and problems more intimately. Ten years after its launch, Square is valued at over four billion dollars and competes with older systems of credit capture.

Despite successes like Square's, an important limitation to exploring the entrepreneurial potential of maker communities is the non-commercial orientation of the movement, which emphasizes open source—rather than proprietary—materials. Thus, some scholars look at how and when makers become entrepreneurial and whether the model is sustainable (see Troxler & Wolf, 2017 for discussion of this and additional case studies). Moreover, narratives like Square's

mythologize maker successes rather than telling the more complicated story of iteration through design processes. Longer incubation periods and slower breakthroughs are common to makers (Holm, 2015), and clean stories such as Square's can risk masking the necessary steps toward successful design, including *iteration* and *failing*.

■ Pedagogical Integration

Technical and professional communication educators can integrate entrepreneurial thinking into courses in a number of ways. First, instructors might use entrepreneurship as an accessible and recognizable rhetorical situation for TPC that requires students to consider a range of social, economic, and ethical affordances and challenges as they approach design. For Kyle Vealey and Jeffrey Gerding (2016), teaching civic entrepreneurship through crowdfunding showed student-entrepreneurs how to "identify and frame problems, construct stories about these problems as pressing matters of concern, and both develop and maintain ethical relationships with their stakeholders and an increasingly diverse body of investors" (p. 421).

Because entrepreneurship is a process that involves various genres that often mediate between sellers, users, and investors, entrepreneurship pedagogies ought to help students organize within the wider ecologies in which they are working. One heuristic for organizing project-based entrepreneurship is the Business Model Canvas (BMC), which accounts for key partners, activities, resources, value propositions, customer relationships, revenue streams, and more (Hixon & Paretti, 2014).

As the BMC makes clear, stakeholders and investors are not the only audiences for entrepreneurial projects, but the social context of entrepreneurship emphasizes performative genres such as pitch decks or slides, which can be integrated into broader curricula that focus on design thinking. Clay Spinuzzi et al. (2014, 2015) examined how Korean entrepreneurs critically revised pitch decks in response to feedback from stakeholders from target markets, often reusing texts from other professional genres in the process. Students with entrepreneurially focused assignments ought to be given similar opportunities to revise based on peer or stakeholder feedback.

Likewise, instructors might also use the exigencies of pitches to help students develop strategies for venture success. This means fostering an entrepreneurial identity that exudes zeal and gusto, but is also equipped to accept risk and repeated failure. In their study of presentations from student entrepreneurs, Kristen Lucas et al. (2016) found passion assessment to be an integral part of entrepreneurial communication, suggesting that students need to be taught rhetorical and interpretive strategies that can help them assess passion as both entrepreneurs and investors. For entrepreneurs, passion assessment can help them attend more consciously to nonverbal delivery and rhetorical choices in content;

for investors, it can help them attend to design or content of the idea rather than performance alone. Such an assessment is particularly useful for pitches and other situations where venture success is too commonly decided by the entrepreneur's pathos alone.

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