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Responsible Entrepreneurship:
A Deweyan Perspective

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Toward a Conceptual Framework for Responsible Entrepreneurship: A Deweyan Perspective¹

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present a definition and conceptualization of responsible entrepreneurship, which we situate at the micro-level of the entrepreneurial action, comprising both decision-making and action. The conception of responsible entrepreneurship proposed here indeed refers to the agency of project leaders, i.e., their ability to control and regulate their actions. In this view, responsible entrepreneurship does not refer to any specific kind of project or project leader, e.g. one with particularly laudable social or environmental goals. Based on a Deweyan perspective, responsible entrepreneurship is rather conceived of as an entrepreneurial decision-making process. The interest of this paper is to lay the foundation for a conceptualization of entrepreneurship responding to the current concerns of sustainable development. It also makes it possible to balance entrepreneurship, generally associated with economic considerations, with other global considerations, such as those related to ethics, society and the environment. Altogether, the proposed framework of responsible entrepreneurship is not meant to be prescriptive, but rather to describe an entrepreneurial process that incorporates both awareness and responsibility.

Keywords: Responsible entrepreneurship, sustainability, reflexivity, corporate social responsibility, cognition and decision.

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The problems facing modern society are numerous. In addition to the social and environmental challenges, there are economic issues to ensure the development of communities and more acceptable living conditions everywhere on the planet. Faced with this context, entrepreneurship is seen as one way to reach and solve many of these problems (Patzelt & Shepherd, 2011). This is why entrepreneurship, historically considered as an economic activity, is increasingly associated with a social purpose.

For the past few years, social entrepreneurship has appeared in academic discourse and continues to gain interest and popularity among researchers and practitioners alike (Chell, 2007). More recently, the concept of sustainable (green, environmental) entrepreneurship, based on the principles of sustainable development, has also emerged (Cohen & Winn, 2007; Hall, Daneke & Lenox, 2010; Munoz & Cohen, 2018; Parrish, 2010). If these forms of entrepreneurship are of interest, however, they fail in their ability to integrate any type of entrepreneurial activity. Essentially, social and sustainable entrepreneurship are defined by their goal, namely the establishment of a firm whose objective is first and foremost (in the case of social entrepreneurship) or at least equally important (in the case of sustainable entrepreneurship) to respond to a social and/or environmental problem. These "types" of entrepreneurship are often in opposition to traditional entrepreneurship, the purpose of which is to market a product or a service that meets a need (whatever it may be) in order to generate a profit for stockholders.

However, it seems relevant to us in 2019 to integrate a global thinking into any entrepreneurial action. This is what we call "responsibility", that is to say, act in a thoughtful and serious way, considering the possible consequences of its actions. As part of this paper, we propose a definition of responsible entrepreneurship, which is inclusive and sufficiently operational to identify impacts for practice.

The interest of this paper is to lay the foundation for a renewed conceptualization of entrepreneurship, responding to the current concerns of the modern world. It also makes it possible to link entrepreneurship, generally associated with economic considerations, with more global considerations, such as those related to society and environment, without, however, denying this economic dimension. The proposed definition is not meant to be prescriptive, but rather to describe a process that incorporates awareness and responsibility. It offers an opportunity to rethink entrepreneurship training and development in order to better address the challenges faced by the society. Firstly, we present the foundations of our conceptualization, i.e., the concepts of value creation and entrepreneurial action. Secondly, we propose a conceptual framework of responsible entrepreneurship. We conclude by opening on the practical impacts of this conceptualization for educators.

THEORETICAL PROPERTIES OF RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

As management is generally evolving towards an increasingly responsible outlook (Laasch & Conaway, 2016), it seems pertinent to translate this framework of responsibility into the context of entrepreneurship. What is the relevance of adding the term “responsible” to the concept of entrepreneurship? How would responsible entrepreneurship differ from other forms of entrepreneurship? And what are the implications for providing education and support for entrepreneurs that strive to be responsible? These are the questions this paper seeks to address.

Entrepreneurship as a process of value creation

Defining entrepreneurship is a more complex task than it appears at first glance. The notion is indeed vastly polysemic, depending on the specializations of those studying it (i.e., administration, sociology, psychology) and their broader research paradigms (Grégoire et al., 2006). In business administration, entrepreneurship is sometimes associated with business opportunities (Venkataraman, 1997), founding organizations (Gartner, 1988), value creation (Bruyat & Julien, 2001), and innovation (Drucker, 1985), or even combinations of two or more of these four aspects. Further, entrepreneurship today is available not only in several forms, but also to various groups, each with their own specificities and particular challenges to face. This includes young entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurs, and immigrant entrepreneurs, to name just a few. The result is an exploded landscape in which the notion of entrepreneurship can take on several meanings.

Following the example of other scholars, we here consider entrepreneurship as a process of value creation (Bruyat & Julien, 2001). This value may, of course, be pecuniary, but it may also be social or cultural, thereby enlarging the spectrum of entrepreneurship (Lackéus, 2015). This openness to ends that are not strictly financial allows us to think about entrepreneurship beyond the foundation of a “classic” business and the search for profit as the only distinguishing factor of entrepreneurship. Value creation can indeed rely on other types of organizations (i.e. cooperatives, associative enterprises), be initiated within an existing organization (i.e., intrapreneurship), or even follow other more or less structured paths outside of a fixed framework (i.e., one-off projects, events, citizens’ initiatives). The idea of value creation is thus doubly important: first, it does not restrict the entrepreneurial rationale to just the search for pecuniary profit; second, it can undo the too-often individualistic view of the leader of an entrepreneurial project. These factors will take on greater importance in what follows, where we will see that responsible entrepreneurship can not expand without the development of awareness, which calls upon not only the individual responsibility, but also the social and environmental responsibility, of the project leader.

In this spirit, our definition of the entrepreneurial phenomenon is not limited to just the creation of companies, but rather falls within a broad vision of enterprise associated with leading various kinds of projects. Due to this broadened vision of entrepreneurship, we have chosen to use the term “project leader” rather than “entrepreneur”: it covers the economic meaning associated with an entrepreneur—in the classic sense of a leader of a business-founding project—as well as also a broader meaning related to the idea of being entrepreneurial in many aspects and spheres of activities. In the latter, more inclusive meaning, which integrates the more general idea of engagement, “entrepreneurs” are people who initiate and bring to term many kinds of projects (Caird, 1990), developing their power to act in the service of causes they hold dear and assuming the role of agents of change.

Responsible entrepreneurship at the foundations of the entrepreneurial act

The capitalist excesses of some businesses, and even of some industries and of the underlying financial system, play a large role in creating the myth of the entrepreneur preoccupied only by the maximization of profits and dividends paid to shareholders, at the expense of other considerations, including the well-being of the community and the environment. Likewise, in this view, the entrepreneur is concerned with the optimization—not to mention the automation—of processes of production without regard for the resultant social costs or interested in individual success to the detriment of the collective interest. This myth is fuelled by the representation of entrepreneurship that associates it with large multinational companies, which little reflect the local entrepreneurial dynamics maintained by often more modest project leaders. Research on entrepreneurial motivations—what pushes some individuals to become business leaders or project leaders—has in fact shown that financial gain is but a minor motivation with respect to other motivational forces that fuel enterprising intentions, as well as the strategic decisions of the project leader or leaders, in giving birth to the project or business and developing it (Shane, Locke & Collins, 2003).

The myth of the entrepreneur driven solely by the quest for profit has been countered by recent concepts, including social entrepreneurship (Chell, 2007), solidarity entrepreneurship (Gianfaldoni, 2004), conscious entrepreneurship (Levesque, 2011), or sustainable entrepreneurship (Hall, Daneke & Lenox, 2010; Munoz & Cohen, 2018; Obrecht, 2016; Parrish, 2010). A growing body of studies explores business ethics (Giacalone & Thompson, 2006; Harris, Sapienza & Bowie, 2009) and the social and environmental responsibilities of corporations. These recent conceptual alternatives to the idea of entrepreneurship are particularly, though not exclusively, interested in the aims of the entrepreneurial act; these aims should not be solely concerned by profit and may lead to communitarian, social, cultural and sustainable benefits.

In our view, responsible entrepreneurship should be situated at the level of the entrepreneurial action (Schmitt, 2015); that is to say, at the level of the actions of entrepreneurs, not just their goals. Our conception of responsible entrepreneurship indeed refers to the agency of project leaders, or their ability to control and regulate their actions (Bandura, 1989). In other words, it must be understood that responsible entrepreneurship does not refer to a particular type of project leader, one with particularly laudable social or environmental goals. As we will see, responsible entrepreneurship is conceived of here as a way of planning and leading an entrepreneurial project. Specifically, this way puts three elements into play: reflexivity, building awareness, and judgment.

RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Entrepreneurship as a process

To grasp the conceptual framework we're proposing, it will be useful to pause on what an entrepreneurial process entails. Tremblay and Gasse (2013) offer a simplified conceptualization, divided into three large phases: 1) ideas, which are abstract and immaterial, but which allow one to establish a horizon for reflection and action; 2) the project, which gives the initial ideas a more concrete form, through the analysis of the environment and what can be done with the available resources; and 3) the creation of a business enterprise,² which is the concrete outcome of the process. The third phase described by these authors can be assimilated into value creation.

² It goes without saying that this phase is in fact the starting point of a completely different adventure, one that consists of making the project or business viable and growing it.

An entrepreneurial process is action-oriented. Whether it takes the form of a business project or a project of another nature, entrepreneurship is not limited to imagining potential projects but rather concretely implementing them. Seen through the lens of an action plan, the contributions of the philosopher John Dewey prove useful in describing what an entrepreneurial process entails (Pepin, 2012). In broad terms, this process always originates from an initial impulse: something happens that pushes an individual—or a group of individuals—to take action. In entrepreneurial terms, this initial impulse could be a business opportunity, or more generally, an opportunity for action (e.g., an idea to bring to life, a problem to solve, a need to be met, a dream to achieve, and so on). Rather than acting impulsively at the outset of an opportunity, Dewey (1938a) invites us to reflect before acting. Pre-action reflection should serve two goals. First, at the outset of the opportunity for action, it should set a concrete goal to attain. Indeed, the initial opportunity is not yet concrete enough to determine a precise course of action; for this reason, a goal should be set, even if it is likely to evolve along the way. This targeted objective should effectively enable the creation of value. Second, pre-action reflection should enable the development of a plan of action to achieve the goal, which implies anticipating problems likely to arise and the means available or to be assembled in order to bring the project to fruition.³

Pre-action reflection is essentially reflexive: in short, it is a matter of mentally projecting oneself into action in order to better prepare oneself. Were it limited to this reflexive step, this could not properly be called an entrepreneurial process, as an entrepreneurial process is necessarily active. Once the plan of action has been developed, whether it is summary or well developed, it should be implemented concretely; that is to say, one should launch into action to attain the objective. Dewey explains that no matter how thorough the pre-action reflection may have been, indeterminate situations will necessarily arise in the implementation stage. An indeterminate situation may be an unanticipated problem, a missing resource, or even a new opportunity for action. In any event, Dewey invites us to reflect again before acting in order to overcome the indeterminate situations that arise. This reflection-in-action must enable a judgment to be made regarding the situation in order to decide, as Dewey puts it, “what must be done”, to continue to make progress. In other words, each indeterminate situation one encounters gives rise to an opportunity for reflection, the outcome of which must enable one to continue to act. It goes without saying that reflection-in-action is likely to modestly or radically change the objective set at the outset, depending on the situation.

Lastly, once the objective has been reached, that is to say once the business is actually created or the project concretized, Dewey invites us to take a retrospective look at the path followed in order to assess the consistency between the targeted objective and the objective actually achieved—which will have inevitably altered in the process—as well as the means employed to reach it. In its nature, this post-action reflection is more meta-cognitive, and it must allow lessons to be drawn from the experience of the process. Ultimately, the entrepreneurial process is not just oriented towards action. Reflection constantly intercedes: first to launch into action, then to overcome problems that arise along the way, and lastly to draw lessons from the process and experience.

³ In this representation, the entrepreneurial process involves both causation and effectuation processes (Sarasvathy, 2001) or, in philosophical terms, it is both teleological and experimental (Dewey, 1938b). To set a goal and identify the means to achieve it (*causation*) allows one to determine a general course of action and provides an intention and a direction to the action to be taken. Nevertheless, this course of action will be contingent on unknown situations to be overcome, the means actually available, and the ways in which they can be combined to produce a desired effect (*effectuation*).

Figure 1, adapted from Pepin (2012), provides the general framework that allows the notion of responsible entrepreneurship to be theorized. In what follows, we will see that the level of reflection corresponds to the awareness of the entrepreneur, where the level of action refers to responsibility.

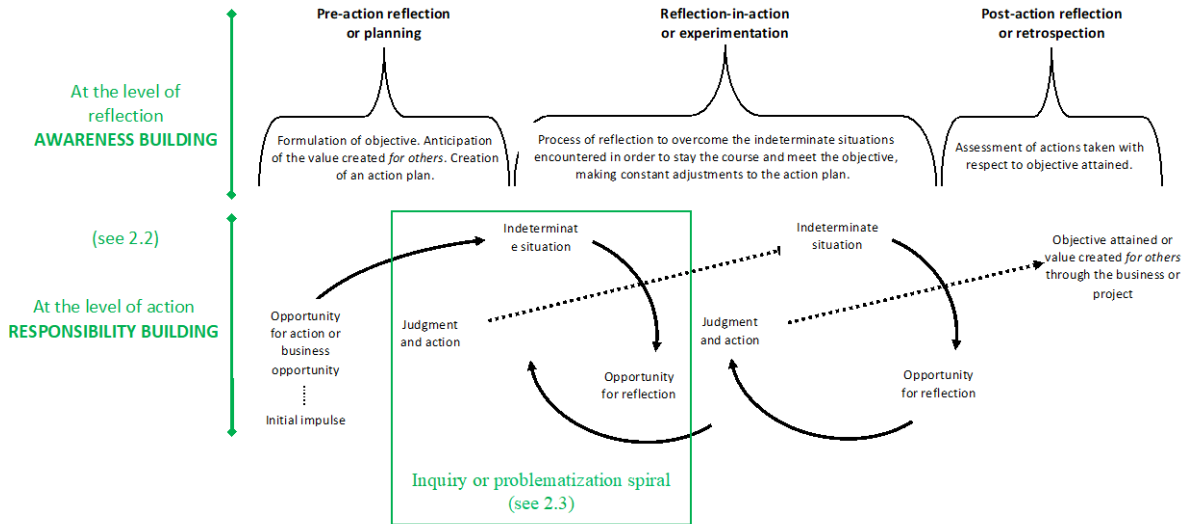


Figure 1: Entrepreneurship as a process (adapted from Pepin, 2012)

From awareness-building to responsibility-building through the entrepreneurial process

The concept of conscious entrepreneurship (Levesque, 2011) most closely resembles the concept of responsible entrepreneurship developed here. Levesque (2011) bases this notion on the observation that we live in a finite world with necessarily limited resources. The concept of conscious entrepreneurship thus emphasizes the need for the viable and sustainable development of society, on the economic front but also on the social and environmental fronts.⁴ Through the mediation of action and reflection, conscious entrepreneurship consequently insists on the importance of being conscious of and reflecting on the impacts of one's entrepreneurial methods on one's self, on others (society), and on nature. In other words, conscious entrepreneurship invites us to ask the following questions: how do my means of enterprising, my project, and the choices I make have an impact on who I am (as a person, as a project leader), on those around me (my family, my network, my community, society), and, more largely, on the ecosystem in which I develop and evolve (the environment, life in all its forms)? As a consequence, conscious entrepreneurship highlights the essential nature of introspection for becoming more aware, that is, of duly noting the impacts of one's actions and decisions on oneself and on others, in the broad sense of the term. Figure 2, which takes its inspiration from Levesque (2011), summarizes these dimensions of awareness or consciousness and responsible entrepreneurship.

⁴ The same idea is found in the area of economics through the idea of conscious capitalism (Mackey & Sisodia, 2013), which aims to reconcile economic development, human values, and the common good. Likewise, the notions of sustainable or green social entrepreneurship, which aim to align entrepreneurship with sustainable development, are gaining legitimacy (Hall et al., 2010; Parrish, 2010).

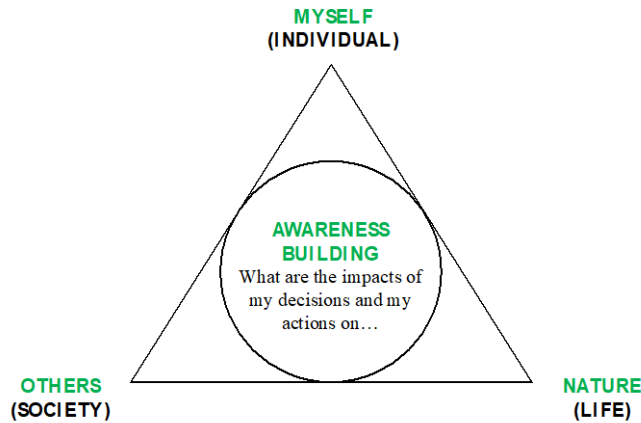


Figure 2: Dimensions of Consciousness

In the conception of responsible entrepreneurship that we employ here, building awareness is necessary but insufficient groundwork for becoming entrepreneurially responsible. If we rely on a common definition, to be responsible is to *accept and deal with the consequences of one's actions, to respond for them*. Being responsible thus implies being aware, or becoming aware, of the significance of one's decisions and actions. This means being able to situate the decisions we make and actions we perform in relation to ourselves and our project, but also in relation to others. But this consciousness is just one aspect of responsibility. We can be conscious of something all the while convincing ourselves that we cannot do anything about it, that it is beyond us or does not involve us. This does not lead to modifying our ways of acting or thinking; it leads to the status quo or inaction.⁵ Developing one's consciousness towards greater responsibility should rather lead one to perform actions and make decisions that are in line with the sequential realizations of the project leader. The more aware I become, the less I can ignore what I know and therefore, the more responsible and beholden I am for my actions and decisions. In conjunction, the more responsible I become, the more likely I am to open myself up to the problems that surround me and be aware of the consequences of my actions and my decisions. Figure 3 symbolizes the interdependence between awareness building and responsibility building, which we could describe as the virtuous circle of becoming responsible.

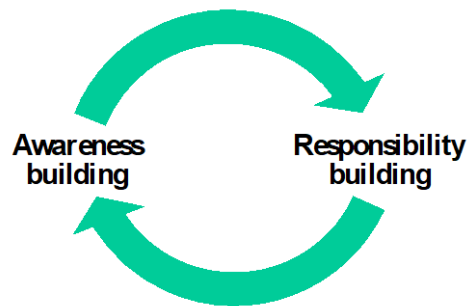


Figure 3: The virtuous circle of responsibility

⁵ In the typology of Ampleman et al. (1994), such thoughts would be described as uncritical or resigned consciousness (it's just the way it is, we can't do anything about it, it's none of our business). The two other levels of their typology are pre-critical or indignant consciousness and critical, integrating-liberating consciousness (which leads to engagement and action). Within the framework of responsibility, one aims for this last level of critical consciousness.

If we return to what has been presented thus far and translate these developments to the entrepreneurial process, we understand that ‘awareness building’ refers to the reflexive dimension of our conceptual framework (Figure 1), where ‘responsibility building’ refers to the active dimension, and these two dimensions are in constant interaction.⁶ We can thus think that awareness building affects responsibility building via two complementary routes. In the first route, the entrepreneur is already aware of some issues through previous experience or education at the outset, thus enabling the entrepreneur to make responsible decisions or act responsibly. For example, environmental and ecological consciousness—or eco-responsibility—certainly corresponds to an awareness acquired by a great number of people today. In the second route, illustrated in Figure 1, the project leader may be confronted by indeterminate situations throughout the entrepreneurial process; project leaders then must deliberate, using their judgment to decide “what must be done”, to continue to progress. These indeterminate situations are thus occasions, within the entrepreneurial process, to think through issues that emerge or obstacles that arise, in order to become more aware and take more responsible actions. What criteria can one then use to judge the responsibility of the project leader over the course of the entrepreneurial process?

Responsibility building from indeterminate situations

If we zoom in on Figure 1, echoing what has been developed until now, we see that the project leader’s responsibility will be particularly called upon in the first two stages of the entrepreneurial process. First, responsibility certainly comes into play when goals are set in the planning stage—during pre-action reflection. Second, as we have just mentioned, the project leader’s responsibility will also be tested in the experimental—or reflection-in-action—stage each time that a situation forces the project leader to decide which course of action to privilege to progress towards the objective. In Dewey’s terms (1938b), each indeterminate situation gives rise to an inquiry, represented by the problematization spiral in Figure 1. For Dewey, the goal of the inquiry is to secure a course of action. It implies the following: 1) analyze the situation to determine its problematic aspects and on which of these it is possible to take action; 2) to imagine one or several solutions to overcome the problem thus defined; 3) to choose the most appropriate solution based on the parameters of the problem, the resources (i.e., cognitive, human, material, and financial) available or that can be acquired, and the goal set as the horizon for action; 4) to implement the chosen solution, through a number of concrete actions. In other words, the project leader’s judgment will be constantly required to deliberate in indeterminate situations and to make choices leading to concrete actions.

Yet each time the judgment of the project leader is called upon in the entrepreneurial process, what points of reference can project leaders rely on to sustain their deliberations? In other words, what are the determining criteria that will allow project leaders to prefer one solution over another in the framework of their deliberations? The three dimensions of sustainable development, evoked in the popular idea of the “Triple Bottom Line (People, Planet, Profit),” stand out as relevant factors to consider in such deliberations. Development is referred to as sustainable when it meets the demands of economic, social, and environmental aspects. However, many projects or decisions do

⁶ If awareness building and responsibility building appear here to be two distinct elements, associated with reflection and action respectively, for other authors, awareness itself falls within a dialectic of reflection and action. Relying on Paulo Freire’s principles of popular education, Ampleman et al. (1994) describe consciousness building as an emancipatory, if not revolutionary, process that aims to make oppressed classes become aware of the relationships of exploitation and domination that maintain them in their current state, in order to engage them in a struggle for liberation, through popular activist organizations, among others.

not affect all three aspects of sustainable development at the same time. It is therefore possible to imagine different interactions in the framework of sustainability. In particular, three tensions are likely to fuel the deliberations of the project leader: 1) viability (involving economic and environmental dimensions); 2) equity (incorporating economic and social dimensions); and 3) bearability (based on social and environmental dimensions). Figure 4 illustrates the determining criteria likely to inform more enlightened and responsible decisions and actions. It is interesting to note that this framework invites one to concomitantly reflect on at least two elements of sustainable development. The economic dimension—profit making—can thus only be considered in conjunction with other dimensions of this framework.

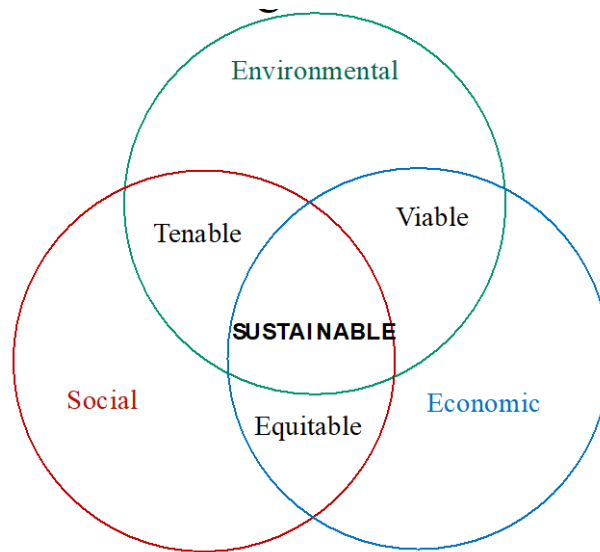


Figure 4: Deliberation criteria for indeterminate situation

Let us take a classic case as an example. To reduce the production costs of a product I want to offer my clients, one option would be to have it manufactured overseas in a country known for low manufacturing costs—China, for example. Applied to this mundane case, the determining criteria could occasion the following three deliberations. First, at the economic level, manufacturing in China allows me to lower my costs of production and thereby reduce my sales price or increase my profit margin. Second, at the social level, entrusting production to a company overseas may lead me to consider that a local company could have managed it—undoubtedly at a higher cost, but guaranteeing local jobs. Furthermore, what do I know about the working conditions in the factory where my product will be manufactured? However, I know that the product I plan to offer will make the lives of my target clients easier. Third, at the environmental level, overseas production necessarily increases the environmental impact of my product, particularly due to the transportation required, if not the use of materials that I may not have complete control over. The aim of this example is not to emphasize one aspect over another, but rather to show possible factors in a deliberation. Depending on which tension the project leader relies on in settling this deliberation (viability, equity, bearability), the project leader is likely to either opt for production in China or to come up with another option. That being said, could there be a “superior value” or a determining criterion with greater weight in the decisions to be made, if an entrepreneurial process is to lean towards greater responsibility?

Responsible entrepreneurship: an ethical concept

It would be relatively easy, in reflecting on the question of responsibility, to fall into considerations of a moral order; in other words, to adopt a normative outlook that would seek to idealize some higher values as more morally acceptable than others. One definition of responsibility indeed has a more moral meaning; responsibility can also refer to the need to *be accountable, by virtue of accepted morality, for one's actions or those of others*. It would be harmful, in our opinion, for the notion of responsible entrepreneurship to slide over into virtue and to refer a set of moral principles that would define what is good or bad, acceptable or unacceptable. It should be recalled that project leaders evolve in a given ecosystem, with its own resources, stakeholders, standards, and accepted ways of doing things. The entire weight of responsibility cannot be placed only on project leaders. Their responsibility is rather a form of mediation, in other words, an act of balancing, between their level of awareness and the possibilities or affordances that their ecosystem actually offers. Of course, the very role of the project leader, particularly if one wants to be responsible, is to question the accepted means, products, or services of a given industry. Nevertheless, building the project leader's responsibility should not occur at the expense of the feasibility or the survival of the project. In this sense, responsible entrepreneurship is closer to ethics than morality: it refers not to a set of moral principles to obey, but invites project leaders to question themselves on the values and moral principles that should guide their actions and decisions about "what must be done" in a particular situation, along the spectrum of what is ideal and what is feasible.

This suggests that project leaders and their environment influence each other in terms of responsibility building. The business environment or project environment may itself become more responsible, through policy-level adoptions of new operating standards or, more subtly, through changes in the social acceptability of certain projects. In a manner of speaking, these may "force" project leaders to adopt more responsible practices or to offer more responsible products or services. At the same time, project leaders may introduce more responsible changes to practices to their larger environment, compelling others to evolve, on the whole, towards greater responsibility. Figure 5 below illustrates this interaction between responsible entrepreneurship and the larger environment.

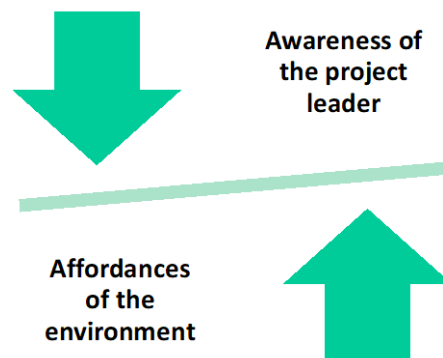


Figure 5: Balancing responsibility

Toward an integrative framework for responsible entrepreneurship

In summarizing what has been proposed thus far, we can put forward six key points:

- Responsible entrepreneurship can be understood as setting value creation as a goal, whether this value is of a pecuniary, social, cultural, or other nature;
- An entrepreneurial process can be considered as an action project directed towards a concrete objective. Reflection occurs constantly throughout this process, informing decisions that must be made and actions that must be taken to progress towards the objective of the project leader;
- In the context of the entrepreneurial process, reflection corresponds to awareness building, while responsibility building is situated at the level of action, and each influences the other;
- Awareness is based on three factors, namely the impacts of one's mode of entrepreneurship on oneself, on others, and on nature;
- Responsibility is related to the agency of project leaders—that is to say, their ability to control and regulate their actions, by constantly considering the consequences of their actions and decisions;
- The determining criteria for deliberating on indeterminate situations, which will arise during the entrepreneurial process, can be inspired by the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, the social, and the environmental.

It seems necessary at this stage to place the operations of awareness building and responsibility building into dialogue, as up to now they have been broached separately for purposes of clarity. The final groundwork of our argument comes from our observation of a dialectic between awareness and responsibility; they each influence each other throughout the entrepreneurial process. Figure 6 below shows the proposed integrative framework for conceptualizing responsible entrepreneurship. In the form of a prism, this figure illustrates how the three dimensions of awareness (myself, others, nature) are enlisted in deliberations surrounding the three tensions of sustainable development (viability, equity, bearability). This reveals three levels of deliberation:

- A first level mobilizes the project leader's individual awareness (myself/us) and bears on the viability of the entrepreneurial project. This level engages the need to reflect on the personal impacts of the entrepreneurial project, including the financial viability for the project leader or leaders. More broadly, the well-being—including the integrity, mental health, personal balance, and financial health—of the project leader or leaders, intercede at this level. This is an aspect often neglected by entrepreneurial texts. It is useful to recall that a large number of project leaders do not necessarily aim to grow their business exponentially. Many are indeed content to modestly surpass breaking even, to the benefit of other aspects of their personal or professional lives.
- A second level mobilizes the project leader's awareness of the collective (others) and bears on the equitableness of the entrepreneurial project. This level highlights the need to reflect on the social impacts of the entrepreneurial project, including the social costs or gains the project entails. More largely, it invites us to broadly consider all human stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in the project, in order to balance the positive and negative aspects for each stakeholder.

- A third level mobilizes the project leader’s environmental awareness and bears on the sustainability of the entrepreneurial project. This level highlights the following: the need to reflect on environmental impacts in the short, medium, and long-term; the processes associated with the entrepreneurial project, including the environmental costs of a product throughout its life cycle (production, transportation, use, and end of life);⁷ and the positive and negative impacts on the social environment. More generally, this level invites project leaders to evaluate the results and repercussions of the project for the natural, and consequently also social, environmental.

Essentially, we could say that, just as the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) implies integrating the challenges of sustainable development into the business world, the concept of responsible entrepreneurship is an invitation to transpose the framework of sustainability onto the entrepreneurial process—that is to say, onto project creation in general. With the help of Figure 6, we can see that on the whole, the three levels of deliberation fuel the core of the system—namely, the responsible creation of value—as the first goal of responsible entrepreneurship. Moreover, the prismatic configuration of this integrative framework invites us to consider the deliberations surrounding the entrepreneurial project through the vertices of the prism, which simultaneously take into account two dimensions of sustainable development. Naturally, nothing impedes all three dimensions from being considered at the same time, in setting the project’s objective or informing decisions or actions throughout the entrepreneurial process.

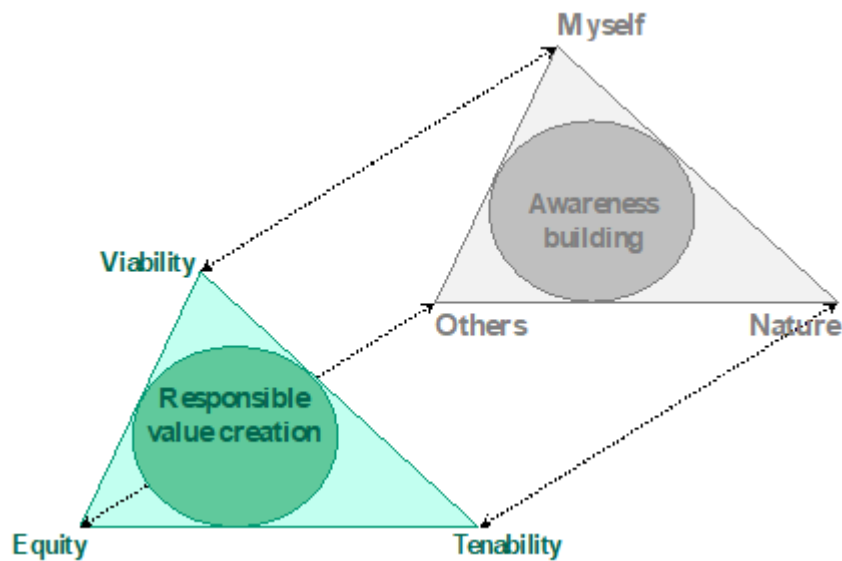


Figure 6: Entrepreneurship through the lens of responsibility

⁷ The principle of the circular economy is interesting to consider in deliberations, as it aims to limit the waste of raw materials and non-renewable energy sources. In particular, the circular economy favours the design of products that can be recycled in their entirety, thus producing no further waste.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION: IMPLICATION FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

The proposed conceptual framework suggests interesting paths for the education and guidance of project leaders. For the educator adopting this view of responsible entrepreneurship, the aim becomes one of offering active or potential project leaders learning opportunities and situations that allow them to develop their awareness and decision-making abilities. Such educators will seek to equip their students such that they are able to adopt entrepreneurially responsible behaviours. Advisors for project leaders often act as “guardians of the process” in ensuring that project leaders work through all the stages of the process and do not skip. Thus this proposed framework provides advisors with beacons and may structure their interventions. On the basis of this framework of responsible entrepreneurship, their role becomes one of ensuring that project leaders do two things: firstly, that project leaders carry out the step of reflecting on the impacts of their projects (on themselves, on others, and on nature); and secondly, that they engage in a deliberation exercise, in which they consider possible solutions and actions and assess them based on their value creation. The same applies to mentors, whose mandate it is to promote reflection on the part of entrepreneurs. This framework renders more concrete the dimensions of the reflection’s mentors are meant to support. It would therefore be to the advantage of all contributors who agree with this view of responsible entrepreneurship to pursue the following objectives:

1. To develop the awareness and consciousness of students or project leaders by enabling them to be aware of and take an interest in the political, social, cultural, and environmental problems that surround us and to be on the lookout for opportunities to act differently;
2. To teach students or project leaders to deliberate when facing indeterminate situation through deliberating between the different options open to them so as to maximize the responsible value created;
3. To develop responsible decision-making reflexes in students or project leaders to make them more efficient and effective in performing the deliberations inherent to the entrepreneurial process.

The example of the business model canvas

Contemporary approaches to entrepreneurial education emphasize action (i.e., *Lean Startup*, *Value-Proposition Design*, *Business Model Canvas*, *Service-Based Learning*, *Design Thinking*, and so on). They compel leaders to think in a summary way and to promptly tackle the fruits of their reflection (speculations, hypotheses, and solutions considered). These methods and tools compete, so to speak, with more traditional methods based on planning and achieved through lectures, case studies, or creating business plans (Carrier, 2007). The *Business Model Canvas* (Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2011) is among the most often used contemporary approaches. At first glance, this tool seems to fit particularly well with the processual view of a value-creation oriented entrepreneurship that we have put forward in this text (see also Osterwalder, Pigneur, Bernarda & Smith, 2015). Indeed, the business model canvas is above all a conceptualizing exercise; it is a creative process intended to develop a project idea in order to quickly test its feasibility. The reflective exercise of the business model canvas is comprised of nine building blocks. The two most central of these are the following: 1) the value propositions of the idea developed, and 2) the customer segments, which are the characteristics of the clientele or more generally the target market. These two building blocks are importantly connected: the central reflective exercise consists of determining how the expectations or needs of the precise target market are fulfilled by the suggested value proposition

(a PULL strategy), or conversely, how the suggested value proposition could interest a target market, without that market already having a concrete need for it (a PUSH strategy).⁸

The business model canvas method consists of creating an initial, relatively cursory, version of the model, the response to which then needs to be tested in the field by meeting potential stakeholders, whether those are clients, suppliers, partners, or investors. The feedback thus obtained on the first canvas should then lead to the production of a second, more precise and adjusted, canvas, which will then in turn be tested again. The process continues in this manner until a sufficiently solid and validated business model is obtained. This iterative sequence of conceptions, validations, and adjustments corresponds particularly well to the processual view of entrepreneurship presented earlier (see Figure 1). The first version of the business model canvas corresponds to the planning—or pre-action reflection—stage, where successive versions of the canvas correspond to the “problematization spirals” in the experimentation—or reflection-in-action—phase. Each adjustment to successive canvases then enables the project leader to come closer to his or her objective, whether that is the creation of a business or, more generally, bringing a project to fruition.

While the processual dimension of our concept is present, nothing in the business model canvas inherently pushes one towards greater responsibility, in the sense that we have defined it previously. The exercise proposed by the business model canvas above all aims to do two things: first, ensure a fit between the value proposition and the target market; and second, to rapidly verify the feasibility of an idea and the interest it generates, without first having to draw up a proper, potentially tedious, business plan.⁹ This, of course, does not mean that a complete business plan will not eventually be necessary later, particularly for obtaining financing. One can imagine that the iterative process proposed by the business model canvas may even lead to less responsibility: successive validations with different potential project stakeholders could lead to less responsible choices, for example, to lower some costs or to accelerate the project. In other words, if the tool is interesting in itself and corresponds well to the processual view of entrepreneurship presented here (Figure 1), it should be amended to instill the idea of responsibility.

The preceding developments are useful for this purpose. First, the central building block in the business model canvas, value proposition, could be simply renamed with reference to responsible value creation. Second, the judgment necessary to adjust subsequent canvases with respect to stakeholder feedback could benefit from drawing on the framework of the three levels of deliberation (Figure 6). Thus, each adjustment—that is, each important decision—could be based on a two-stage deliberation: 1) what are the consequences of a particular decision on me/us, others, and nature; and 2) how does the solution I favour to resolve a given indeterminate situation allow me to ensure a balance in terms of viability, equity, or bearability? In our opinion, these additions provide support for the development of reflexes associated with responsible entrepreneurship.

⁸ To understand this PUSH strategy, consider smartphones: companies had a technology to sell at a time when no real need for it had been widely expressed by consumers. The trend is now the reverse, and everyone feels that they need an increasingly efficient smartphone.

⁹ With respect to the entrepreneurial process as presented here (Figure 1), the writing of a business plan—were it to be carried out in a vacuum—would be to base everything on planning (pre-action reflection) without undergoing the experimentation (reflection-in-action) phase.

To conclude: Business schools as promoters of responsible entrepreneurship

Even if today, entrepreneurship is becoming increasingly democratic, an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary activity present in all university faculties and schools, entrepreneurial education and development still mainly fall within the competence of business schools. Existing businesses and organizations increasingly wish to develop this aspect in their activities through a variety of means: entrepreneurial direction, intrapreneurial activities, and the development of employee entrepreneurial skills. These objectives fall within our inclusive definition of entrepreneurship and thus support the leading role business schools should take in the development of responsible entrepreneurship. Enabling the development of responsible entrepreneurs is particularly in line with the fundamental mission of many business schools. Business schools would be well advised to disseminate this view of responsible entrepreneurship and the values, skills and expertise associated with it across their campuses. In this sense, our conception of responsible entrepreneurship would, in our opinion, allow faculties to be united around a common, inclusive view that would benefit students from all areas of study.

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