

**MMUBS Doctoral Symposium
2009**

**Disabled Entrepreneurship: A viable route of opportunity
for the disabled?**

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Abstract

The research is aiming to identify the potential factors affecting the business growth and performance of businesses run by entrepreneurs with disabilities in the UK. Disabled Entrepreneurship is relatively unfamiliar both to people with disability themselves and other disability organizations (e.g. support services, social enterprise etc.) in the UK. Within most entrepreneurship theory and research, there seems to be no room for disability; most theories assume that entrepreneurs are able people. This paper is exploratory in nature and identifying the important factors which are related with disabled entrepreneurship. Presently, at the UK there are already some people with disabilities who run small and medium scale businesses. This means entrepreneurship through self-employment has already been developed by some people with disabilities, yet still in a very limited scale. But, researches have found that entrepreneurs in deprived groups in the UK have less human, social and financial capital than other British business founders. However, it is possible that the existing relationships between human, social and financial capital and disabled entrepreneurship are flawed, because they do not take account of the needs of disabled people and particularly the entrepreneurs with disabilities (i.e. who suffer health problems). Alternatively, disabled entrepreneurship needs to be developed systematically and progressively for both academic perspective and practical consideration. Moreover, this paper justifies the theme of the research why there is a gap between the disabled entrepreneurship and the capital resources for the business.

Keywords: Disabled Entrepreneurship, entrepreneur, disability, capital resources.

Introduction

The study of “disabled entrepreneurship” is very new, starting from the 1990s in the UK. Consequently, the viability of disabled entrepreneurship (DE) has not been broadly tested in the field of social science and business (Pavey 2006). The overall aim of my research is to identify the potential factors affecting the business growth and performance of businesses run by disabled entrepreneurs in the UK. The rationale for this focus comes from the few studies on DE (e.g. research evidence) and the growing population of people with disabilities in the UK (e.g. practical consideration). Early research into disabled entrepreneurship (DE) demonstrated that it is more expensive to create entrepreneurs from the disabled population because people with disabilities live in a state of high vulnerability (Gartner *et al* 1987). It is argued disabled people are largely invisible, are ignored and excluded from mainstream development (Burchardt 2003). In general, they face disempowerment and economic exclusion (ADP 1999). However, the present decade has seen a rapid rise in the number of disabled business owner in the UK (Larsson, 2006) in the view of encouraging economic and social inclusion. On the practical elevation, it is evident that the disabled demographic in the UK is increasing (DOH 2007, LFS 2006, ONS 2001). The Employers Forum of Disability (EFD Research 2007) says that just over 15% of the population of the UK have some form of disability. Recently, the Disability Right Commissions (DRC) published statistics from the Labour Force Survey showing 6.8 million disabled people of working age with, only half (50.1%) of women are in work; this compares with 80.5 percent of the non-disabled

population (DRC 2007). Reasons for this huge disparity are not indicated in statistics, issues are directly related to health issue and social benefit scheme or not having relevant business resources skills (e.g. education, training, experience, network etc.) nor can statistics show why of the economically inactive, one third of disabled people would like to work, compared to others capable people (DRC 2007) This statistical evidence also requires a more comprehensive study, understanding how this comes about and reasons why the majority group of disabled population do not work despite of positive environments in the developed region. At the first step, my research proposal seeks to address, in part, the gap in knowledge about a particular form of work in the disabled population - entrepreneurship. This comes from a practical consideration - the growing disabled population, low rate of paid work and barriers to work. Moreover, this study will consider the viability of entrepreneurship among the disabled by analysing their business performance and assessing how this relates to the ownership of capital resources. More specifically, my research will investigate factors that influence disabled entrepreneurs' business experiences, growth and performance in UK. This will enable the research to identify the factors specific to disabled entrepreneur in business and expecting to contribute to the knowledge about disabled entrepreneurship more generally.

Resources are generally defined as "all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, firm attributes, information, knowledge, etc. controlled by a firm" (Barney 1991, p.101). The Resources-Based View (RBV) helps to explain the conditions under which a firm's resources will provide it with a competitive advantage (Barney 1991). In contrast with the emphasis on external analysis in traditional-organization economics (Bain 1959), the RBV emphasizes the internal analysis of the differences of resource endowments across firms (even within the same industry) and explain how these differences can be a source of a sustainable competitive advantage (Barney 1986,1991; Wernerfelt 1984). Resources contribute to these performance advantages to the extent that they are valuable, rare, costly to imitate, and non-substitutable. Resources are valuable when they help to improve the firm's efficiency and effectiveness (Barney 1991). The conditions under which resources are valuable are context dependent (Barney 2001; Conner 1991; Priem & Butler 2001). In presenting the Resource-Based View (RBV), Barney (1991) classified firm resources into three categories: Human, Social and Financial capitals.

People in general relate people with disabilities with a lack of different types of capital resources (Noakes 2006). Accordingly, disabled entrepreneurs are often regarded as having competitive disadvantages due to increased labour costs (e.g. the need for hire a person to carry merchandise instead of carrying it oneself, additional transportation costs, slower production etc.). In some cultures, due to prejudice, superstition etc., being disabled can also result in a marketing disadvantage since consumers might not want to contract products or services from disabled entrepreneurs (Handojo 2004). Hence, being disabled may turn into a competitive disadvantage when a disabled entrepreneur faces competition from non-disabled entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, the resource deficit as it is perceived by others may not reflect the real resource constrains associated with disabled entrepreneurs. It is therefore important to assess the real capital resources base and not only the perceived resource base. However, the resource demands for disabled entrepreneurs are in general significant and may be harder to obtain than for non-disabled entrepreneurs. This may include resources within all the mentioned resource categories e.g. human, capital and financial resources. Insights from resource based theory are here in line with major findings when it comes to impact from human, social and financial capitals which indicate that there is greater impact on entrepreneurial performance who begin with more financial, physical, or social resources than on other who start from a very low resource base.

Research Objectives

The research is exploratory in nature. The overall objectives of this research are to identify the relationship among capital resources, disability and entrepreneurship. The paper is the first footstep to fill the knowledge about the gap between existing and non existing secondary data on employment status (e.g. disabled population) with capital resources among UK disabled population. At this stage, my research question: what are the significant differences between disabled and normal entrepreneurs in relation to human, social and financial resources? For this, objective will be made to identify the nature and extent of relationships among self-employment, unemployment, employment with available capital resources. The analysis will be based on the proportion of disabled people who are self-employed, the characteristics of disabled self-employed people, types of self-employment in which disabled people are involved, and comparisons with non-disabled self-employed people in the UK.

The main objective of this doctoral study is that to explore the crucial factors affecting the disabled entrepreneurs' business performance at the UK.

Background

It has been recognised the time of early twentieths century, that entrepreneurs are engaged not only product markets, but also in labour markets (Knight 1921). So, there are in two ways entrepreneurs engage in labour market by occupational choice (participation in entrepreneurship) and by hiring employees. Then the literature in this are defines entrepreneurship as self-employment (Aronson 1991; Parker 2004). Their definition makes for great empirical convenience. Because, self-employment is a labour market categorization that is widely used and implemented in large-scale data sets (katz 1990). So the self-employment takes as a working definition of entrepreneurship in this study.

Research has found that entrepreneurs in deprived areas in the UK have less human, social and financial capital than other British business founders (Coleman 2007; DTI 2005; Ebben & Johnson; Harding 2007; Jayawarna *et al* 2007). Most of the researches have showed that resource capital (e.g. human, financial and social capitals etc.) has a direct influence on small business performance for types of business. This situation could be the same for other disadvantaged groups, including the disabled. So, it can be said that the disadvantaged entrepreneurs by area (e.g. deprived) or by group (e.g. disability) generally have less entrepreneurial activities between different ownership of resources, business performance and entrepreneurship rates. However, it is possible that the existing relationships between human, social and financial capital and disabled entrepreneurship are flawed, because they do not take account of the needs of disabled people and particularly of people with disabilities who suffer health problems, and do not acknowledge that there are people who do not fit the conceptual models but who are nevertheless developing their own businesses and other aspects of entrepreneurship (Pavey 2006) It can be argued that they do not adequately theorise health as a form of capital resource – perhaps a form of human capital. Other empirical research argued that disabled people wanting to generate their own income setting up and developing a business must overcome physical barriers which mirror the barriers that face disabled employees in the labour market (Arnold 2005). This research identified that disabled may lack of confidence to start or expand their business because of

unavailability of different capital resources especially financial capital. Thus, the resources availability is the most important factor to set up new business. But the research in capital resource accumulation is absent in disabled entrepreneurship in the UK.

If we look into UK national database (e.g. Census, ONS etc.) on this special population in developing a disability data strategy could not meet the specific policy research agenda regarding entrepreneurship and the business at the same time could not serve the interests of the research community more broadly. If we concern about the national data base about disabled self-employed or entrepreneurs there are no data for a “minimum data set” of disability data elements that are routinely collected. Moreover data are absent on disabled persons into business on a more regular and periodical basis.

Within most entrepreneurship theory and research, there seems to be no room for disability; most theories assume that entrepreneurs are able people. The oldest argument of Bouchikhi (1993) that the outcome of the business start-up process involves a complex interaction between entrepreneur, the environment, chance events, and prior performance. But, not relating with the disadvantaged entrepreneurial people. So that no comprehensive study was carried for data relating to factors such as opportunity recognition for the disabled entrepreneurs, information search, resource gathering, team starts, and characteristics of the business idea for the people with disabilities and the business itself could be collected. Thus research is needed to increase our understanding of how disabled entrepreneurs gain competitive advantages by using their experience, knowledge, network contacts, and resources accumulation process from their businesses.

Underpinning the academic and practical demands of researching disabled people and their organisations is a socio/political re-interpretation of disability widely referred to as the '*Social model of disability*'. Originally devised by disabled activists in Britain this approach derives from disabled people's direct experiences of living with impairment in Western society (UPIAS 1976). Since its development in the 1970s the social model has been increasingly accepted and adapted by disability groups throughout the world and now underpins, either implicitly or explicitly, their thinking and policies in countries as diverse as Britain, Japan, South Africa and the USA (see for example, WHO 2001). This is mainly because the social model of disability is nothing more complicated than an emphasis on the economic, environmental and cultural barriers encountered by people viewed by others as having some form of impairment. These barriers include inaccessible education, information and communication systems, working environments, inadequate disability benefits, discriminatory health and social support services, inaccessible transport, housing and public buildings and amenities, and the devaluing of people labelled 'disabled' by negative imagery and representation in the media - films, television and newspapers. From this perspective, people with designated impairments are disabled by society's failure to accommodate their individual and collective needs within the mainstream of economic and cultural life (Barnes 1991).

Methodology & Work plan

The study will be an exploratory in nature, both primary and secondary data will be used. Considering the nature of the research, a combination of structured, semi-structured and some unstructured format will be used in order to explore both quantitative and qualitative information. This research project is a piece of qualitative research that is explorative, seeks

to gain insight, and involves interpretation and theories generated out of data. Apart from some of the points already mentioned above, this section will present some important reasons why a qualitative research method is appropriate to this research. Firstly, qualitative methods are more advantageous than quantitative methods in exploring particular social phenomenon (Cooper *et al* 1995). As this research on experience of DE is still in the exploratory stage at the UK, there is little data and understanding of the phenomena of disabled entrepreneurship in the UK. Under this circumstance, qualitative methods will be more appropriate in providing rich, deep data and getting close involvement with the people being investigated.

Secondly, the difficulty in finding the exact figure of total population of disabled entrepreneurs at the Great Britain (e.g. unknown population size ref. ONS, Census). Furthermore, willingness to respond to this research investigation has been reported (Burchardt 2003). For the quantitative strategy, the appropriate sample size (substantial percentage from the population) will be required. A small sample without exact population is a problem in quantitative research with its validity and reliability (Cooper *et al* 1995). This is one of important reason why quantitative research methods are inappropriate in this research.

Thirdly, by conducting a face-to-face interview, in contrast to other methods, it puts the interviewer and the interviewee to a level of feeling as co-equals reducing ethical issues, making the interviewee more of an 'informant' than a respondent (Yin 1994). The data collection method in this research will enable me to gain access to the 'spontaneous data' or general chat after the actual interview of which studies have found at times to be very resourceful and truthful than the recorded data (Bryman 2004).

Fourthly, qualitative research is adoptive so that concepts and theoretical elaboration emerge out of data collection. In terms of this research, qualitative research will enable the research to develop a theoretical model of the process of disabled entrepreneurship which is weak in quantitative research.

Fifthly, regarding to open-defining terms of entrepreneurship development in the disadvantaged group, the unstructured qualitative research approach might discover new dimensions and perspective of what is regarded as disabled people entrepreneurial performance. Hence, the quantitative research is impossible to study irrationality and various unpredictable actions that are common in individual human behaviour (Crotty 1998). This author also argues that quantitative research lacks the goal of understanding of description, control and prediction. Hence, my research is aiming to verifiable version of reality which cannot be possible by conducting quantitative research.

Finally, qualitative research has usually been criticized for relying too much on the researcher's view about what is important and significant. It is often argued that qualitative study has difficulty of replicating, because it is unstructured and often reliant upon the qualitative researcher's ingenuity (Clive 1999). It is suggested (Mason 1958) that the scope of the findings of qualitative investigations is restricted. In other words, it is hardly possible to know how the findings can be generalized to other settings or cases. It has been stated that self-reflective assessment on the application of qualitative research methods in this research will avoid the bias of personal values that has been incorporated into the research process. It is crucial to pay attention to these points at which bias and intrusion of values can occur. Moreover, this research will deal with the second issue of how to generalize from a small piece of research. The effort will be made on the development of links between the experience of disabled entrepreneurs and the process of entrepreneurship that are likely to

also affect other entrepreneurs. While the theory will not be generalisable in a simplistic way, because no one can claim that all disabled entrepreneurs exactly have the same experiences. Therefore, this research will develop an understanding of the context in which individual operate, which will inform an understanding of other disabled people who are in business, seeking to diversify and disabled entrepreneurs support services.

This research project is organized in following four steps.

Stage 1:

Exploratory Research by Quantitative Analysis (ongoing). Expand the understanding of the research area by reviewing of secondary literatures and data. At this stage (MRes Thesis), identify the relationships between contributions of different resources (e.g. human, social, and financial) to a propensity to be in self-employment (i.e. entrepreneurship) of the individual (i.e. disabled) from the national data source.

Stage 2:

Qualitative Research (12 months). Make sampling frame and questionnaire, distribution and data collection. It is expected that 40 semi-structured in-depth interview will be collected from the disabled entrepreneurs through (i) Disabled Entrepreneur Network (DEN) and (ii) Leonard Cheshire Disability(LC Disability) in the UK.

Stage 3:

Data Analysis & Interpretation (6 Months). Data will use appropriate qualitative software (*NVivo*).

Stage 4:

Completion of Work (12 Months). Writing and finalise the final draft as per supervisors' approval.

Expected Contribution

A number of studies of disabled people's employment have highlighted self-employment as an important source of paid work (Jones 2005; Burchardt 2002; Noakes 2006) but none has focused on capital resources. Consequently, although it is clear that a significant proportion of disabled people are self-employed, little is known about who they are, what sort of jobs and businesses they have, and the earnings they derive from self-employment. Becoming entrepreneurs as a disabled person has also not been widely explored in the UK, the problems that are experienced in establishing and sustaining a business, the advice and support that is needed, and the ways these needs differ from those of the average entrepreneur. The literature review has given some views of the subject on disabled entrepreneurship examination field. It has been observed that there are relationships between capital resources and entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial performance but (i) we don't know the relationships for disabled entrepreneurs with those resources (ii) entrepreneurship may still be a desired route for disabled people without these resources - making it a responsibility of support service organisation to help them gain the correct resources. From the review, it is indicating that no comprehensive study on disabled entrepreneurs performance and there required support services. A few researchers have addressed environmental barrier but gap has been found which most effective environment such political, financial, social etc. are crucial for the disabled entrepreneurs. Research is

absent to find out salient features of disabled entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial performance in the UK. What types and sizes of enterprises do the disabled run and convenient for them (e.g. micro, small, medium etc.), what is the success factor and to evaluate entrepreneurial success of the people with disability also absent in literature works. What kinds of challenges/problems faced by disabled entrepreneurs, are there any areas of struggle (e.g. finance, marketing), what is the effect of support services/facilities on the growth of disabled owned business unit? These most important aspects could not find any literature works. In summary, the association between entrepreneurship and disability is ambiguous because it lacks literature and empirical evidence. It is very unclear of the performance of disabled entrepreneurs in the lens of resource based view in the UK in various empirical studies.

Finally, the aim of this research study is: although the extant literature point out the direction of the casual relationship between these capital resources and business performance, the details of such relationship is often incomparable. This is mainly due to variations in different samples, research methods and ways of measures. Secondly, research on this context focuses specifically on disadvantaged entrepreneurs (e.g. working disabled population). It is valuable to look into business performance predictors in this specific area. Not only because there is a gap in our knowledge about what indicates success for disabled entrepreneurs, but more importantly because it will benefit these business groups (e.g. to help them understand what is more important to business success and growth), policymakers (e.g. to have more relevant and effective plans), and support service organisations (e.g. to provide them make better support services).

Entrepreneurship is relatively unfamiliar both to people with disability themselves and other disability organizations (e.g. support services, social enterprise etc.) in the UK (Andofatto *et al* 2000; Anderson 2002). A wider definition of entrepreneurship, which includes people with disabilities, will be sought in this research. Presently new forms of support are emerging, voluntary and public sector organizations could develop an entrepreneurial role for the disabled but the development of disabled-owned businesses is a topic needing further analysis and research. The goals of this study will be to foster meaningful research about entrepreneurship of persons with disabilities, raise awareness about entrepreneurs with disabilities' work capabilities, qualifications, and value to the UK economy, and to recommend the enhancement of effective and fair implementation of public and private initiatives that promote entrepreneurial opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This research will explore the relationship between capital resources and the disabled entrepreneurship and whether entrepreneurship still be a desired route for the disabled or not. The association between entrepreneurship and disability is ambiguous. It is very unclear of the performance of disabled entrepreneurs in the UK in various empirical studies, but it would seem that there is ample scope for research on this topic. Further this study can be utilized to assist the UK Government policies, guidelines and procedures for making social development decision in disabled sector.

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