

The Human Element of Entrepreneurship:

‘THE PARADIGM EFFECT’

by: Matija Squire

Abstract

Who we are, how we perceive ourselves and the way we interact with the world around us influences our decision-making. Building self-awareness of our internal compass of values, attitudes, beliefs and expectations is a critical component of successful entrepreneurs. The ‘human element’ is understanding that to be successful requires not just the technical skills, but alignment with oneself.

The beginning of your journey into entrepreneurship is defining clearly who you are, what you stand for and what your deepest values are. In general business studies and organisations, we tend to have a focus on the skills and competencies that we must meet to have a successful career. While these skills can be essential, the soft skills, or as I like to call it ‘the human element’, can be overlooked. When I first started looking for work after University, I was willing to change myself depending on the needs of the organisation. I was focused so much on achieving the goal of employment that I ignored my own needs. I remember being accepted into a corporate finance role and thinking I had taken a step in the right direction, corporate career here I come.

What followed was 12 months of feeling something was wrong, living for the weekends and working long hours that didn’t allow for much else. I wondered to myself why was I unhappy, I had the degree, the job and the decent paycheque, shouldn’t I be more grateful? I started to think back to the reasons I chose to study business, I wanted to be a leader. All great leaders have something in common - they are self-aware. They know who they are, what they stand for and what is expected of them. In that moment I made it a goal to better know myself. I shared my journey on LinkedIn and the response was overwhelming, I was not the only person disengaged in my work or feeling that something was lacking. This gave me the confidence to start sharing what I had learned and was how my first start-up was founded. I became aware of my values, observed my attitude and thoughts, revisited my beliefs and shifted my expectations, which achieved what I would later refer to as **‘The Paradigm Effect’**.

A shift in a paradigm is a shift in the way we interact with and perceive the world, by becoming more emotionally intelligent, I shifted the way I interacted with and perceived myself. This can be powerful for both individuals and businesses. I continued to create content on LinkedIn that discussed emotional intelligence and my experience. I grew more confident and started making decisions that aligned with who I was. There were several times within business where I had an experience which made me uncomfortable. On reflection, I realised this feeling of uncomfortableness was due to something going against my core values.

“Our core values are our guiding principles, the compass that points us in the direction we truly desire” (Townsend 2009). I remember my team leader asking me to communicate a solution to a customer, one that I disagreed with, I felt uncomfortable following his instruction. Your values are like a signal, they remind us to think twice before we make a decision. One of my core values is fairness, what my team leader was instructing me to do was in my experience unfair, therefore my values signalled – do you really want to go through with this? Is this okay with me? What do we do when our core values are challenged? Well we can always share our perspective if the situation allows, however in most cases if your role is causing you to ignore your ‘compass’ it may be best to move on to a more suitable environment.

At the time I decided to apply for the role I was in, I hadn’t even considered my values. I knew that this role was one I would not find fulfilling. At this stage I had already been receiving job offers through LinkedIn, as well as invitations to speak at events and provide training to organisations. Over time I had organically created myself an opportunity to work within a role that aligned with my values. I use the word organically as I hadn’t intended in this result. I shared my knowledge and experience on LinkedIn to help others, which ultimately also helped myself. I was asked by a global tech company to travel to and participate in a conference, it was then I decided, rather than taking on these job offers, what if I create something of my own?

I launched **The Paradigm Effect**, a branding and marketing agency that focused on emotional intelligence. Prior to launching my first start-up, I considered myself as someone who needed to work my way up before I could create change, and that I had to gain (earn) an important status or title. However, the more that I interacted with leaders and global organisations, the more I realised that they too are human, and we do not have to wait to start creating the change we want to see in the world. My attitude towards my life, myself and others had changed, I believed that I could travel, work, grow, build relationships and make a positive impact.

Our beliefs too are important in understanding ourselves and our decisions. Beliefs can be religious, cultural or moral, they are what govern our expectations. We have different levels of beliefs. From an early age we may have beliefs imparted on us by those we are surrounded by and as we grow older, we start to take on our own. *“At some point in life we may need to discard certain beliefs as they no longer apply to us “* (Conners et al. 2015).

I found that I still had limiting beliefs which held me back from making the decisions that would put me on the path I wanted most. These can originate from negative experiences; it is normal for us to avoid decisions that may bring us uncertainty or regret. I carried a belief with me that because I was young and had a challenging childhood that I was less deserving of opportunities, I often told myself that I wasn't ready yet, or I hadn't earned the right to strive for more than I had.

I let go of this belief and took every opportunity to make decisions that aligned with my core values, which reinforced my belief in myself. I took on responsibilities that at first terrified me and now I am thriving. I have a second start-up where I work closely across two countries in innovation and education, I'm a Director of a Business Council and I'm continually striving to grow my positive impact. As I worked with start-ups, investors and corporates, whether it be in business or as an entrepreneur, it became clear that relationships must come first.

The core message of my work is: that we cannot expect others to trust us if we do not know ourselves or know what we stand for. In a space of 3 years of founding my own business, I learned to make decisions that aligned with my core values, changed my attitude, discarded my limiting beliefs and shifted my expectations.

CASE STUDY EXERCISES

1. Core Value Exercise: Write down a list of up to 20 things that you value. Values are a measure of worth or importance we place upon something. For example; your values may include relationships, integrity or creativity. Once you have written 20 values, cross them out from least important to most important, until you have your top 5. These are the basis of your compass; you should be able to take your compass out every day and check whether or not you are on track.

Provide an example of a time where a Core Value of yours was either reinforced or challenged.

2. What is your current attitude towards your work, study and life? Attitude is a feeling or opinion about something or someone, or a way of behaving that is caused by this.

For example: I like studying as I learn new things that will help me to be successful. It's okay if your attitude is not always positive, you can look at why and make choices that can rectify it. "By retaining a list of your positive attitudes, you can reinforce your beliefs" (Cameron, E & Green, M, 2019).

3. List out as many of your beliefs as you can, for example: I believe age is not equivalent to knowledge. Identify if you have any current limiting beliefs, the key to this exercise is being aware of how your beliefs, both the positive and limiting can affect your decision-making process.
4. Expectations/ Objectives
What are your expectations? Expectations are what we believe is most likely to happen. In entrepreneurship, we are often working within uncertain environments. It's important to know our expectations and what is required to meet them. A few example questions are:

What is your expectation for your future role or business?

What are your objectives for 2021?

What learning outcomes are you expecting from your studies?

References:

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Bio

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Matija is a Founder, Director and Educator with versatile knowledge and experience in start-ups. Matija is often mentoring at the grass roots level start-ups, providing tools and education to enable them to enter into global markets and successfully raise funds. She graduated from James Cook University with a Double bachelor's in business/management and arts/languages and has lectured at tertiary institutions since 2015. Matija is passionate about providing opportunities for people to create solutions that will contribute to global prosperity.