Entrepreneurial leadership in Christian ministry
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The term "entrepreneur" has become a fashionable term, widely used and popularised in recent years, at least in the West, through the tv shows that seek to entertain audiences with an often rather unrealistic portrayal of what an entrepreneur is. The brash and competitive nature of some of those competing on such shows might lead the Christian to wonder whether a Christian could be an entrepreneur and function with integrity in such a world.

In recent years the term "social entrepreneur" has also become fashionable and lauded by organisations with interests in alleviating poverty and meeting social needs. Bridge International Schools are an example of a fast growing social start up, begun in Kenya just a few year ago and with ambitions to reach India next year. With Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as investors, the project is heralded as a new way to meet social need through a for profit organisation.

Many governments around the world, recognising the importance of entrepreneurship to their economies now try to promote entrepreneurship and academic courses on entrepreneurship have proliferated over the last 20 to 30 years. Despite much research and many articles in the academic and popular press, there remains some confusion over what an entrepreneurial leader is and whether they are born or made.

What is an entrepreneur?
So what exactly is an entrepreneur and is an entrepreneurial leader some special breed of entrepreneur? In this article we will explore what an entrepreneurial leader is, whether they are born or made and how such leaders are needed in the Kingdom, not just for business but also for ministry. We will conclude by looking at what Christian organisations and churches can do to encourage entrepreneurial leadership in their midst.

A helpful starting point might be to separate the term entrepreneur and leader and to look at how these characteristics ought to combine. In doing so I hope that we will be able to see how it is possible to be an entrepreneur but not necessarily a leader and vice versa.

One thing that most people are agreed on is a common set of traits that distinguish a successful entrepreneur and these are:

- spotting opportunities
- casting a vision, passion, communication of ideas to followers, investors and others.
- flexibility to adapt, willingness to use existing resources or do more with less - bootstrapping
- measured risk taking (not reckless) and dealing with uncertainty
- perseverance, tenacity, drive and urgency

We discussed leadership in "Foundations of Christian Leadership" so suffice it to say here that some of the key attributes of a leader are the ability to inspire others to follow and setting out and communicating a strategy for taking the organisation forward. We can see that there is some overlap with the traits of an entrepreneur. The areas of crucial overlap that determine whether an entrepreneur is likely to succeed are in inspiring and communicating the vision to others and thus gathering followers, whether they be employees or investors.

Not all leaders are entrepreneurs
It may seem fairly obvious, but having an idea but being unable to cast that into a clear vision and strategy and then inspire others with it is a recipe for failure. What is also true is that many good leaders are not entrepreneurs in that they don't have that ability to spot new opportunities nor the passion and drive to take these forward. They are more comfortable in a stable context where the vision is clear and their role is moving the organisation forward rather than than disrupting the

status quo. The entrepreneurial leader then, has a a unique combination of traits and abilities that pre dispose them to be able to start new ventures be they social, business or Christian ministry related or even a combination of these as in Business as Mission.

Born or made?
When it comes to executing a plan, what both leaders and entrepreneurs need in order to be successful in their roles is the development of basic business and management skills, without which many a start up organisation fails and even established organisations may falter. Herein lies the answer to the question of whether entrepreneurs are born or made. I believe that it's a combination of both. There are certain traits of en entrepreneur that seem to be more a facet of our make up, such as the creative ability to spot opportunities, cope with uncertainty and drive a vision forward come what may. Whilst these traits can be enhanced and developed through experience it seems to me that you cannot simply just train people to act in this way as some educationalists seem to think. On the other hand there are many management skills that can be learn't that can have a great impact on the success or otherwise of a new venture. These include planning, risk management, accounting and understanding cash flows, balance sheets and a P&L account, human resource management and interviewing skills.

In this sense then I believe that successful entrepreneurs are both born and made. There are a combination of innate character traits coupled with learned skills that are vital to giving a new venture the best chance of success. Of course by it's very nature, entrepreneurial activity may fail and good entrepreneurs learn from failure, pick themselves up and start something new.

Entrepreneurs in Christian ministry
With the key attributes of an entrepreneurial leader thus defined we can now consider how these might play out in Christian ministry. Looking back through the history of the church and even into the Old Testament we can see how many Christian leaders have in fact been entrepreneurial leaders, spotting opportunities, being people of vision with a passion and drive to take it forward. They wouldn't necessarily have seen themselves as entrepreneurs since the the word entrepreneur has it's origins in the 13 century French word entreprendre which meant to undertake and it was only used in regard to business ventures in the 16th century and in economics by Richard Cantillon and Jean Baptiste Say in the 18th and 19th century. Nonetheless, what we now refer to as entrepreneurial leadership can be clearly seen in certain leaders of past ages.

Throughout history God has raised up people who spotted opportunities and needs in society and who were able to do something about them. The evangelical members of the so called Clapham Sect are a classic example from the late 18th and early 19th Century. William Wilberforce is one of the better known members of this group due to his role in the abolition of slavery but the other key objective that he had throughout his life after becoming a Christian was "the reform of manners" in the United Kingdom. This worked itself out in the establishment of many charities and organisations to assist the poor and disadvantaged, and through which the gospel was proclaimed. The education of poor children was pioneered by Hannah More, a friend of members of the Clapham group and eventually led to the British government taking over the role of education of children in the late 19th Century.

Pioneering mission
Many early pioneering missionary activities such as those of William Carey in India or Hudson Taylor in China, clearly demonstrated entrepreneurial leadership and required considerable perseverance and passion. Carey founded a missionary society before he eventually went to India where he became a plantation manager so as to become self sufficient. In 1818, some years later he founded Serampore College, the first Divinity school and University for Indians. He typifies the disruptive dimension of entrepreneurship in the often quoted incident when he was seeking to enthuse church leaders about overseas mission, he was interrupted by an older minister who said, "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to convert the heathen, he'll do it without consulting you or me."

In the Old Testament one can think of characters like Joshua and Caleb who demonstrated vision, courage and a willingness to take risks in the face of opposition from other detractors after they had spied out the promised land. Clearly their confidence was in God and the vision one that they could rely on and be passionate about because it came from God.

Opportunities today
God has gifted some of his people with those traits that make an entrepreneurial leader and I believe that Christian ministry is much in need of such people in the 21st Century with such a rapidly changing social, technological and political landscape. Whilst the truth is unchanging there are new ways to do mission and to spread the gospel in this changing landscape. We should be leading the way in doing righteousness and justice where God has placed us and beyond. The work of gospel proclamation and church planting need creative ways to engage with communities and to prepare the soil for sowing.

On occasions opportunities or needs are simply long unmet or even forgotten. When my wife and I were in Kenya at the time of the post election violence in 2008 we discovered that Christians from different tribes were at war with each other torching each others houses, many Kenyans were killed. We heard one story of a pastor riding off of a bicycle, not with a bible but with a bow and arrow. How could Christians be involved in such things let alone pastors? We discovered that rural pastors are largely untrained, they left school after primary education and were living at a subsistence level. Whilst pastors in the urban churches had been to bible college and were fully supported by their churches, rural pastors had been forgotten! The opportunity and need that we spotted was to train these pastors in the communities where they lived and without charge. As a result of spotting this need, Africa Rural Trainers was born, 123 pastors have graduated and 250 more are in training. The new way of doing things is perhaps going to the pastors rather than expecting them to go to colleges that they can't afford and don't have the educational qualifications to enter anyway.

In a world full of moral turmoil and scandal such as the VW emissions cheating, there are many opportunities for Christians to provide answers to the moral confusion in our societies, but in order to be heard we need to be seen as those who are doing righteousness and justice and especially in a Western context, to help people to first see the paucity of their own secular worldview before engaging them with the answers.

Are you an entrepreneurial leader?
Do you spot opportunities for creating something new or different from the old way of doing things. Perhaps it's a new way for engaging non believers to think about what they believe, maybe it's a desperate need perhaps brought about by the refugee crisis. Technology and it's use are rapidly changing providing opportunities that never existed before to communicate across borders. A true entrepreneur will be able to cast a vision around these opportunities and ideas and communicate them to others. All new ventures, whether within an existing organisation or the creation of a brand new organisation requires the work and support of others. An entrepreneurial leader will be able to communicate their passion and vision so as to inspire others to follow.

Stepping out to do something new in ministry can be scary, no one has done it before, there will be the gainsayers like the minister of Carey's time. Entrepreneurial leadership requires courage, determination and perseverance and a willingness to take a calculated risk. Of course new ventures don't always work out, sometime due to lack of finance or the right people resources or simply we got it wrong! As Christians we need to trust God to lead and guide us as we pray through opportunities and cast the vision but also have the courage to admit to and deal with failure. God often will use failure as a tool to teach us and better equip us for something new. We need to avoid the temptation to not venture anything in case it doesn't work out.

Encouraging and developing entrepreneurial leaders
How might existing Christian organisations and the church foster and encourage entrepreneurial leaders? The frustration for many entrepreneurs is that, as in many secular organisations, the

organisational culture doesn't support such people nor the development of new ideas and opportunities. Many churches and organisations are reluctant to change preferring to stick to the tried and tested and the safe and comfortable environment that avoids trying something new and failing.

The unique combination of traits of entrepreneurial leaders are no less than God given gifts and skills developed sometimes over a number of years in an organisation or corporate world. An organisation can either stifle or encourage such people. Where is your organisation or church? Are you afraid of change or of encouraging what might be regarded as a maverick within the church or organisation or are you willing to celebrate these God given gifts, nurture and help them to develop to be productive members of the body of Christ. This might require some changes in leadership thinking within the church or organisation in order to recognise and channel the energies of entrepreneurs and to allow them to start and lead new ventures. In a church context this could be church planting, meeting social needs or creating new resources for evangelism. For Christian organisations this could be as radical as helping to re-invent the organisation as the needs that it was set up to meet change or it could be spawning a new venture to tackle a new opportunity, develop a new product or service.

Leaders will need to create an environment that encourages the sharing of ideas and support the necessary due diligence to shape these up into something that's viable. This is as much a function of how open you are as a leader as it is of creating specific opportunities for idea generation and sharing although clearly both are required. The reality is that most ideas are not developed in a vacuum but need the input of others to test and refine. Are you the sort of leader that your team or church members feel confident to approach or would they feel you were dismissive of them? Do you convey the impression that all ideas come from the top?

In a previous article, "Foundations (and Dysfunctions) of Christian Leadership" we stressed the importance of character as a foundation for leadership. This no less applies to entrepreneurial leaders and the church has a crucial role in helping entrepreneurs develop their characters and in ensuring that new venture are led not just by entrepreneurial leaders abut by people of character.