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Examining the characteristics, philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies of village entrepreneurs

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Abstract

Purpose: The literature of entrepreneurship has an urban bias, focusing on successful high growth companies and despite the emergence of the rural entrepreneurship literature, we know little about the characteristics, philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies of ordinary village entrepreneurs' in a UK context. As a concept, the 'village entrepreneur' per se is contentious as theoretically there should be little difference between the urban and rural entrepreneur. Nevertheless, there is! The concept is important because many villages are in decline and are marginal places, in terms of entrepreneurial opportunity.

Methodological approach: A review of the fragmented literature synthesises and develops a greater understanding of the topic. Drawing on a 'Life Story' approach the empirical strand comprises of an analysis of ethnographic interviews with five village entrepreneurs.

Findings: The respondents did not consider themselves entrepreneurs whom they characterised as being flash, rogues and even crooked. Their embedded village entrepreneur persona is built around tales-of-character, hard-work and perseverance. Embeddedness, self-efficacy, character and morality were key themes encountered. They prided themselves in making 'slow money' which they retain over their lifetime.

Limitations: From a research perspective, the findings are based on a limited sample and the study was not specifically designed to capture data on characteristics, philosophies and operating practices. Further research on a larger scale is necessary to validate the findings. From a practical perspective policy makers require to consider the notions of embeddedness, self-efficacy, character and morality when considering implementing growth strategies in rural areas.

Value: This study contributes to the growing literature of rural entrepreneurship by expanding existing typologies of rural entrepreneurs and by detailing suitable philosophies, operating practices, and growth strategies appropriate for small village and rural businesses.

Introduction

A perusal of the early literature of entrepreneurship reveals a distinctly urban bias (Porter, 1995) and a focus on successful high-growth companies. In recent years, this imbalance has been rectified but despite the emergence of a healthy literature on 'Rural Entrepreneurship' (Atterton, 2007, 2008; Alsos et al 2011; Atterton et al. 2011; Dubois 2016; Markantoni et al, 2012, 2013,2014 and Delfmann and Koster, 2016) we still know little about the characteristics, philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies of ordinary rural and 'village entrepreneurs'. This conceptualisation of the 'village entrepreneur' as a distinctive case from other coverages of rural entrepreneurship in the wider European and North American literature offers a relatively original perspective. The ubiquitous rural entrepreneur is a (Weberian) ideal-type who engages with place and space to leverage local resources through localised entrepreneurial processes (Korsgaard, Müller and Tanvig, 2015). A village is a clustered human settlement and importantly a community.¹ This work adopts the viewpoint of Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) that urban and rural settings are inherently different. Tönnies notions of community life as represented by natural will, revolve around the house, village, town and city as forms of social organisation. Tönnies argued that people live together in different ways but traditionally the village retains more familial characteristics than towns and cities. He talks of the *Gemeinschaft* of family and rural life devoted to agricultural pursuits, art and handicraft where family life forms the basis of everyday life. In village life, commerce does not predominate as an organising factor. Harper (1989) refers to the dichotomous relationship of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and its persistence in the literature of rurality and of rural ethnographies focusing on the 'essence' of rural community through analysis of process and change.

The aim of this study is to highlight and develop the focus on village entrepreneurship in a UK context and the objective is to increase academic interest whilst developing its theoretical underpinning. The very concept of the 'village entrepreneur' (Smith, 2008) is contentious as theoretically and conceptually there should be little difference between urban and rural entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, there appears to be a character based difference. The village entrepreneur is characterised as slow (Jack, 2002: Smith, 2008) and bucolic (Budge, Irvine and Smith, 2009) and is often dichotomously labelled as either incomer or outsider (Fletcher and Watson, 2007: Bosworth, 2008). Village entrepreneurship is about making the most of '*self and circumstance*' (Anderson, 2000) in a constrained, isolated environment. However, many studies of entrepreneurship do not differentiate between rural and village entrepreneurs despite villages being integral to the rural idyll (Mingay, 1989) and rurality. The literature is moving away from the idyll which captures many writers and commentators. In the idyll, rurality becomes enmeshed with notions of goodness and morality and indeed Mahar (1991) refers to the moral economy of country life and the creation and reproduction of cultural and symbolic capital, via networking processes. Mahar, highlights the process of morality in the functioning of village life. Through these strategies and distributions of capital the social world is constructed in a homologous symbolic system. Clearly, a village, is a social construct (a socio-spatial context) subject to idealisation, reification and romanticisation as a '*village in the mind*' (Duenckmann, 2010). As a concept, village entrepreneurship is important because many villages are in decline and are marginal places in terms of entrepreneurial opportunity. This study builds upon a meagre literature on 'Village' entrepreneurship in a UK context and synthesises extant studies into a specific literature.

By adopting a life-story approach (McAdams, 1989) to analyse the stories of five village based entrepreneurs this study makes a further contribution to the literature by using the stories, vignettes and anecdotes of village entrepreneurs; and by examining these via this framework enabled the stories to be decoded and results aligned with their philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies. Village entrepreneurship fascinates the author because it spans village life and lived experience which feel ‘intuitively’ important but difficult to articulate in terms of research objectives. The overarching research question is how do the village entrepreneurs articulate their lived experience and entrepreneurial identities in village settings?

The literature review synthesises material on village entrepreneurship in a UK context paying attention to the sparse literature on the philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies of entrepreneurship; and the literature of character in relation to entrepreneurship. The methodology presents the story-based framework used to analyse the individual stories collected. The analysis discusses the collection and (re)presentation of the respondents’ stories making sense of them through the life story framework in which the stories emerge as ‘tales-of-character’. The penultimate section discusses such embedded tales. The conclusion considers the research question and limitations of the research proffering suggestions for further study. This distinction, i.e. the village entrepreneur provides an original contribution given that different types of villages offer more, or less, promising/challenging entrepreneurial environments. The emerging notion of “slow-money” is also conceptually and theoretically promising.

Expanding and synthesizing the literatures

This section reviews literatures relating to the philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies of ordinary village entrepreneurs' and because character emerged as being an important facet of the psychological makeup of village entrepreneurs it covers literature on entrepreneurship and character. Though selective, it underpins the explanation of the character, philosophies and practices of the entrepreneurs encountered empirically. This paper covers the importance of place and space and deals respectively with the philosophy, operating practices and growth strategies of small business and with entrepreneurial modus operandi highlighting the importance of collective cognition and behaviour. Finally, it considers character and entrepreneurial personality, highlighting the importance of individuality.

The literature of village entrepreneurship

There is a substantive literature on 'village entrepreneurs' in a developing nations' context, however the literature in a UK context is sparse (Smith, 2008).ⁱⁱ Much of it is parochial and descriptive. The village entrepreneur can be encompassed within the rubric of Anderson's '*Arcadian entrepreneur*' (Anderson, 1995) but in many studies of rural entrepreneurship, the location of the respondents is often not specifically mentioned, thus rural or village location setting is often overlooked making it the proverbial elephant in the room (see Hamilton, 2013). The rural literature generally ascribes rurality as a quality of place, or space (Halfacree, 1993; Tilt, Kearney and Bradley, 2007) and not as a personal quality and rural entrepreneurship possesses a 'value-adding' quality (Korsgaard et al, 2015). The study by Haugh and Pardy (1999) set in rural Aberdeenshire examined the influence of community-based-enterprise initiatives on socio-economic development.

The studies by Anderson (1995/2000) were set in rural Argyllshire and Aberdeenshire (Anderson, 1995; Smith and Anderson, 2007) but did not specifically relate to village entrepreneurship per se.ⁱⁱⁱ Fletcher and Watson (2006) studied social change in the English countryside and the role played by entrepreneurship in the shifting life orientations of in-migrants as part of a processes of counter-urbanisation between urban, rural and village settings. Villages were key focal points.

Nevertheless, numerous studies feature the village and village settings - for example, Smith (2005) reported on subsistence enterprise in a Scottish fishing village from a historical and longitudinal perspective and examined the scale and scope of individual entrepreneurs and enterprises as remembered by respondents. The study of Smith (2008) set in rural Aberdeenshire, raised the issue of village entrepreneurship in a UK context by examining the scale and type of entrepreneurship practiced in a village and surrounding area via case studies of relevant entrepreneurs and their businesses. The message articulated was that although a village may appear as 'sleepy' there is a substantial ongoing level of entrepreneurial activity. Budge, Irvine and Smith (2009) set in rural Tayside examined small entrepreneurs' in village settings. In these articles a micro-case study approach was adopted and yielded a rich catch of stories of (entrepreneurial) village life but did not go beyond the descriptive.

Smith (2011) studied the lifestyles of an entrepreneurial milieu in an 'Urban Village' setting highlighted that organizing contexts were everyday stories of village life relating to the entrepreneurs' place of residence and of community-based-entrepreneurship (Bosworth, 2015). Smith (2011[a]) examined the use of storyboards in a rural village enterprise. The theme of community-based-entrepreneurship was continued in Smith

(2012) by examining the regeneration of an entrepreneurial spirit in Aberdeenshire villages via a process of amateurship and community-based-enterprise to grow social enterprises. The background context was rurality and the stories articulated were of new social enterprises set in villages. Annibal, Liddle and McElwee (2014) expanded this theme of amateurship/animating in rural communities. Collectively, these studies constitute an emerging body of work and protean literature on UK village entrepreneurship. Additionally, the doctoral thesis of Anderson (1995) and Jack (2004) contain scenarios of rural and village entrepreneurship.

The philosophy, operating practices and growth strategies of small business

The literature on the philosophy of small business is sparse and spread thinly across studies as an incidental element. Ward (2011) argues that individual family philosophies impact upon the business and its everyday practices. A seminal work on the nature and character of small business was the study of Bechhofer and Elliot (1976, p.1981) who argued that shopkeepers and businessmen shared similar characteristics as a group e.g. a long-hours and hard-work culture and had ‘aspirations’ for their children, not themselves. In a sense, they could be categorized as an ideal type. These small businessmen did not present as entrepreneurs but shared many of their ideological characteristics with personality traits and character forming part of the construct. More recently, Ullah and Anderson (2013) argue that the nature of the business *per-se* may influence the philosophy and operating practices of small businesses due to the ‘*Nature and Condition of Smallness*’. Likewise, Ullah and Smith (2015) argue that there is a related ‘*fairness paradox*’ whereby small businesses and associated practices can be intrinsically unfair to employees due to the very condition of smallness leading to a reliance on self.

Frameworks for differentiating between entrepreneurs and small businessmen are well established (Carland *et al*, 1984). However, trying to differentiate between entrepreneurs in different settings assumes that an entrepreneur in every setting, will possess identical characteristics which is contentious, taking no account of self-efficacy (Anderson, 2000), or of place. Entrepreneurism is itself a philosophy, a politically charged ideology (Kao, Kao and Kao, 2003) thus if a small businessman is entrepreneurial by nature this influences the philosophy and operating practices of the business setting up a tautological argument whereby possession of entrepreneurial traits and characteristics likely result in entrepreneurial success.

More recent research into rural entrepreneurship sheds more light on the importance of the modus operandi of rural entrepreneurs. Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood (2013) examined traditionally less 'rational' entrepreneurial behaviors, such as bricolage.^{iv} From these they extrapolated themes such as self-perceived identity, organization of space, a sense of personal limits, and responsiveness to changing market conditions. Similarly, Dubois (2016) examined regional innovation strategies which are often place-based, dependent on competitiveness and on developing a firm's relational biography. Dubois highlighted the importance of local agency, i.e. the ability of a firm to actively engage in multiple webs of relations and concludes that internationalisation strategies do not lessen the value of local networks. For Delfmann and Koster (2016) regional context matters in terms of local employment and as villages with modest populations decline, new businesses are important generators of employment opportunities. Invisible side-activities contribute to a vibrant countryside and it is easy to dismiss such activities as lifestyle choices (Markantoni and Van Hoven, 2012; Markantoni, et al 2013).

Developing an entrepreneurial modus operandi

The above discussion informed by the literature is important because rural and urban entrepreneurs may have differing entrepreneurial modus operandi. The term *Modus Operandi* relates to adopting a particular ‘method of operating’ and is used in criminology to describe a person’s habits, or manner of working and in a wider sense their method of functioning. It is seldom considered in entrepreneurship research circles albeit Dees (2001) refers to the willingness to innovate as being part of the modus operandi of entrepreneurs.^v This is important because entrepreneurial modus operandi is connected to modus essendi and modus Vivendi. The former encompasses ‘being’ composed of biological, physiological and psychological elements, or essences, and the latter relates to how they engage and network differentially with others. Consideration of modus operandi has utility in relation to this study as it offers us a new lens for the analysis of the subsequent cases. This discussion segues into issues of character and personality.

Character and the entrepreneurial personality

This section covers literature on character in relation to entrepreneurial personality and is necessary because of the importance of both to this study. The literature specifically engaging with character and entrepreneurship is dated and sparse as is the literature on character and rurality. Character is regarded as the quality of an individual’s behaviour, revealed through their thoughts, expressions, attitudes and actions and is a foundation upon which important individual and collective traits are built. Character is related to and

influenced by individual and collective business philosophies, operating practices and ultimately to the decision to grow or not. Before understanding the character of rural small business communities, one must first understand character, *per se*.

Human behaviour is the outcome of a complex collection of elements of which character is but one. Character like legitimacy, matures through time. For Covey, the characteristics of character are internal and must be transmitted from '*the inside out*' via social constructionist process over time. Character is an essential aspect of any person, made up of principles and values that give life direction and meaning. For Maher (2003) it is the expression of the personality of a human being revealing itself in conduct (action). Thus, we speak of men of character, implying a unity of qualities and a recognisable degree of constancy (fixity) in mode of action. It is linked closely to psychology, ethics, education and religion and to acquired habits. Covey (1989, p.47) regards a habit as being an intersection of knowledge, skill and drive which collectively, mould character. Entrepreneurial activity is a powerful proactive habit and consideration of character is problematic, being regarded as unscientific, individualistic, unpredictable and difficult to classify. Thus, locating character requires deductive reasoning and drawing inferences which are easily challenged. Like entrepreneurial status, it is interpreted and ascribed by others. Ascribing character is about determining the worth of a person and requires the attribution of judgment of whether someone is good, bad or indifferent. Character, like legitimacy is the outcome of a set of social processes and principles, but it is also a standard against which one measures one selves and others and by which the respondents in this study judged their own actions.

Of relevance is the work of Covey (1989) on character and personality ethics. Incisively, Covey (1989, p.23) argues that both the character and personality ethic are socially constructed paradigms capable of change through practice. Covey studied the literature of success over a 200-year period, stressing that the literature of the first 150 years equates to 'character ethic' as the foundation of success championed via traits like integrity, humility, fidelity, temperance, courage, justice, patience, industry, simplicity and modesty. Collectively, these form a protective 'Character Armour'. Conversely, the predominant ethic of the last fifty years is the 'personality ethic', which regards success as a function of personality, public image, attitudes, behaviours, skills and techniques. Covey argues that placing too much emphasis upon personality, if one's character is flawed, manifests itself as duplicity and insincerity. For Covey, failings of character are important and result in self-destructive behaviour and ultimately failure. Character failings (like many facets of entrepreneurship) cannot be separated from the '*flesh and blood entrepreneur*' with their passions and foibles, their brilliance and flaws (Casson 2000, p.viii). However, in narrative and stories characteristics are brought to life splendidly by the portrayal of the entrepreneur as hero or villain. It is perhaps the presence of this dominant 'character ethic' that makes classic entrepreneur stories appealing to the public. Covey (1989, p.103) advocates re-scripting and becoming your own author, by utilising the most effective existing scripts to tell ones' story. Entrepreneurship is a ready-made social script with character as its bedrock.

More recent quantitative studies into entrepreneurial personality have sought to measure its influence (Lee and Tsang, 2001; Rauch and Frese, 2007; Zhao, Seibert and Lumpkin, 2010). Lee and Tsang investigated the effects of entrepreneurial personality

traits, background and networking activities on venture growth, whilst Kisfalvi (2002) argues that although entrepreneurs appear to engage little in formal planning, strategy in entrepreneurial firms exhibits identifiable patterns over time with strategic orientations reflecting the priorities of their entrepreneurial CEOs. Kisfalvi considered possible interactions between entrepreneurs' personal characteristics and their strategic options. For Kisfalvi, an entrepreneurs' strategy-making processes are linked to their life issues and legacies of their past histories including character. Thus, entrepreneurial firms consistently pursue strategic directions that reflect the entrepreneur's unique life issues.

This review is relevant in considering the distinction between necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship and the nature of lifestyle businesses which feature in the conceptualisation of rural entrepreneurship. The themes developed above form a theoretical underpinning to help in the interrogation and interpretation of the cases along with the methodological framework discussed below.

Methodology

The review of the fragmented literatures synthesized them to develop a greater understanding of the philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies of typical village entrepreneurs. The empirical strand comprises of five recorded, 'face-to-face' interviews with village entrepreneurs conducted between 2001 and 2005. This study presents research conducted via in-depth interviews with businessmen (in North East Scotland) predominantly from small single-life-businesses.

The purposeful sample was chosen because the author knew them personally and had developed a rapport with them as individuals. This enabled the triangulation of their

stories, actions and deeds over the research period. The respondents were inveterate storytellers and their stories well spun and crafted. All interviews were recorded and transcribed in full but a smaller number of shorter semi-structured interviews were not because they emerged spontaneously in social settings. These informal interviews were captured using field and contextual notes to ensure that the issue of 'selected recall bias' was minimized. The data was analysed and coded manually as per Miles and Huberman (1994) and emergent themes written on post-it notes for ease of figuration and reconfiguration. The basis for the distinction of the themes in the cases presented resulted from frequency of usage/recurrence. The author also had access to the stories the respondents told and the stories told by their wives and family. This makes a vital contribution because it is often not the entrepreneurs or businessmen themselves who tell their stories, but wives and family. It allowed the author to develop issues that arose from their own words during the interviews, akin to unravelling yarn. Triangulation was possible because the author was 'able to' verify the plots, contents and scenarios from the stories through discussing them with others who knew the respondents. Nevertheless, much detail had to 'taken on trust'.

The small sample size allowed the author to concentrate on the stories themselves, to look, listen and learn instead of imposing an emerging research structure onto the narrative. An overarching theme of character emerged in which the over-riding theme of their stories was that character matters in their rural entrepreneurial communities. Immediately after the interviews the author wrote up the details as field notes which were subjected to a content analysis using constant comparative analysis.

A life-story approach (McAdams, 1989; Hamilton, 2002) is used to present the respondents stories as illustrative examples. The life events are ordered into stories and recounted to help the storyteller and audience, make sense of disparate events. This paper adopts McAdams framework of seven related features central to life stories, namely – 1) Narrative Tone – the emotional tone or attitude; 2) Imagery – determined by metaphors and similes; 3) Theme; 4) Ideological Setting; 5) Nuclear episodes – scenes that stand out; 6) Imagoes – idealized personification of the self as a character; and 7) Endings – the generative script of a positive legacy left for future generations. These formed units of analysis to decode the respondents’ stories. Their stories were augmented by additional ethnographic research with other rural and village entrepreneurs using observation techniques and reflective ethnography (Smith, 2012; Watson, 2006).

The two strategies worked well. The structured (tape recorded) in-depth interviews allowed the generation of a considerable amount of qualitative data which when combined with participant observation provided a rich mix. This was augmented by informal unstructured interviews carried out on a spontaneous basis (separated in space and time) as and when the opportunity presented itself. This enabled the development and augmentation of themes identified via in-depth interviews. In addition, a smaller number of shorter semi-structured interviews were conducted with businessmen acquaintances that lived and operated in village settings. These proved fruitful in developing themes identified in the main interviews above.

Collecting stories of village entrepreneurship

This section reports on the interviews conducted. There are four parts. The first narrates the stories of village entrepreneurship; the second unravels their yarns; the third identifies

the emerging theme of ‘slow-money’; and the fourth recasts the respondents’ stories as ‘tales-of-character’. There was considerable overlap between the “life-story” and the “Entrepreneurial-life-story” element which necessitated further analysis.

Stories of village entrepreneurship

This section introduces the respondents’ stories, and are stories ‘of’ and ‘about’ village entrepreneurship. Instead of discussing these stories in traditional cameo format and (re)presenting their life-stories, they are presented in tabular format to concentrate the themes together before analyzing and unpicking sub-themes from the stories. It is very difficult to tell an entrepreneur-story without telling their life story. Their stories are discussed in relation to the philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies as village entrepreneurs. An overarching narrative theme of character emerged from the interviews from an early stage. There was an almost bucolic tone (Budge, Irvine and Smith, 2009) to the moralizing of the individual respondents’ who valued their personal rural idyll and indeed, several spoke of having resisted a move to a nearby town or city to retain their quality of life. In the next section, specific story-elements will be elaborated on and developed. The respondents have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. These are Bill, Vick, Alfie, Dan and Kirsty. At the time of interview, they were aged from 40 to their mid 60s. Kirsty is the wife of Dan.

Table 1 – the life stories of the respondents

Respondent Life Story	Entrepreneurial Life Themes
Bill - garage proprietor and property speculator: Bill was born in the early 1930s in rural Aberdeenshire, the son of a farm labourer. He was an only boy with several sisters. He had an austere upbringing and was exposed to the work-ethic from an early age, working the land. He suffered in youth	Although his wealth and income were generated from the local community, Bill became a respected part of the community, renowned for fair dealing. He projected his morality in his personality. The most obvious foundation of his morality was contained in the advice he was given by a peer at the start of his business career, ‘ <i>Dinna be a thief ...but take your profit</i> ’. In other words, be fair and honest

<p>from several serious illnesses, which adversely affected his education, but he compensated for this by personal enterprise and effort. He had a typical rural upbringing and formed a distinctively moralistic outlook upon life. He became a quiet, confident if somewhat introverted man. Apprenticed as a motor mechanic, he quickly took responsibility for the running of the garage/business where he was employed. He was inspired by local 'self-made-men'. Serendipity played a hand and he purchased a modest local garage premises and was encouraged and assisted by a local bank manager, who acted as a business mentor. Over forty years he and his wife built a thriving rural business employing 12 people. He bought and rented several houses.</p>	<p>but ensure that you do take a fair share. He lived his life by this tenet. Unusually for a Scotsman, he was critical of '<i>business conducted over a dram</i>'. His success resulted from his hard work and unstinting attention to the operational problems of the business. He never sought to be, a, '<i>Big Shot</i>' or to broadcast his success but built an image of honesty, integrity and probity. Customers identified with him. Honesty and trust were expected and given. Importance and power were of no concern to him, although customers freely ascribed him these qualities. Many locals regard Bill as a paternalistic businessman and not an entrepreneur. Bill is an inveterate storyteller and loved nothing more than to wile away the quiet hours by telling philosophical stories of business, and life. Bill's children went to University and moved on in life the family business was not for them. He worked his garage business until his 70s and sold it on. It is gone now but he still maintains his personal wealth and now lives in quiet retirement.</p>
<p>Vick – joiner and contractor: Vick grew up in 1960s rural Aberdeenshire. He was a quiet industrious child, the second son of a sober, hard-working builder's labourer. His father Danny was a genial soul, who whistled his way through life and considered his employer a friend. At school Vick made modest progress and entered the same builders firm his father worked at. He quickly became a 'jack of all trades' able to turn his hands to all aspects of work. Serendipity played a huge part in Vicks future career as an entrepreneur. Vick and Danny's employer who was childless died leaving the modest business to Danny, his lifelong friend. Danny shouldered the responsibility he had never sought nor believed he would ever have to carry. He kept the business ticking over, but was no businessman. Vick continued to work for his father until in his mid 20s but deep down knew he om his father's shadow. Having had new horizons open for him and inspired by his father's progress he took the plunge.</p>	<p>He remembers sitting at home of an evening at the kitchen table wondering how an earth he would ever manage to pay his debts and feed his family. Slowly, he prospered, bought an old van and employed two local men. Through a friend in the trade he was offered a building contract but had to buy the materials himself. Newly married with a small child, he used all his savings running up a considerable overdraft before the deal paid off. Over a short period his business expanded and he employed several other labourers' as and when required. He prospered because of his hard work, the long hours and his meticulous attention to costs and details. His reputation soon grew and he took on Council and Oil Company Contracts and diversified into other areas including landscape gardening. He bought his father's firm and now in his 40's employs 39 full time employees. He diversified into property speculation and house developing but remains a very modest moral character who lives for his family and two daughters who are now at university.</p>
<p>Alfie – joiner and undertaker: Alfie was raised in an Aberdeenshire village. Born in the 1930s he began work first as a farm labourer and then a joiner. He lived all his working life in the same village. In his early 20s he married and rented a house in the village. He was friendly with other young men in his peer group some of whom were the sons of shopkeepers, bakers, publicans and small business owners. Alfie played football with them and over a pint in the pub would listen to their stories of business success and failure. He became a respected</p>	<p>Alfie's chance came one day when a local joiner retired. He made him a modest offer for the business which was accepted. Alfie remember his first six months as a time of despair, searching his jacket pockets for pennies to pay a bill. He often went without food himself because if he had a bill to pay he would do so because he did not consider it his money to use. Alfie did what he did best, working hard and slowly saved money. He employed two local joiners but chose to remain small. He saw from watching his business peers that expanding rapidly and being the 'big man' did not always pay. He took pride in his expanding bank balance. When the local undertaker died, he stepped into the role and between the two businesses prospered. Alfie has employed</p>

<p>joiner, noted for his craftsmanship and skill. He was also very artistic and painted and sculpted. A keen local historian he developed into a very articulate orator and author. For being such a quiet man he was very much a charismatic introvert. He has a keen sense of humour and is a student of life.</p>	<p>up to 7 joiners at different times in the business life cycle. He is a deeply moral man and a devoted husband. His children went to University and when he reached retirement age he sold his businesses to other local men. He now lives a quiet life, reading, writing, painting sculpting and a caring for his wife. He is a master storyteller, musician and singer.</p>
<p>Dan and Kirsty, independent entrepreneurs: The tale of Big Dan and wife Kirsty is a complex story of joint entrepreneurial ability. It is a love story where each partner's talents and life skills complement the others. The sum is greater than the total of the parts. Dan is a lone-wolf and was born in rural England, in the 1950s. He was the second son of a small farmer three brothers with whom he has been in competition ever since. Apprenticed as a mechanic he saved up for his first BMW. Kirsty was born into a travelling family who had settled in an Aberdeenshire village. One of six children she grew up looking after four brothers and numerous cousins. She is one of life's maternal mother figures. Her childhood stories are replete with the usual masculine motifs of fist fights to protect the honour of her family and her siblings. Her mother had been raised in a strict farming family and when she met and fell in love with the charming likeable rogue Hughie (her father) she was cast out of the house. To marry a 'Tinkie' was a stigma. Hughie was a 'wheeler-dealer' who bought and sold anything for a profit. Kirsty was brought up to respect religion and this underpins her personal morality. She wanted a better life for her family. In the 1970s Dan tiring of the poor wages of a mechanic decided to seek his fortune in the burgeoning oil business. He arrived in Aberdeen and got a job on a pipeline. The world which he entered a miniature 'Wild West' with good money to be made. He worked hard and saved his money meeting Kirsty at a local dance. It was love at first sight. Marriage followed a brief courtship.</p>	<p>After marrying, Dan followed his dream and opened a garage in a nearby town. He built up a thriving trade in a short time but was too naïve. Normal customers paid on time but the other traders whom he dealt with were poor at settling their bills. A harsh lesson in cash flow problems ensued and Dan lost his first business. On settling his debts he was penniless. He accepted a job on a pipeline in the Middle East and left Kirsty and their young daughter on their own. Kirsty remembers being alone with no money and no food in the house. Undaunted, she trudged through the snow and visited every business who owed them money. She collected the debt by hectoring embarrassing them into paying up. It was a lesson she never forgot. It resulted in them becoming ruthless but fair people. Back from his travels with money in his pocket once again, Dan was mentored by Hughie who taught him the trading tricks. He learned quickly and started dealing in second-hand-cars. He did well and diversified into selling trucks. Over the years he built up a reasonable sized business but sold it to start a small oil company. He taught himself about hydraulics. He was at first moderately successful and opened an office in the city. He employed a salesman and a secretary but his business faltered. He blamed staff for drawing wages and not putting in effort. An unexpected bill from the taxman cleaned him out again. Dan and Kirsty returned to dealing in second-hand cars and built up enough money for Dan to re-enter the oil business. He now travels the globe buying and selling second-hand oil equipment and scrap, acting as a middleman for other companies. He trades in used oil rigs but still lives buys and sells cars on the side. He taught himself about finance and offshore banking and is now a multi-millionaire. He has a vast network of contacts in business and spends his spare time scouring his network for new deals. Kirsty stays at home and answers the phone and attends to urgent business in his absence. They are a formidable team. She bought and sold antiques and dotes on their family. Dan has a finger in many pies - property development; a village pub he hopes will fund his retirement as well as property deals in Africa and South America. He revels in his status as an entrepreneur.</p>

Unraveling the yarns and nuancing themes

This section deals with an analysis of the respondents' stories, discussing narrative tone, emotional tones and attitude, detailing imagery associated with the respondents and

unpicks common themes running through the narratives, as well as specific ideological settings that stand out across time. In the narratives, a critical theme was ‘character’ and a mono-message of honesty and hard-work emerged which underpinned their personal philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies.

In reviewing the life of Bill, it is apparent he fits the classical entrepreneurial narrative of the ‘poor-boy-made-good’. However, his business history demonstrates the full extent of his entrepreneuriality. For example, he mentored and encouraged nine former employees to start their own businesses. His contribution to the local economy is significant. In the dour North East Scots culture, which frowns on ostentatious success, Bill’s business achievements were muted but remarkable. Bill rejects any suggestion that he is an entrepreneur. He did have an opportunity to buy a large garage business in a nearby town but rejected it because he simply could not see himself mixing it with the ‘big-boys’. He preferred selling cars to farmers and tradesmen and did not relish the cut-and-thrust of town life. The narrative tone of his story is heroic, being one of slow but steady progress over a life time of hard-work. Bill’s stories are those of an emotionally balanced individual with a lust for life and an honest character. He is one of life’s gentlemen. Being a businessman, Bill was always well presented in his suit and tie which he insisted on for dealing with customers. He had a choice of cars but insisted in driving a modest car from stock taking pains not to appear ‘flash’. The main theme to emerge is of exemplary character. The ideology which pervades Bills stories is that of self-help and scrupulous honesty. Refreshingly, Bill presents himself as Bill - nothing more, nothing less. Bill’s story ends poignantly but as a role model his persona lives on as a generative script. In terms of his philosophy, his personal and business philosophies are inseparable.

Bill did not separate himself from circumstance and honesty is the hallmark of his philosophy and operating practices. His business growth plans were circumvented by his personal circumstances and having no sons to pass the business on to he was forced to diversify into property to maintain his personal wealth. His was a single-life-business which provided well for him and his family but generated income for others in the community during his 50 year in business.

Vick's life story is incomplete as he is still an active entrepreneur. The narrative tone of his life story is that of slow, steady heroism. Vick comes across as a quietly confident but self-deprecating character. The overall tone is of pride in achievement whilst keeping his character. Although Vick does not seek to project himself in local affairs but is every bit an entrepreneur. He does not consider himself to be one claiming he is not ruthless enough to be one. He too, is full of moral exhortations about the benefits of hard-work. Vick is a very emotionally balanced individual. He lives his life for his family through his work. He has no sons but hopes for grandsons to inherit the business. Vick does not project the imagery of an entrepreneur being very much the craftsman joiner with pencil behind his ear. He does have a Range Rover with private number plates, his daughters are in the 'Horsy set' but he keeps his feet firmly on the ground. Vick promotes his business image by modest acts of local philanthropy. The main theme to emerge is the projection of good character. Vick's image is simple - he presents himself as an idealized personification of the craftsman which guides his very character. Indeed, Vick projects himself as being modestly well off honest businessman and abhors the bad character of many of his peer group. In keeping with his character, he refused to divulge their names.

Vick's stories are set in the ideology of working-class craftsmanship and hard-work and honest toil pervade his stories which have an open ending. His personal life philosophy pervades his business philosophy – again being inseparable. Vicks honesty is self-evident in his personal life philosophy and operating practices. His business growth plans are endangered by his personal circumstances. He has no sons, or grandsons, to pass the business on to and may also be forced to diversify to maintain his personal wealth. His may well be a single-life-business. He provides well for his family whilst generating income for others in the community.

The narrative tone of Alfie's stories 'exude' morality and character. Alfie is a larger-than-life, genial character with a patient attitude to life. He rejects any notion of being an entrepreneur, despite his life narrative (like Bill) fitting the formula. He is very disparaging about entrepreneurs and laughs when he states that he still has all the money he made in the bank to pass on as a legacy to his grandchildren. He told the author tales of his peer group and of those who bought flash cars, wasted their money on flash parties and Poker games. He told stories of infidelity, kept women, mistresses, scandals and worse. These were not gangsters but local businessmen. They were his lifelong friends and being of good character he was too loyal a character to name names. Alfie drives a modest car and has maintained his character and associates entrepreneurs with local Councilors and sleazy politicians. The ideology surrounding Alfie's stories is that of the rural entrepreneur. Like Bill, Alfie is of the generation who present themselves as themselves. There is only one Alfie whatever the situation. The generative script which he leaves for future generations is one of moral entrepreneurship. However, again an emerging theme of personal and business philosophies being intertwined emerges. Alfie's

personal life philosophy also pervades and is inseparable from his business philosophy. Alfie's honesty is self-evident in his personal life philosophy and operating practices. His business growth plans were stunted by circumstance – his family did not want to take on the business. His is a single-life-business which enabled him to provide well for his family whilst generating income for others in the community.

The narrative tone of Dan and Kirsty's story is a heroic joint-life struggle. It is a classic rendition of the entrepreneurial narrative. However, it is not Dan who regularly tells his story. It is Kirsty who performs this role, with relish. Dan is too self-deprecating to 'blow his own trumpet'. However, an undercurrent of character is discernable in their life story. Dan is not an emotional man, but Kirsty makes up for them both, telling stories with a passion. Dan's attitude is that in life, you must work hard to succeed and he projects classic entrepreneurial semiotic imagery. His personal car is a top of the range black Mercedes with a personal number plate. As a car dealer, he has a choice of any car that passed through his books. He often has a second Mercedes, or a BMW as a run around, but is equally at home at the wheel of the Transit vans he trades in. He projects a very masculine entrepreneurial imagery. Being 6 feet four inches tall and twenty stone, he is an imposing figure. With a head of dark hair and a moustache, or goatee beard usually complementing the image he looks formidable. He dresses all in black. His gold sovereign rings complete the 'bad-boy' imagery which belies his gentle character. Dan and Kirsty project their high moral standards as an underpinning to their characters. They espouse the ideology of the underdog, of the outcast and of the entrepreneurial dream. Kirsty presents herself as a homemaker, but has a shrewd business acumen honed by years of privation and trading. Dan, projects himself as a serious man, not someone to be

messed with. He is soft spoken, until he slips into business mode when he changes tone to a more aggressive confident style. It is a very abrupt direct style. Both have multiple selves. The epic story that is their cumulative rise out of poverty is not yet over. Their story is the regenerative script and entrepreneurial narrative. Their two grown up children cannot take over the business because they do not possess the business knowledge or experience built up over the years. Dan considers an entrepreneur to be anyone who 'risks their money and reputation' to better themselves and believes that entrepreneurs possess a chameleon like character and so presents himself. Their story is still unfolding. Dan's personal life philosophy pervades his business philosophy and his operating practices. He has never borrowed money from a bank/lender and he finances his business deals and personal through reinvesting his personal wealth. Dan's honesty is genuine but situational in that he can deal with complex business situations philosophically (like being ripped off or having partners renege on deals). His business story may yet be a of a single-life-business. This influences his operating practices in that he invests offshore to safeguard his future. His business ventures have enabled him to provide well for his family but not for the local community.

The stories discussed are rich in detail and interesting, making it necessary to reflect on whether these cases constitute "entrepreneurship in the rural" or "rural entrepreneurship" to borrow Korsgaard et al's terminology (Korsgaard et al, 2015). They are simultaneously both in that the renting and selling of self and service is the former and the enacted personal narratives as bricolage are the latter. This reflection permitted the more nuanced themes of 1) family; and 2) community-embeddedness; to be extrapolated from the storied data making the cases easy to comprehend and compare

without losing the richness of the narratives. All the respondents were family orientated and their narratives demonstrate their embeddedness in the community.

Making slow-money

Before discussing the ‘tales-of-character’ it is necessary to revisit the theme of making ‘slow-money’. The respondents Bill, Vick and Alfie are all typical village entrepreneurs in that they started and successfully run businesses over a lifetime. This relates to McAdams theme of ‘fixity’ in that they operated a business over an extended period-of-time, becoming fixed in time and space, as village entrepreneurs giving of themselves to the community as entrepreneurs and small time philanthropists. As a theme, serendipity collectively pervades their stories. They were helped into business by others at a time when this occurred more freely. By the time, Bill and Alfie retired the business environment had changed and it was no longer viable to pass on a business to other non-family members – their businesses became non-viable due to external circumstances. Bill, Alfie, Vick and Dan and Kirsty are victims of self and circumstance (Anderson, 2000) in that they do not see themselves passing on their business. Each business is a single-life-business, not family business. As such they are forced to adopt their personal and business philosophies to take a more personalized view of income generation and business growth. Separately and without collusion Bill, Alfie, Vick and Dan all talked about a philosophy of making ‘slow-money’. By this they meant that they made their wealth cautiously and slowly over a life-time by hard work and not taking big risks. Dan is atypical but then of course risk is relative to self and circumstance. They have seen flash entrepreneurs come and go but retain their personal wealth despite their businesses

failing over time. There is a triumph of substance over style. This may well be an important element to the character and personalities of rural and village entrepreneurs and is worthy of further research. Bill, Vick, Alfie, Dan and Kirsty view themselves as being different from other entrepreneurs. They value their rural and village lifestyles and the pace of life it provided them in growing old with their families. The themes identified are of perseverance over time; modesty in character; humour; and of the enactment of personalised life philosophies. In family business studies, academics concentrate on families-in-business across several generations and not upon the single-life entrepreneurial venture. There are many of these in village settings and this may make villages viable venues for new entrepreneurial ventures. From a philosophical perspective, this slant on making '*slow-money*' relates to a sense of financial security and holding onto the money they made across their lifetimes. Conversely, flash entrepreneurs made money at a faster pace but often lost it. This strategy of slow but steady growth along with the examples of diversification and pluriactivity presented appear to be common practices amongst village entrepreneurs. The significance of "slow-money" merits further study with a larger data set. It emerged from the data and not the literature and thus constitutes a genuine finding. It is not present in earlier studies of rural entrepreneurship. The concept offers an interesting angle for understanding more about village entrepreneurs. It may be distinctive for village entrepreneurs but this study cannot explain the how and why nor the implications for business development and broader rural economic issues.

Discussing tales-of-character

The emergence of character permitted the storied reformualisation of ‘tales-of-character’ as cultural and symbolic capital (Mahar, 1991). All the respondents are ‘*Characters*’ in their own right. They are intensely private people whom exude warmth and charm and posses a knack of making you like them. They all welcomed the opportunity to tell their own stories being seldom granted this opportunity. The social settings chosen allowed them to relax sufficiently to tell their stories. Only Dan presented himself as an entrepreneur, using standard entrepreneur storylines. All are ‘self-deprecating’ individuals who emphasised personal and family values and modesty. Being shaped by adversity and adhering to values breeds character and accentuates hard gained value. They all lived through hard times and had lost money. It is of significance that although they did not present themselves as entrepreneurs, when one charts the elements and storylines associated with entrepreneurship onto the skeleton of their stories one can designate them as entrepreneurs.^{vi} Entrepreneurship is associated with change yet ironically change in rural activities is frequently seen as negative which downplays the role and importance of entrepreneurs in sustaining the vitality of rural areas (Bryant, 1989). Yet, in a rural context one can be entrepreneurial without being an entrepreneur *per se* if one extended the notion to include entrepreneurial activity by other people. Such activity is crucial to the maintenance of rural vitality.

These village entrepreneurs inspired others by their basic honesty, character; kindness and by propagating the work-ethic by personal example. Their tales are replete with examples of stubborn pride, of hardship faced in the early years - searching jacket pockets for money to pay bills on time, of going hungry rather than create the impression they could not pay a bill, and of overcoming financial losses. These moral success stories

appear to be a characteristic of village entrepreneurs socialised into the entrepreneurial-work-ethic. Yet one could question the morality claimed. It can be argued that some of the activities engaged in, offshore banking, property speculation, casualization of labour etc are morally questionable. One could equally question their claim of high moral standing. Bill and Dan deal in second-hand cars, an industry notorious for 'sharp practices'. Bill and Vick speculate in property, again a morally debatable occupation which could lead to property prices squeezing out less privileged locals from the property market. But both rented to local people. Similarly, Dan engaged in 'multi-million pound' oil deals. Given that some respondents had many employees (Bill 12, Vick 39) it would be interesting to establish the views of 'villagers' at the receiving end of 'moral judgements' made by them which may have impacted on them. Obviously, the stories of 'villagers' will differ from our entrepreneurs' intrepid tales. It is noteworthy that with-the-exception of Dan, there are no known disreputable stories in circulation about the respondents. One could suggest that Vick is guilty of pedalling 'zero-hours-contracts' but employment opportunities are scarce in rural settings and part-time work is valued. So, context is important and in this study, this author concerns himself only with the storied reality of the respondents. Delving deeper into the differences between a rural and village entrepreneur and considering potential differences, the most significant appears to be a perception of greater (Tönnien) morality which village entrepreneurs ascribe to themselves. Without more data and in-depth discussion regarding the differences between a rural and village entrepreneur this study stops short of articulating this difference.

The respondents' stories confirm, yet subtly refute the stereotype of the village entrepreneur as a slow and bucolic creature of habit. They consider entrepreneurs as

‘flash’, ‘rogues’ and even ‘crooks’. Their life stories and operating practices are characterised by vignettes about hard-work, perseverance, slow and dogged growth. However, one must beware of the duality of such tautological and questionable narrative descriptors because although all the respondents highlighted ‘hard-work’ and ‘honesty’ in their stories little research to-date uncovers examples of lazy entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the scope of their entrepreneurial ambitions, often transcend the opportunities available in a village setting. From the above discussion, it is possible to draft a narrative based model of ‘tales-of-character’ (see figure 1):-

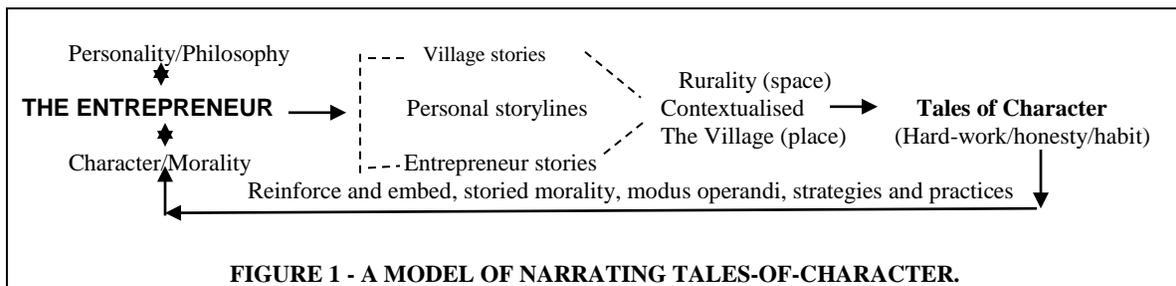


Figure 1 provides a justification for using narratives and informs us of the entrepreneurial journey. In this model, the entrepreneur and their character are inseparable (for good or bad) thus the village entrepreneurs interviewed all engaged in a ‘storying’ of their self-perceived identity (Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013; Korsgaard et al, 2015) and achieved this by participating in a storytelling cycle drawing on ‘personal-stories’, ‘entrepreneur-stories’ and ‘village-stories’ to reinforce their good character. The discursive practices and behaviours identified among ‘village entrepreneurs’ constitute an extension to the theoretical underpinning of rurality as a personal characteristic. The fact that the results are presented as narratives with the distinction between "entrepreneurial life themes" and "life story" remaining blurred is an important finding too.

Conclusions

The paper challenges some of the conventional thinking on rural entrepreneurship. A strength of this study is that it draws on an interdisciplinary literature to shed more light on the 'village entrepreneur' and argues that a village entrepreneur may well be different from other conceptualisations of "rural entrepreneurs". The "village entrepreneur" as a blend of "entrepreneurship in the rural" and "rural entrepreneur" and this is worthy of further explorations. To return to the research question - how do the village entrepreneurs articulate their lived experience and entrepreneurial identities in village settings – it is apparent they do so by narrating their life-stories as ‘tales-of-character’ which they live by. Their philosophies, working practices and growth strategies are guided by these storied scripts. Their business identities are moulded by the stories they tell. If one could better understand such philosophies, practices and strategies one would be in a better position as academics to conceptualise and theorise ‘Rural Enterprise’ at a higher level. There are implications for policy makers in that a more nuanced understanding of these philosophies, practices and strategies (both rural and village) would allow the design and initiation of policies which support and encourage the growth of rural enterprise and the differentiated operating practices found in the rural domain. Moreover, this study contributes to an emerging and growing literature of ‘Rural Entrepreneurship’ expanding our understanding of rural entrepreneurs by detailing philosophies, operating practices and growth strategies suitable and appropriate for small village and rural businesses. The respondents are reminiscent of Bechhofer and Elliot’s (1976) petite-bourgeoisie in nature and character and that they too emerge from the working class.

They are happy to work away making 'slow-money'. They are small-scale capitalists but own the production, distribution, and/or exchange of commodities and thus are an entrepreneurial class even if it suits their personal philosophy to deny so. Although the respondents are characterised more by their differences than by their commonalities it is nevertheless possible to view them as a category of ideal typical village entrepreneurs. Place can and indeed does exercise an influence on entrepreneurial identity. The fact that these are also very personal narratives limits any generalizability but the stories contextualise the content in a way that make readers think about the distinctive character of rural entrepreneurs and of villages as sites of entrepreneurship.

Although there are limitations to this study, it provides an enterprising and innovative approach to the rural entrepreneurship debate. One limitation is the small sample and lack of outliers. Obviously further research is required to increase the sample. Another limitation is its rural parochialism. During this ethnographic study the researcher was living in and embedded in rural village culture. Embeddedness, situated practices and transferring value across spheres are key facets of entrepreneurial practices in rural places (McKeever, Jack, and Anderson, 2015). This study lacks a comparative focus with urban entrepreneurs and would benefit from a rigorous comparison with urban entrepreneurial praxis. This will be the focus of future research. This might better underpin the empirical evidence provided and by making comparison more clearly highlight the interpretations around 'character', 'morality', and 'slow-money' by challenging whether these concepts are only germane to rurality, or are such character based traits found in urban enterprise settings. This work provides a platform for more informed academic debate around what

constitutes a rural entrepreneur as sociologically rural and urban life may be based on very different philosophies and life approaches.

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End Notes

ⁱ Villages vary in size from under 3000 inhabitants, to hamlets, to a handful of scattered houses. In the UK, a hamlet is regarded as such when it has no church (Stevenson, 2006) albeit many large villages do not have a church either. Villages usually have some form of social organisation such as a village hall, a village square, shops and services.

ⁱⁱ There is a substantive literature on village entrepreneurship in the context of the developing world but this is invariably about subsistence enterprise, micro finance, small scale initiatives and encouraging social and economic development. These issues have little relevance to a UK context.

ⁱⁱⁱ Albeit Anderson’s respondents were not specifically located in rural villages (this is a moot point because from experience most rural dwellers identify with a nearby village as part of their rural identities). One of the respondents in Anderson and Smith (2007) was a village entrepreneur from Aberdeenshire.

^{iv} Via a five-category typology of entrepreneurial behaviors/strategies that includes art, craft, engineering, bricolage, and brokerage.

^v At present the term is primarily used in a criminological context, particularly in policing and in offender profiling where it is used to draw inferences relating to the behavioural psychology of an offender. In everyday usage, the term is shortened to *MO* for Modus Operandi.

^{vi} Traits, personality and character play an important part in the profiling process and help us build up different levels of understanding. Thus, Narrative Fit is a useful method for identifying a person as being an entrepreneur. Granted, since entrepreneur stories are social constructs and narrative has been the tool used to unlock them, one would expect this result but, it is nevertheless an interpretative, subjective method and an additional tool in the armoury of the entrepreneurship researcher.