"We are what we share": 'Reflections on Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Business History'. [1]

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1 Introduction

There is not a long history of collaboration between businessmen and business historians, for they have long inhabited different environments. Indeed in the first issue of the British journal, *Business History*, in 1958, Thomas Ashton observed that historically:

'The businessman has never been a popular figure'. (Ashton, 1958:1)

In the same issue Theo Barker summed up the gaps in perception between the world of business and the academic business historian when he commented:

> 'Many businessmen, of course, still have little time for the academic world which they consider unreal and sheltered from the hard realities of profit and loss. By tradition, members of university staff must be rather stuffy and remote, capable of writing only in the most tedious and unreadable style and with an enormous apparatus of distracting footnotes. As links between universities and the business world grow closer... these legends are dying. The news is spreading that academics are not always either unrealistic or dreary'. (Barker, 1958:18)

While the sub-discipline of business history developed in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s, the gap in understanding between business history and business - the writing of company histories by professional historians notwithstanding- seemed to widen. This paper focuses on the potential for innovative practice in research and teaching when the boundaries between academic research, teaching and business are crossed. It sets our personal collaborative experience in a broader historical perspective, linked to the development of business history as a discipline and its relationship, most particularly to entrepreneurship and innovation.

The paper will briefly review the development of business history as a discipline and its relationship to business using the lens of communities of practice. This provides context for our personal analysis of business-academic collaboration around entrepreneurship and innovation and allows us to better appreciate the boundaries and barriers between the worlds of business history and academia. in the second our personal collaborative experience in researching and teaching innovation is explored. In a final section conclusions are drawn.

Business history, business, entrepreneurship and innovation: path dependency and path creation

Appreciation of the development of academic disciplines and attitudes to emerging areas can be improved by exploring them from a social perspective. This section of the paper examines the development of business history and its relationship to other disciplines, especially to management as a context for appreciating relationships between business historians and business.

Path dependency applies as much to academic work as it does to business, technology and innovation. Disciplines typically develop in silos with particular language, rituals and behaviours, associated with a shared history and community of practice.

Communities of practice is a theory of situated learning which helps us understand behaviour within and between organisations and activities. Communities of practice is defined by Etienne Wenger as follows:

> 'Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell: Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.' (Wenger, 1998: 10)

In academia knowledge and expertise, built through PhD, through journal articles, through teaching is inevitably cumulative. It is also part of a social process, developed within a particular community of practice, associated with working within a discipline and within a university or universities. Tacit knowledge based upon shared experience and understanding speeds up communication within a discipline through the development of tacit knowledge. But since communities of practice differ between disciplines even in the same university

significant barriers and silos of knowledge can emerge as suggested *below:*

> 'There can be no doubt that the academic profession is an odd occupation. ... Variety is its name, for it is inevitably a conglomerate of interests in which purposes and tasks steadily divide along lines of subject, clientele and occupational linkage. And opaqueness is its style, for who can fathom an econometrician when he or she is in full stride, let alone a high energy physicist ... or an English professor determined to deconstruct literary texts?' (Clark 1987: xxi).

Similarly

> 'It is around the disciplines that faculty sub cultures increasingly form. As the work and the points of view grow more specialised men [and women] in different disciplines have fewer things in common, in their background and daily problems. They have less impulse to interact with one another and less ability to do so... (Clarke, quoted Becher, 1989:45)

Academic boundaries are surprisingly acute if you try to move between disciplines which one might expect to be related.

> 'Given the inherent interrelatedness of entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity, one would expect there to have been a natural conscious blending of research interests, results, methodologies and diverse applications; yet each field is neatly compartmentalized with little cross pollination. For example, creativity is rooted firmly in psychology and innovation has primarily been examined in fields of technology and engineering.' (Brazeal and Herbert 1999).

Reflecting on the gulf between business history and management Geoffrey Jones echoed this view in a 2009 Harvard Business School interview. He suggested that despite having much to offer the study of entrepreneurship and management, business history has developed in a separate silo, which has ' resulted in the spread of influential theories based on ill-informed understandings of the past". (Silverthorne, 2008) The origins of this separation are historically embedded, reinforced by the emergence of distinctive communities of practice and hence norms of behaviour, priorities and languages between business historians those in even near neighbours in management. The following section of the paper brings a brief overview of how and why this has occurred.

Business history is a sub-discipline, though whether of history, economics, economic history or management depends very much on when and where the question is asked and by whom. Business history emerged earlier in the United States than in Britain and the journal *Business History Review* was founded in 1926, two years before N.S.B. Gras became the first Straus Professor of Business History, at Harvard Business School. (Gourvish, 2003) Gras's book *Business and Capitalism: An Introduction to Business History* (1939) identified a series of stages in the evolution of business policy and management. It was unashamedly a defense of the 'Robber Barons' and of the contribution which Gras believed business had made to American prosperity. This approach attracted very little attention, other than from other business historians, whose intellectual isolation became associated with the collection of information, rather than its interpretation. (Galambos, 2003). After the Second World War

barriers between business historians and other related disciplines, if anything, became higher rather than lower in the United States. Economic history was being transformed by cliometricians, whose contempt for business history was even more profound than that of mainstream historians. The very assumptions of neoclassical economics meant that 'the historical and internal dimensions of business were, by definition, eliminated from consideration. (Galambos, 2003:14)

The origins and early development of business history came later in Britain. Although Sir Gordon Clark first used the term in 1932, linked to the preservation of business records, the journal *Business History* was not founded until 1958. The sub-discipline's British origins lay in the industrial history of T.S Ashton, Sir John Clapham and George Unwin, but its intellectual isolation was considerable. (Gourvish, 1995.) Many mainstream British historians were contemptuous of business history and in 1979 Alan Milward dismissed it as the 'deadest of all historical dead ends'. (Milward, 1979:886) Even today, business history does not even merit an index mention, still less a designated chapter in Cannadine's *What is History Now?* (Cannadine, 2002).This is despite annual conferences, learned associations and no less 5 business history journals.

The intellectual isolation of business history, in both United States and Britain until the 1960s and 1970s, stemmed from its association with the commissioned history. In terms of its place in the 'hierarchies of histories, business history was very lowly. Not least this was because of what Donald Coleman described as business history's *Catch 22*:

'Business history must use company records and to get those records must build a relationship with the company –the working with a client –company history and business history

have often been seen as synonymous. ….[One] distinguished historian from LSE described business history as a sort of applied history –'thereby placing it below the salt and indicating a distinction akin to that so uniquely beloved of the British between pure and applied science ' (Coleman, 1987: 141,145)

Business historians did not, therefore, fit the norms of behaviour for mainstream history. A *Historical Association* pamphlet in 1960 merely compounded this by explaining that serious business history appealed to the businessman 'not only as something which can satisfy his curiosity about the past, but also as an important public relations exercise.' (Quoted Coleman, 1987:146) This served to divide business history further from the mainstream of history, and built few bridges with management. By the 1970s, and the appearance of a number of scholarly business histories, the gap between business history and management is obvious. At a conference held at what was then Cranfield Institute of Technology in 1973, management specialists called for business historians to look beyond narrative case studies. Peter Mathias, then Professor of Economic History at Oxford University, pointed to the existing 'wheel ruts' in the development of business history, suggesting that historians were naturally averse to the notion that their work should have 'any direct utility to the present'. He concluded that separation of attitude, expectations and practice would prevent much fruitful business history interplay between management specialists and business historians. If anything the gap widened in the 1970s, and in 1981 Leslie Hannah commented on the reinforcement of barriers between business school research and business history-where neither group read each other's research. (Hannah, 1981) Some outstanding, rigorous, scholarly, business histories had

been written in Britain by this time. But they had very little impact, outside the narrow sub discipline either on history or on management or, it has to be said, on the businesses whose company histories had been written. At its narrative best, in Britain, business history was a sub discipline of the sub discipline economic history and at its worst it was, 'narrow, insular and antiquarian'. (Hannah, 1983, 165-6) Not an encouraging profile!

 Business history's early development then was inseparable from its narrow, case study approach, was innocent of theory and was anything but interdisciplinary. Like all inward looking networks, business history would have withered without external engagement, and on both sides of the Atlantic there were calls for engagement with theory from the 1960s onwards. It was not so much the abandonment of the company history that was called for, as the widening of the context to capture the interplay between business and its social, economic, political and cultural environment. This plea for a broadening of the research agenda was essential to the reversal of intellectual myopia. Engagement with other disciplines brings new insights and the opportunity to identify new questions in both business history and to related areas of study- a healthier and more holistic approach. As Arthur Cole said in 1962, business historians need not abandon case studies but they should integrate new dimensions to their work, which would be 'more fruitful for both the improvement of professional training in schools of business and for the enlightenment of scholars and students engrossed in social history'. (Quoted Gourvish, 1995:5).

 Innovation stems from the new perspectives, insights and questions that new combinations of knowledge bring, and the development of business history was no exception. A major source of cross fertilisation for American business history was Harvard University's Research Centre in Entrepreneurial History

during the 1950s and early 1960s and the emerging position of business history within Harvard Business School. The Centre nurtured the thinking of two major influences on the development of modern business history, transforming it from being inward looking and parochial to being outward looking and creative. These included Alfred D.Chandler Jr. who set the study of big business in the context of Schumpeterian innovation and Thomas Cochran with his sociological insights into entrepreneurship. Both men, in their different ways, contributed to the reversal of business history's isolation. In many respects Cochran held the broadest perspectives, and his research ranged from American entrepreneurship to child bearing habits. Chandler, on the other hand, placed the American business corporation and the professionalisation of management at the heart of the dynamic innovation process. But he too drew on sociology, to be precise on the work of Harvard sociologist Talcott Parsons, who emphasised the evolution of roles within bureaucracies. Chandler did not entirely abandon the detailed case study, though he certainly abandoned the 'hero entrepreneurs' beloved of Gras and his contemporaries. Nevertheless his work drew heavily on his own empirical studies and personal experience. He had direct family connections with the Du Ponts and was advisor to Alfred P. Sloan, CEO of General Motors, in his preparation of *My Life at General Motors.* He was convinced that 'traditional case studies must continue to provide the absolutely essential information on which any broad generalisations and concepts about the history of business … can be based [but they] clearly were not enough.' (Chandler, 1984).

Chandler was convinced of the power of history as a framework for understanding change, and identified a strong and shifting relationship between the innovative strategies of large scale companies and their professional managerial

structures. His syntheses explored types of business, rather than individual firms and set change in the context of changing markets and technology. Chandler's platform transformed business history from the obsession with the particular, to a broader, more sophisticated analytical vehicle for understanding the development and performance of American business. His position as the Straus Professor of Business History at America's most prestigious business school, HBS where he ran the most popular MBA elective, undoubtedly raised the profile of his work and his paradigm provoked healthy debate within related disciplines. In contrast to the previous generation of business historians, he gained a wide audience and *Visible Hand,* published in 1977, transformed Chandler's national and international standing when he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for it. For nearly 30 years, from the 1960s, and the publication of *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of the America Industrial Enterprise* (1962)*,* until 1990 and American business history can be broadly be described as Chandlerian. The unhealthy degree of consensus was not Chandler's intent, but a reflection of the extent to which his interdisciplinary work had moved the boundaries of business history. The degree of consensus arguably peaked in 1989 when, in the autumn issue of *Business History Review* all articles cited Chandler's work. . (Galambos, 2003).

   The Chandler revolution did not pass British business history by, but responses, especially from industrial historians, were initially quite sceptical and suspicious of theoretical generalisation. In 1983 Leslie Hannah, the then director of the Business History Unit observed that: 'progress in systematic integrative work, going beyond company history towards comparative business history dealing with wider themes, has been halting.' This stemmed, he felt, from the separation of

business and economic history not just from mainstream history, but from most other disciplines also – including social sciences economics and from business schools. This is echoed by Charles Harvey and Geoffrey Jones who concluded in 1990 :

> ' It is hard not to regard at least part of the British resistance to Chandlerism as stemming from the same sentiments as those which motivated resistance to the new economic history of the 1960s; an excessive attachment to the empirical method, innate conservatism and an insularity of mind which breeds hostility towards innovative ideas originating abroad' (Harvey and Jones, 1990, 5).

Until the mid 1990s business history was taught primarily in history or economic history departments in Britain. Experiments with the Economic and Social Research Council funded business history fellowships in London Business School and the Management Centre, University of Bath, in the 1980s, proved short-lived. (Harvey and Jones, 1990:11). In the following two decades one of the most notable changes in British business history has been :

> ' The changing institutional location of most
> business historians ….from history departments
> to business schools.'
> (Harvey and Wilson, 2007: 3).

During that period business history came of age as a discipline. The formation of Learned Societies, annual conferences and an array of

journals, between 1990 and 2007, reflect the extent to which business history has matured. Part of the development was a healthy response against the Chandlerian consensus as debate gathered in Europe and indeed the United States, following the publication of *Scale and Scope* in 1990. There were several reasons for this, including growing doubt that the Chandler model reflected experience outside American capital intensive sectors, still less in Europe of further a field. In addition, with its focus on the internal structures and management of companies, there was a growing sense of missing dimensions, not least those of entrepreneurship, of culture, of gender and even of products. Indeed in 1989 Harold Livesay went as far as to say that business history:

> 'has in recent years acted like a neutron bomb, wiping out
> the people while leaving the buildings intact' (Livesay, 1989:
> 5)

 The business history agenda undoubtedly shifted and broadened during the 1990s and 2000s in the United States, Europe and in Asia to embrace some of these missing dimensions, as illustrated from the contents page of the Oxford Handbook of Business History (Jones and Zeitlin, 2008). Despite this the impact of business history on the study of entrepreneurship by management scholars remains limited. Silos of knowledge can co-exist without coalescing. The question inevitably arises of ways to embrace the opportunities and reduce the boundaries between disciplines. Schumpeter's emphasis on the potential for co-evolution of knowledge by economists and economic historians is especially apposite. (Schumpeter, 1947) The creative impact of 'new combinations' on the economic system is equally applicable to academic research, where innovation takes

place at the boundaries of disciplines drawing together complementary approaches.

The following section sets our collaborative experience which link academia and business in this context, exploring how combining new networks with old knowledge contributed to our ability to develop new ideas and new ways of using and approaching business history in the first place. It will identify the interrelated role of shared histories, shared practice and boundary crossing in contributing to innovation in developing approaches to researching and teaching entrepreneurship and innovation.

Personal boundary crossing, path dependence and path creation-

The above discussion highlighted ways in which innovation in business history derived from boundary crossing between disciplines and the sharing of ideas. It places the final part of this paper in historical perspective. The paper began with a quotation which highlighted the gap between the businessman and the business historian. The foregoing has demonstrated some reduction in the intellectual isolation of business history, while highlighting continuing barriers. Yet there has been remarkably little tendency for business historians to get closer to business people. Business historians may interview businessmen, but they typically occupy entirely different worlds.

One retired business man, himself studying for a PhD observed:

' business theorists don't understand history, historians don't understand (or respect) business practitioners and

business practitioners generally don't see the relevance of history in business strategy and decision making. **Maybe we are all talking past each other**…' (H-Business 2005)

This sums up the gulf between the business world and business history and actually refers to experience in the United States. The shift of business history into business schools in Britain has done little to bridge the gap. There was after all a gap between academic business schools and industry in Britain that stretches back to their post war origins. Theo Barker's optimistic belief in some building of understanding between academics and business, outlined at the beginning of this article was not shared by Norman Kipping, Director General of the Federation of British Industry during the 1950s:

' In the early post-war years British industry's knowledge of the universities is slight ; outside the faculties of science it is almost nil. So was the universities' knowledge of industry....[recalling a meeting in 1949] It was at once obvious how necessary the meeting was. The two sides were unknown to one another, stiff legged at first like puppies meeting strangers. On their side perhaps a reaction that we were dull and uninteresting dogs; on ours a consciousness of chips on many shoulders through being uneducated. The universities told us again how poor our image was; we in turn explained our need for technologists.' (Kipping, 1972

Business schools developed late in the UK and initially were seen as anathema to conventional academic values. (Locke,1989: 146-77; Wilson, 1992: 1-17) Even within business schools, business engagement has sometimes been viewed as

the preserve of 'mavericks' (Lockett and Robinson, 2007).It is therefore of little surprise that direct business engagement by business historians working within business schools is limited. Yet our experience has shown that by stepping over boundaries and developing a sustained and long term collaborative partnership based on our combined past knowledge, experience and networks has led to innovation. The rest of the paper explores the circumstances that made it possible and the implications it had for our research, teaching and business.

The following extract from Mary Rose's [inaugural lecture] gives a summary of our experience:

> ' In 2003 I had the opportunity to cross boundaries, to move departments to collaborate with new colleagues and set up the Institute for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (IEED).   It can be extremely challenging to move successfully into a new discipline and a new department after 25 years in another one, albeit in the same institution. My reputation and my expertise was based on business history. However, I took a conscious decision when I got my personal chair to choose the title Professor of Entrepreneurship. To have done anything else would have encouraged me to have fallen back on my past and to have continued to deepen the 'wheel ruts' rather than to combine past with present to develop new things. By working closely with new colleagues, in a new and different environment that was just a few hundred yards down the corridor, I became part of a new and extremely rewarding community of practice.   The new environment created considerable

opportunities for innovation in both research and teaching. In crossing the boundary I have in no sense abandoned my past knowledge and contacts, but have been able to combine them with the insights from a different discipline and with renewed vigour. I am not alone in changing departments and disciplines and developing new ideas as a result. What has been unusual for me is that it has not just been the case of crossing the boundaries between disciplines, but between academia and business, through my ongoing work with entrepreneur Mike Parsons. The world of the academic business historian and the world of business often have differing objectives, perceptions and priorities – based on parallel worlds with entirely separate histories. Participants in each world are embedded in different social processes and tend to operate in entirely separate networks. Learning, behaviour and attitudes in those worlds has developed through a combination of personal experience and also social processes,' (Rose, 2006).

Central to our Institute's philosophy has been the integration of 'the business world into teaching and research' which interplay and reinforce each other through a virtuous circle. (George, Gordon and Hamilton, 2010, 496) For a 5 minute over view OF THIS PHILOSOPHY [follow link](). Achieving this can be both challenging and rewarding as our Entrepreneur in Residence, Ian Gordon recalled:

' As mentor and guest speaker I came as an outsider... now [as Entrepreneur in Residence] I was doing more than simply turning up to tell my story, I was involved with the

planning of what was done... what emerged was a very different world, slower, more unyielding and steeped in systems and with a tendency to resist change.' (George, Gordon and Hamilton, 2010, 501)

What was taking place was the building of understanding through sharing practice ways which could be challenging, sometimes uncomfortable, but also creative.

Our collaborative background began before the establishment of IEED with researching and writing *Invisible on Everest : Innovation and the Gear Makers* (Philadelphia :2003). This book traces the evolution of clothing and equipment for outdoor activities, from the middle of the nineteenth century to the present day. The starting point for this work was developing a shared vision of a book which was academically rigorous, but aimed to appeal to a broader market. To write the book we had to develop an understanding of our differing worlds and confront theory with practice and vice versa. In doing so we crossed many boundaries while at the same time established areas of common interest and understanding. We did, in reality, begin moving between our respective communities of practice and in so doing built a shared understanding of both business and academia.

It is uncommon for a businessman to write a book, other than an autobiography of business experience. Ours was a full collaboration around rigorous academic research. It covered the 150 year history of the development of mountaineering, outdoors activities and polar exploration and the outdoors industries, clothing and equipment.

Conventional business archives were sparse for the earlier period were supplemented by equipment archives around expeditions. For the period after 1960, research was based upon a range of interviews with suppliers, manufacturers, users, retailers and outdoor journalists, which have been set alongside printed sources and advertising to gain a holistic view of the trade and supply chain relationships. This approach was adopted to gain appreciation of the importance of entrepreneurial networks in innovation. These are by their nature mainly informal and are not readily reflected in company archives, even had these been widely available. In reality, the large number of liquidations and takeovers in recent years has meant that many archives have been lost. Whilst this is an unusual way of exploring innovation, it represents relatively standard historical methodology. What is distinctive, if not unique, however, is that Mike Parsons, one of the authors and the past owner of Karrimor, was also one of the key innovators in the outdoor trade.

This had profound methodological implications for the research. The collaboration of researcher and researched, in writing an academic article, challenges the very philosophy of historical research. Business historians have traditionally remained aloof from the researched, to maintain objectivity and judgement. Where research relates to the relatively distant past and exclusively involves archival research this is inevitable. Where the study of the more recent past involves the use of oral evidence, alongside other primary sources, again any collaboration beyond the interview process is a rarity. Indeed, in the case of the commissioned history, where the historian is employed by a company, such distance is vital for the credibility of the work, and the difficulties of this particular relationship are well known.

The distance maintained by historians from the objects of their research is not always shared in other disciplines. In anthropology, social sciences and especially management, 'action research', the involvement of researcher with researched is widely accepted within an inter-related spectrum of research methodologies and philosophies. Both the philosophy and methodology of this collaborative piece of research lies somewhere between conventional historical methodology and action research.

All the conventional tools of the historian were employed – especially those of verification of oral testimony against other primary and secondary sources. However, whereas in action research the researcher typically works within the organisation which he or she is researching, in this research, since Mike Parsons was himself a leading player in the UK outdoor trade in this period, the researched became co-researcher. This inevitably raises issues of objectivity and makes verification crucially important to the work's credibility as a piece of academic history.

The collaboration was in many ways a happy accident, and the unplanned consequence of a request for an interview by Mary Rose. Had this research merely been a history of Mike Parsons' old company, Karrimor, or had it been a commissioned history, the result could have been very different and more problematic. From the start, the shared objective was to explore the development of innovation in outdoor clothing and equipment more generally and to set it within a long-term historical framework. Consequently, the recent history was part of a much wider piece of research, in which Mike Parsons was engaged throughout. His depth of business, technical and sporting knowledge brought perceptions which significantly deepened and

widened the entire study and almost perfectly complemented Mary Rose's expertise as a historian.

The research around the period after 1960 was based upon a combination of interviews with 18 individuals, reinforced by follow-up e-mails and telephone calls with individuals from all stages in the supply chain. In all, 60 hours of interviews were completed, since in many cases second or even third interviews were undertaken. Interviewees were selected from among those firms which made path-breaking innovations, from all stages in the supply chain and from outside it to include independent testers, journalists and sports-people. In many cases, more than one person from any one firm was chosen. Inevitably some selection was partly pragmatic and based upon availability. Parsons himself was interviewed, and his perceptions were set alongside those of his competitors as well as a broad spectrum of retailers, outdoor testers and outdoor journalists. (extracted from appendix to Parsons and Rose, 2004: 638) The result was a holistic approach to analysing contemporary innovation which brought greater rigour and credibility to the research. The long term historical perspective of the research allowed us to better understand modern innovation.

As with any collaboration, our work was shaped by our personal and our shared history. These shaped the research questions addressed in *Invisible on Everest* and in later research. As Supple observed,

'historical knowledge is a significant form of experience [while] any full understanding of the present depends on a knowledge of the past...' (Supple, 1959: 595-7)

Mike Parsons' deep understanding of mountain sports, design and the subtle nuances of the outdoor business, undoubtedly shaped both research questions and findings. Questions came from outside the mainstream of academic debates. This especially allowed us to review the legacies of the cotton industry from the perspective of high performance fabrics and engineering design. For example:

> 'In the latter part of the 20th century, design opportunities were created from the interplay between the historic conditions of Lancashire, Sheffield and the dynamic development of climbing in the UK after the Second World War. The mixture of knowledge, expertise and technology from these three sources was crucially important to the design and innovation processes of new outdoor clothing and equipment companies in this region. The interplay provided a platform for new combinations of expertise, the blending of tacit knowledge and the mixing of manufacturing and sporting innovation. The proximity of Lancashire and Sheffield to one of the most creative areas of British technical climbing and outdoor activity was important.' (Rose, Love and Parsons, 2007, 67).

The collaborative work on our book provided a key platform for ongoing collaboration linking research and teaching in the congenial environment of IEED.   Engaging business people in teaching, research and third mission is part of the philosophy of IEED which enriches student experience. The following quotation is a fair approximation of attitudes within IEED :

> ' University entrepreneurship ought to be taught,
> experientially, creatively, joyously, respectfully,

adaptively and dare one say it entrepreneurially.'
(Hindle, 2007: 135)

Which takes us to who should teach entrepreneurship and how. David Birch is deeply sceptical that it should be taught by academics in universities, precisely because most of them lack experience of running their own business and academic norms are often barriers to creativity and boundary crossing. In a controversial interview in 2004 he stated:

'If you want to teach people to be entrepreneurs, you can't. If you want to teach people to work for entrepreneurs you could. If you want to encourage entrepreneurship, it should be through some kind of apprenticeship. That would be a wonderful experience'.
(Birch, 2004:289)

This imaginative solution to teaching entrepreneurship has many benefits for students, entrepreneurs and academics. It allows boundary crossing, promotes dialogue and experiential learning. The simplest interpretation is where a student is involved in a placement in an entrepreneurial company, keeping a reflective diary and linking their experience back to theory learnt within the university. But it need not stop there and can be extended to a pairing of entrepreneur and academic where through collaborative working both gain understanding of each other's world and practices to their mutual benefit and those of their students. Both engage in a 'learning journey through joining unfamiliar new 'communities of practice'. This type of arrangement is becoming embedded in IEED's philosophy, as

witnessed by Mike and I's experience both in the development of our course and our annual conference [Innovation for Extremes](#).

Innovation involves seeing old things in new ways and moving 'outside the ruts of established practice'. (Schumpeter, 1947) The inspiration for our courses, came when we worked together to write our book: *Invisible on Everest: Innovation and the Gear Makers.* As an academic and a businessman, we came from different worlds with often contrasting objectives and practices. But, between 2000 and 2003 the vision, dialogue and activity around our book, built trust, shared understanding and experience. This provided the foundation for collaborative course development and a growing appreciation of and engagement with the communities of practice surrounding each other's world. The design principles were, therefore, experiential. Collaborating gave us the opportunity to draw together our previous learning journeys into something new and distinctive. It genuinely combines theory and practice and engages students in our active learning process. The course approaches innovation as a socially and historically embedded process where students confront theory with practice in an interactive online and face to face environment. There are few lectures instead, we use a combination of peer to peer learning and student – businessman interaction around contemporary innovation and analysed with theory using a blended learning approach . Face to face workshops analyse ongoing innovation through Innovation Search and critique theory.

We do not teach business history in a conventional way, but to make sense of contemporary innovations students are required to place them in long term perspective - which may be technological,

organisational, social and economic. We did not set out to innovate in our course design, but rather set about exploring what we wanted the students to achieve from a course in innovation. Mike observed :

> *"I cannot claim to have a teaching philosophy because this is my first real teaching experience. However Mary agreed to my proposal that I treat the students as I would employees during an extensive period of change. We aimed to change student behaviour and develop full student participation throughout the course'.* Mike Parsons, 2005.

Conclusions

To return to the title "We are what we share" : 'Reflections on Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Business History', the focus of this paper has been on the role of socially and historically embedded networks in innovation - in academic disciplines and in learning and teaching. History lies at the heart of functioning networks but need not be a constraint. Certainly there are numerous examples of lock in, where networks become inward looking within which communities of practice become entrenched and so a barrier to innovation. Yet this paper has shown how innovation can take place at the boundaries of communities of practice through knowledge and network sharing.

The paper explored how boundary crossing offers new opportunities for academic disciplines. The paper showed how and why business history -and indeed most disciplines have developed in its own silo with its own distinctive community of practice, that has left its impact on the way management scholars view entrepreneurship limited. Yet where academic research is informed by business dialogue the potential exists to create new pathways through 'mindful deviation'. In exploring the design and delivery of our innovation course, I have been

able to demonstrate how a 'new combination' of business and academic of manufacturer and historian can innovate-even though that was not the objective.

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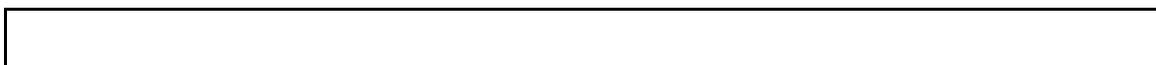
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