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Pre-Assignment for Session 3

This essay is based upon my reflections on two qualitative empirical studies: Cope, J. (2011). "Entrepreneurial learning from failure: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. Journal of business venturing, 26(6), 604-623" and Kim, S., & Kim, A. (2021). "Going viral or growing like an oak tree? Towards sustainable local development through entrepreneurship." Academy of Management Journal, (ja). In this essay, I will first discuss each article individually, highlighting key aspects from the articles I found interesting or relevant pertaining to the nature of qualitative research or the topics at hand, and second, share some overlapping and synthesized thoughts about the two articles together.

Firstly, I will share my thoughts and reflections upon the article by Cope (2011) where the author conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis of failure within the context of entrepreneurship. I chose this article in particular due to three main reasons: 1) the topic of failure within entrepreneurship was fascinating to me, particularly due to the possible connection it may have towards entrepreneurial learning and experiential learning, 2) the method of the study was something I was not familiar with and thus, this provided me with an opportunity to explore this further, and 3) the journal itself it was published in is an avenue for publishing I would like to explore myself in the future and that made it particularly interesting to read this study.

This study connected itself closely to the theoretical discussions on the role of failure within the entrepreneurial learning process, as well as looking at the domain and concept of 'learning from failure.' For me, the latter was, in particular, interesting as in my previous research I had looked at experiential learning, where the role of failure is often discussed and how education should provide students with a safe space to fail too, if needed. Cope (2011), in this article, discussed different types of failures within the entrepreneurial context before framing the focus of this study on failures that were defined as "the termination of a business that has fallen short of its goals" (p.605). Through the use of tables, Cope summarized the key theoretical concepts on recovery and learning from failure, citing ten different papers that were either conceptual, qualitative, and/or quantitative research method based. Within the theoretical review of this study, Cope also introduces important concepts from other scholars such as "intelligent failures" by Sitkin (1992, cited in Cope, 2011) which refers to "small which are small and relatively harmless failures most effective in fostering learning" (p.606). I particularly found this concept of/term intelligent failures interesting, and something I would like to explore further academically, particularly in the context of experiential learning and education.

In terms of the qualitative method adopted for this study, Cope made use of an interpretative phenomenological analysis whereby the research focused upon the experience of entrepreneurial failures of eight different individuals, four of whom were from (resided in) the United Kingdom (UK), and the remaining four of whom were in the United States (US). To conduct the study, Cope utilized phenomenological interviews where the focus was on gaining a first-person description of the domain of experience. In this structure, the participant (interviewee) is responsible largely for setting the course of the dialogue. I found it interesting that Cope explicitly mentioned that opportunism and convenience sampling were contributing

factors in choosing the sample for their study. While this was only one sentence within the whole article, I found this to be an important display of strong research ethics from the author themselves. The study makes use of six different level of phenomenological analysis, which range from familiarization and sense-making, towards categorization, interpretation, and eventual explanation and abstraction. For me personally, this approach, in some ways, reminded me of the Gioia methodology where the researcher goes from the data to first order concept, second order themes, and eventually towards aggregate dimensions connecting back to key theoretical concepts.

To present and analyze the findings, Cope makes use of his own earlier study where he had identified various entrepreneurial learning task dimensions. By using his earlier study in some ways as the “lens” to look at the findings, Cope categorizes the findings into learning task dimensions of 1) learning about oneself, 2) to learning about the venture, 3) learning about networks and relationships, and 4) learning about venture management. The findings of this study indicated that failure is a complex phenomenon with six key aspects that that the author then delved further into: financial, emotional, physiological, social, professional, and entrepreneurial. An example of the financial failure was the amount of capital that was lost in/through the venture initiated by the entrepreneur. Social and professional failures were, for example, the loss in image and possible humiliation felt by the entrepreneur in front of their friends, family, or colleagues – by letting them down.

Cope (2011) also indicates that the findings showcase failures as the “ultimate form of trial and error” learning, which is seen as a key learning approach towards entrepreneurship by scholars such as Gibb (p.617). In the discussions, Cope focuses on the concept of regenerative failures which he frames as failures that relate to serial entrepreneurs who have gone on to apply lessons from failures in the creation of new ventures. Cope also discusses the importance of critical self-reflection and the overall act of reflexivity in turning these failure experiences into learning outcomes. This, in particular, was of interest to me, once again mainly due to its possible implications within the fields of experiential entrepreneurial education.

For future research, Cope indicated that new methodologies that are more capable of understanding the social complexity of failures will be required. Cope (2011) also discusses that future discourse within this topic should look at failure to play a central role in facilitating more sophisticated mental models, which connected to his other point about entrepreneurs developing a “cognitive early warning system” that can allow them to avoid the repetition of more negative experiences” (p.618). Action learning approaches, which I presume to be closely linked to concepts such as learn by doing, are seeing an increase, according to Cope, in being utilized within the entrepreneurial learning mechanism. The interesting thing with this previous point is that while this paper is from 2011, the point still remains relatively valid in terms of the interest and development of action learning approaches.

Second, I will share my thoughts and reflections upon the article by Kim and Kim (2022) where the authors conducted an ethnographic study looking at two differing approaches taken by business incubators in the city of Detroit to support sustainable local business development. I chose this article in particular due to three main reasons: 1) once again the topic discussed was of key interest to me, and I particularly was interested in seeing the connection between entrepreneurship and its ability to support local/regional development, 2) while the principles of ethnography are familiar to me, I was curious to take an in-depth look at what an ethnographic study, particularly within the fields of entrepreneurship may look like, and 3) as

the previous paper I looked at was from 2011, I wanted to take as fresh of a paper as possible to look at what current topics and research is being looked at within the AOM Journal.

The Kim and Kim (2021) paper begins with a description of high-growth entrepreneurship which primarily focuses upon quick scaling of ventures through the utilization of venture capital (VC) financing. The paper then delves into theoretical concepts pertaining to the key research domains of the study such as the utilization of entrepreneurship as a means towards local and regional development, high-tech entrepreneurship sectors and regional innovation clusters (like Silicon Valley), policy mechanisms designed to support and promote entrepreneurship, and approaches that repurpose existing resources to support development rather than relying on external resources. For the last, the authors connected this concept to the idea of entrepreneurial bricolage which was presented by Baker & Nelson (2005) as “making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities” (p.333, cited in Kim & Kim, 2021). I particularly found this idea of entrepreneurial bricolage really fascinating as it is something I had encountered before, but in a differing context. More specifically, this concept was introduced to me (somewhat discussed) within the effectuation theory that was proposed by Sarasvathy (2001), and also something we had briefly chatted about with Tua Björklund during my interview with her a couple of months back too.

Looking at the method, Kim and Kim conducted a 22-month long ethnography study between 2012 and 2014, looking at two business incubators that both had the objective of revitalizing the city of Detroit, albeit in vastly different ways. The study then extended our focus by following the next six years to trace the trajectories of the 27 ventures that were fostered and supported by these incubators. The 22-month ethnographic study resulted in the authors observing 148, one-to-five-hour meetings/events and conducting 67 one-to-two-hour interviews. The subsequent six-year trajectory study was conducted by using the venture names as search term in Factiva and LexisNexis news archives. For the 27 ventures, the authors constructed a timeline highlighting key growth events like founding, fundraising, relocation, and possible closures and acquisitions.

For the study, the authors identified that the two incubators adopted vastly different approaches towards development – with one of the incubators focusing on high-growth, quick paced, and scaling-up opportunities, and the other focusing on slow(er)-growth, and more community-oriented opportunities through a scaling-deep approach. For me, this in itself was a particularly interesting finding as it indicated two alternative approaches for developing and supporting a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. Moreover, this was of interest to me because of the strong emphasis placed on entrepreneurial activities and initiatives placed by policy makers and other public sector stakeholders.

The findings also indicated that the high-growth incubator was able to get most of their firms to serve customers beyond the original local market within 36 months, at an average of 13 months. But, out of the 19 ventures supported by this incubator, only four continued to operate in Detroit as of 2020, with the remaining ventures either operating in different US cities, being acquired, or being closed. For the other incubator, out of the eight ventures supported, six were still in operation within Detroit as of 2020. In a similar vein, while both incubators, over the observed period, generated spillover effects, their scales and depth varied significantly. Kim and Kim discuss that these scaling deep ventures arise from local bricolage, whose spatial scope is by defined confined to a particular place.

In the discussions chapter, Kim, and Kim (2021) discuss the concept of local bricolage further which they present as environments in “which entrepreneurs make do by applying combinations of locally available resources to locally specific problems and opportunities” (p.43). On a personal note, I found both their findings and discussions, as well as the other scholarly works they presented as particularly interesting and relevant for my future research opportunities and angles too. In particular, I already found myself writing down possible research avenues for a similar type of research conducted within the Finnish entrepreneurial ecosystem with players such as Slush, FVCA, Kiuas, NewCo Helsinki, Aalto Entrepreneurship Society, Maria01 as possible stakeholders to research upon. In a similar vein, another topic that was discussed within the paper I found relevant for my own future research plans was about business models. In the paper, Kim and Kim discuss, albeit not in too much detail, about how most, if not all the ventures they observed underwent various changes to their business models. This, in particular, gave me ideas and thoughts on conducting possible longitudinal, ethnographic studies on business models of particular types of startups or organizations.

Lastly, I would like to present a synthesized personal reflection upon the two articles and various insights from both that I can carry forward within my own research. Something that both the articles provided me with were valuable insights into particular theoretical concepts and terms such as entrepreneurial learning task dimensions and intelligent failures from the Cope (2011) article, and terms such as local/entrepreneurial bricolage and entrepreneurship as a means of developing communities from the Kim and Kim (2021) article. Something else I found relevant and useful from both the papers were the detailed insights into the methods adopted by the papers. While I was familiar with the overarching concept of ethnography, the Kim and Kim paper basically presented a well thought out, step-by-step approach towards conducting a rigorous ethnographic study. As for the Cope article, it provided me with insights into an entirely new method of an interpretative phenomenological analysis. Both articles also presented valuable insights into framing a succinct literature review/theoretical background for my possible future studies.

To conclude, the two papers I had chosen provided me with a lot of valuable guidance towards the framing, writing, and developing of a well-thought out empirical qualitative study. While vastly different in their research questions, objectives, and methods, both studies still had some similarities in terms of their rigor, approach towards presenting their findings, and relevance for me, personally, as I move forward with my own academic research career.

References:

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