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From Innovation to Sustainability: Life-Cycle Polylemmas and Strategic Initiatives for Entrepreneurship in Africa

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Introduction and Purpose

The context and aim of this chapter are based on the contention, and simple but profound and irrefutable evidence, that Africa is experiencing economic growth but without commensurate development, or at least not enough for the teeming and desperately poor population of the continent, despite the continent's vast natural, mineral and human resources, and the goodwill and support of the international community. The lag of development behind growth, two concepts that development scholars categorically distinguish (Fik 2000), is significant in understanding and explaining what this chapter terms Africa's 'schizophrenic' development experience, as exemplified by the Africa Rising and African growth tragedy debate (Easterly and Levine 1997; Rowden 2013, 2015; Gibney 2015; Spooner 2015). While the growth/development mismatch places

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the primary burden on political leaders and policymakers to develop feasible mitigation measures, it also places responsibility on other stakeholders, including scholars and academics, to engage in diagnosing and prescribing reasonable initiatives for Africa to work its way out of poverty and despair, thereby achieving sustainable development. This chapter posits that entrepreneurship, fostered and enabled by innovation and knowledge management, holds enormous potential for Africa to achieve sustainable development. In the life cycle of entrepreneurship in Africa, there are perennial polylemmas that must be addressed or mitigated in order for entrepreneurs to be successful in terms of profitability and sustainability. The idea of polylemmas suggests that Africa's entrepreneurial challenges and obstacles are deeply rooted, long-standing and formidable. Therefore, none of the mitigation measures and options are optimal, yet choices must be made between the options. The analysis and insights that may be useful for informed tactical and strategic policy, programme and project choices is part of the purpose, implication and value of this chapter for policymakers, technocrats, entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial advocates in Africa.

Methodology

This chapter resulted from two basic research methods that allow for a fair and robust exploration and analysis of an issue that is as subjective yet complex and multifaceted as sustainable entrepreneurship in a continent as vast and diverse as Africa. One was the desktop method, where conceptual and empirical materials from various scholarly, professional and governmental sources were reviewed on the subject of discourse. The second was a series of unstructured conversational interviews with entrepreneurs from five African countries: Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa and South Sudan. Information from the desktop method provided very rich insights into extant conceptual discussions on innovation, knowledge management and entrepreneurship, as well as insights on country-specific practices and applications of innovation, knowledge and entrepreneurship. The interviews were aimed at understanding the diverse terrain of entrepreneurship across Africa based on the knowledge, experiences, observations and perspectives of the interviewees. The information and insights from both methods were used to develop Table 2.1.

Overview and Relevance of Concepts

Some of the critical concepts used in this chapter hardly need to be defined from the standpoint of the literature and professional practice, as they have already been robustly, almost ubiquitously, discussed and researched. The relevant concepts are innovation, knowledge economy or creative economy, knowledge management and entrepreneurship. What this chapter finds common to all the concepts are, firstly, they are multidisciplinary in origin, study and application. Secondly, they are widely used in most fields today for problem-solving, change or improved action. Thirdly, there is no universal consensus on their interpretation and, particularly, their measurement or assessment (El Houssamy 2016; Weheba 2015). Fourthly, they combine, depend on or require knowledge and skills that are cognitive, experiential and intuitive. Finally, the end result for all of them is the same: cost-effective problem-solving or improvement in the condition or performance of a phenomenon (situation or thing). In light of these commonalities, the terms are used and defined 'operationally' and annotated 'apropos' in this chapter. The use of these terms in this chapter notwithstanding, quite noteworthy is the rationale and relevance for their use in anchoring the discourse in the chapter, one which is discussed next.

The discourse in this chapter is predicated or premised on the contention, indeed conviction, that the world economy today is powered by innovation and knowledge (Kolo 2009). This economy is known popularly as the knowledge economy (KE) or the creative economy (CE). According to Piotrowski (2015), 'the term "knowledge economy" was coined in the 1960s to describe a shift from traditional economies to ones where the production and use of knowledge are paramount'. He referenced the four pillars of KE identified by the World Bank as 'institutional structures that provide incentives for entrepreneurship and the use of knowledge, skilled labor availability and good education systems, ICT infrastructure and access, and, finally, a vibrant innovation landscape that

Table 2.1 Business life cycle polylemmas and strategic initiatives for African entrepreneurship

Goal clusters	Initiation Concept Idea Vision	Planning Research Design Protocol Strategy Consults	Financing Registration Permitting Budgeting Equipment Lead team	Operations Staffing Contracting Take off Testing Production Refining	Sales Promotion Marketing Distribution Placements	Stabilisation Streamlining Consolidation Branding	Modernisation Expansion Diversification Acquisition Merger Restructuring Transfer
Political Polylemmas	N/A	No T/A No seed funds No grants	No T/A No seed funds No grants Bureaucracy Regulations Charges/Fees	N/A	Bureaucracy Regulations Charges/Fees	N/A	Bureaucracy Regulations Charges/Fees
Initiatives	Create Business Enterprise Development Office to provide T/A and conduct business research Establish One Stop Shop and streamlined permitting programme Establish business finance grants and low-interest loans Provide fee waiver and reduction incentives Contract universities to provide business seminars and training and T/A for local businesses Offer or promote entrepreneurial education curriculum in schools and universities Establish a credit bureau Invest in infrastructure and technology development, repairs and upgrades Invest in smart technologies to serve citizens and businesses Provide business references in local library (translate as feasible)						
Economic Polylemmas	N/A		No bank loans High interests No credit	No bank loans High interests No credit High leases No insurance	No bank loans High interests No credit	No bank loans High interests No credit	No bank loans High interests No credit

Initiatives	Provide low-interest and flexible business loans Provide credit counselling and repair programmes with or through non-profits providing business T/A Partner with universities to provide business capacity training and business planning T/A Establish business mentoring programme for prospective lenders Provide smart banking business programmes						
Psychosocial							
Polylemmas	Poverty No business literacy		Poverty No business literacy	Poverty No business literacy	Poverty No business literacy	Poverty No business literacy	Poverty No business literacy
Initiatives	Entrepreneurs should establish business savings account with local banks Establish and/or repair credit Attend business training programmes, seminars and training workshops Provide healthy workplace						
Built Environment	N/A						
Polylemmas			Poor infrastructure Energy cost No technology	Poor infrastructure Energy cost No technology	Poor infrastructure Energy cost No technology	Poor infrastructure Energy cost No technology	Poor infrastructure Energy cost No technology
Initiatives	N/A						
Natural Environment	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Polylemmas							
Initiatives							

Source: Compiled by the author

Notes: T/A is Technical Assistance. Bureaucracy implies personnel-related hurdles, including corruption includes academia, the private sector and civil society'. A parallel term, CE, was first used by Howkins (2001) to describe the current global economy, although the term has been popularised more widely by scholars such as Florida (2002). Creativity lies at the heart of the CE, and, as Howkins (ibid.) noted, 'creativity is the ability to generate something new. It means the production by one or more people of ideas and inventions that are personal, original and meaningful. It is a talent, and aptitude.' He noted further that 'the creative economy has been midwifed by the technologies of information and communications', adding that 'perhaps the greatest impact of the creative economy is not only within the traditional creative industries but in the way their skills and business models are being used to create value in other areas of life'. In the CE, he said, 'people with ideas – people who own ideas – have become more powerful than people who work machines and, in many cases, more powerful than people who own machines'.

The contextual relevance of the foregoing brief overview of the concept of the KE to this chapter is that Africa cannot afford to be left behind, marginalised or ostracised, by default or because of some handicaps, from the creative global economy. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2002, Ngubane (2002) posited that poor nations must embrace the KE or be left behind in the global economic race, stating that 'it is the knowledge and technological capacity to apply the inputs of labor, capital and resources that make modern economies work'.

Akin to the concept of KE is that of knowledge management (KM). As earlier stated, there is a plethora of scholarly and professional literature on KM from a multidisciplinary standpoint (Barclay and Murray 1997), although there is no consensus on its definition (Dalkir 2005). In his own view, Dalkir (ibid.) defined KM as 'the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization's people, technology, processes, and organizational structure in order to add value through reuse and innovation. This coordination is achieved through creating, sharing, and applying knowledge as well as through feeding the valuable lessons learned and best practices into corporate memory in order to foster continued organizational learning.' He noted that 'the ability to manage knowledge is becoming increasingly more crucial in today's knowledge economy. The creation and diffusion of knowledge have become ever more important factors in competitiveness.' Again, the contextual relevance of this definition in this chapter is that African countries must understand and adopt or apply the basic tenets of KM, even if for the purposes of managing, and protecting through patents, trademark and intellectual property rights, indigenous or primordial knowledge that has been used to produce goods and services in local communities for centuries. It is not unlikely that this type of knowledge, if unprotected and poorly managed, can lose its value, can 'migrate' legally or illegally, or can be lost totally to future generations.

Next is the concept of innovation, which this chapter deems to be the 'zeitgeist' of business, management, technology and social enterprise discourse and practice today (Elahi et al. 2013). Satell (2013) posited that innovation 'has become management's new imperative', adding that the 'innovate or die' maxim is often heard at conferences and meetings. It is, he noted, 'a messy business which creates novel solutions to important problems'. He went further to delineate what he deems to be 'the three pillars of innovation' as competency, strategy and management. Foster (2016) cautioned that 'innovation does not mean simply inventing ideas; innovation is being flexible, adapting your business model and making changes in order to deliver better products or services to respond to the needs of your customers'. He added that 'if you establish the right culture and are brave enough to challenge thinking, then anyone's bright idea can be turned into value adding innovation'. According to Schirtzinger (2016), 'true innovation begins with an exciting new idea, but extends to its execution. So, in its fullest expression, innovation is also about spurring—and successfully managing—organizational change.' He was pragmatic in adding that 'real innovation is really, really hard'. Interestingly, unlike other innovation analysts such as Shaughnessy (2013), and quite pertinent to the aim of this chapter, he opted to address what he called '10 innovation killers—and how to neutralize them'. Of the ten, the seven that this chapter finds apropos for the African context are famine (resource scarcity, mainly budget, people, time and technology); trying to go it alone; institutional knowledge (dismissing an idea which someone said they had tried before and was futile); no short-term vision (thinking of end result and overlooking the 'now' hurdles); the 'right' way (stuck to one way and ignoring options); the sunk-cost fallacy (not cutting losses, but throwing good money at bad); and uncertainty (one's insecurities). The other less relevant three are feast (vast resources to work with, leading to wastage); too much data (data deluge, leading to analysis paralysis); and all work, no play (the 'live to work' type).

While innovation discourse generally tends to focus on the positive aspects of innovation, Hanekom (2013) observed that 'innovation can have a downside', and in the context of social equity he posed a rather ethical question: 'Through innovation we may remain globally competitive, but at what cost to the poorer members of our society?'

The final concept reviewed for its relevance in this chapter is entrepreneurship. Judging by the scope and time frame of scholarly, professional and policy discourses of entrepreneurship, this chapter surmises that entrepreneurship lies at the heart of market capitalism, industrialisation and the creative economy. In the light of the scope of the literature on entrepreneurship, suffice it to say that one of the earliest and most insightful scholarly analyses of entrepreneurship was by the economic doyen Schumpeter (1934), who married the concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation by depicting entrepreneurs as innovators who implement entrepreneurial change within markets. He identified five dimensions of entrepreneurship as the introduction of a new or improved item; the unveiling of a new method of production; discovery or opening of a new market; tapping into a new source of supply; and restructuring or re-engineering of business management processes. Another management guru, Drucker (1985), described an entrepreneur as someone who actually searches for change, responds to it and exploits it as an opportunity. In perhaps the most lay terms, the US Department of State (2007) defined an entrepreneur simply as 'a person who organizes, operates, and assumes the risk for a business venture'.

Rationalising Entrepreneurship

What is relevant for this chapter from the referenced definitions of entrepreneurship is the need to grasp, for policy and planning purposes, what it entails to nurture or groom Africans who are able, or have the capacity and wherewithal, to capitalise on opportunities to produce and market valuable and profitable goods and services for consumption both locally and beyond. Essentially, African governments and entrepreneurs must understand what it takes to engage profitably in the creative economy. While there is historic evidence that entrepreneurship is an age-old practice and tradition across Africa (Kolo 2006), the view in this chapter is that such practice has existed and served only at the subsistence level. The issue today is the ability of African entrepreneurs to produce and market goods and services that can command patronage and value in the global marketplace. This is the critical issue that this chapter addresses in the light of the extant creative global economy. At the heart of this issue are the vibrancy, resilience, profitability and sustainability of African enterprises for the short and long hauls, that is, throughout their life cycle.

In further pondering the reference issue as an African development scholar, several difficult, troubling and interrelated questions arise that lead to the contention that African entrepreneurs face several polylemmas in the life cycle trajectory from business innovation to business sustainability. Firstly, given the dismal level of international trade by the aggregate of African countries relative to other regions of the world, what are the prospects that entrepreneurship would now make a difference in Africa's engagement in the creative global economy? Secondly, with the relative failure of 'special' trade programmes designed to incentivise African trade with the world, such as America's 2000–2025 African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), how and why would entrepreneurship make a difference? Thirdly, with the cascade of domestic political, security, economic, environmental, health and infrastructure problems that beset Africa and constantly threaten political stability, governance and the investment climate, what are the chances for sustainable entrepreneurship in such environments? Yet, many more similar questions can be posed, while many other obstacles can be identified, such as climate change, food insecurity, terrorism and xenophobia. Paradoxically—and this is the crux of the rationale for advocating sustainable entrepreneurship through innovation and knowledge management in this chapter—these very obstacles, problems and challenges harbour enormous opportunities for entrepreneurs, as defined in the literature as strategic risk managers, to be innovative, productive and profitable within and beyond the shores of Africa. Mugabe (2009) mounted a strong and evidence-based case for the deployment of knowledge and innovation for development in Africa, on the grounds that there are significant positive changes occurring across all spectrums of African countries, all pointing to a ripe and conducive time to create an enabling environment for sustainable entrepreneurship in the continent. The view in this chapter is that a Marshallian effort across the continent, especially through interregional and international collaboration, would help develop the entrepreneurial capacity that would answer some of the questions posed above, and mitigate some of the development and quality of life problems currently threatening public interest across the continent.

Business Life Cycle Polylemmas and Strategic Initiatives

Information from the desktop research (Murray et al. 2010) and personal interviews conducted for this chapter were used to construct Table 2.1 below. First, an analytical framework consisting of society's main goal clusters was developed in order to cluster the information from both sources. Goal clusters are categories of all people's needs and desires, based on the primary societal resources that would be needed or appropriate to address the needs. This is critical to understand the real causes of the problems and challenges of entrepreneurs, and for strategic development of initiatives and deployment of resources. Second, ideal phases were delineated for the life cycle of an enterprise, from cradle (initiation) to Grave (modernisation). Sustainable entrepreneurship is about a perpetual life for an enterprise, which is a rarity for African enterprises. Third, for each phase, the polylemmas identified from the literature and interviews for each goal cluster were summarised. Four, for each polylemma, strategic or actionable initiatives were proposed.

Conclusion

The argument and position in this chapter revolve around Africa's weak role and presence in the in the global economy, and the need to strengthen and expand this role by stimulating, developing and nurturing a robust entrepreneurial capacity in the continent through innovation and knowledge, along with other requisite political, economic and institutional reforms. Entrepreneurship has been the key to the economic success and, to some extent, political and strategic supremacy of countries around the world. From Norway's preponderance in communications technology to Japan's excellence in automobile manufacturing and America's and China's ubiquitous presence in all economic and industrial sectors, entrepreneurship has proven to be the *sine qua non* for success. Not to be left out is the ability of nations to feed, house and employ their citizens, resulting in political stability, self-reliance and patriotism. Finally, entrepreneurship has accounted for wealth creation and generation all over the world, while the sustainability of enterprises has accounted for the successful intergenerational transfer of wealth. All or most of these dividends of entrepreneurship remain a dream for most Africans. Yet, the demand for the dividends continues to grow as population and urbanisation rates rise above world averages.

Having examined the key factors of production, namely land, labour, capital, technology, infrastructure and entrepreneurial skills (Fiks 2000), this chapter contends that post-colonial African governments embraced, willingly, blindly and/or in compliance with the dictates of international development agencies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, classical or modern economic models which have inadvertently or by design shifted the control, ownership and access of and to these factors from the vast majority of Africans to a privileged few. In sum, across Africa today, most people are landless; labour is cheap but crude and skill-less; access to affordable credit is limited to a few privileged people; technology is obsolete, non-existent or overly costly; and knowledge is handicapped by inadequate educational infrastructure. Add to these population, urbanisation and slum explosions, unaffordable health care, crumbling institutions, and unemployed and very restless youths (Anderson and Galatsidas 2014; Tinsley 2015). The consequence of all these is a stagnant or declining standard of living and overall quality of life for the majority. In this context, innovation and entrepreneurship become extremely difficult or nearly impossible for the majority of citizens who have the ambition and talent, but lack the production factors needed to move through the trajectory of innovation or entrepreneurship.

To address Africa's challenges, there have been advocates, such as Wadongo (2014) (Afro-realism), Elemelu (2015) (Africapitalism) and Sarfo (2013), for new development paradigms in Africa. It is in this context that this chapter advocates unlabelled entrepreneurship, which deploys innovation and knowledge to provide African entrepreneurs with the capacity to engage profitably in the creative global economy. The conclusion of this chapter is that innovation is pragmatically the time- and resource-intensive process of converting ideas into products and/or services that, firstly, are of value to others and command a price; secondly, yield dividends to the proprietor or owner of the product or service; thirdly, bring a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction to the owner; and finally, encourage or motivate the owner to share dividends with those who cannot afford to pay for the product/service. At the individual/corporate ownership level, these four would translate, respectively, into productivity, profit, self-fulfilment/corporate success and giving back to society (service)/corporate social responsibility.

The phases and initiatives proposed in this chapter for the trajectory or life cycle of African enterprises will require radical changes in the thought processes, attitudes and viewpoints of those interested in entrepreneurship. These shifts will trigger some of the risks of innovation and entrepreneurship in the creative economy. As Hanekom (2013) opined, for example, 'policy-makers have to be more thoughtful about where and how innovation takes place. Otherwise they risk promoting economic growth that leaves people even further behind than before.' What this implies is that innovation is not risk-free. However, the conviction in this chapter is that there is hardly any viable or sensible alternative for Africa to become an active and profitable player in the creative economy. Among the strategic imperatives for dealing with any risk that innovation may portend are mutual collaboration among all societal stakeholders, leveraging of roles and resources, and vertical and lateral integration of institutions locally, regionally and internationally.

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