

Systems psychodynamics and ethnic minority entrepreneurship

Kiran Trehan

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the ways in which systems psychodynamic theory and practice can contribute to our understanding of how ethnic minority enterprise operate in superdiverse urban settings. ‘Superdiversity’, as outlined by Vertovec (2007) draws attention to the new and complex social formations, characterised by a dynamic integration of variables (race, ethnicity and social class, for example) in European cosmopolitan cities. Increased diversity has created a complex range of under-explored challenges to minority entrepreneurs, who work within and, most importantly, for such communities. Importantly, for migrant groups in the current climate of austerity, enterprise may be a way of promoting employment and local development, whilst also kick-starting broader business regeneration.

The article reviews key ideas and controversies in minority entrepreneurship. It illuminates how systems psychodynamic theory can enrich our understanding of the ways in which ethnic minority enterprise interconnects in encounters where the participants have different biographies, trajectories and linguistic histories. The paper concludes by demonstrating how a synthesis of systems psychodynamics and diversity sheds new light on the complex and nuanced experience of ethnic minority enterprise and the work territory they are creating for themselves. Exploring ethnic minority enterprise as an organisational system creates a distinctive new perspective for systems psychodynamic literature and helps us to identify and articulate new implications for small firms’ research and practice.

KEYWORDS

Systems Psychodynamic
Ethnic Minority
Entrepreneurship
Power
Emotions
Politics

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The empirical examples illustrate my broader findings that, when migrants set up small businesses, they often do so with determination, focus and a strong work ethic, but it is also clear that these business owners must draw upon additional creativity, resilience and resourcefulness to succeed against a backdrop of discrimination and exclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Self-employment is an important economic activity for ethnic minorities and new migrants. Often faced with obstacles as they attempt to enter the labour market, migrants may open businesses as a means of economic survival. However, we know relatively little about the everyday experiences of new migrant business owners and how these businesses operate. In this paper, we consider the dynamics of self-employment as an economic activity for migrants. Following a historical overview of recent scholarship, I focus on a specific example of ethnic minority business owners in Birmingham, UK, and share their story of the challenges faced in establishing, developing and sustaining their business. I also interrogate how they optimise organised reflection to explore possibilities for economic expansion and demonstrate the value of entrepreneurial orientation to secure their future. The empirical examples illustrate my broader findings that, when migrants set up small businesses, they often do so with determination, focus and a strong work ethic, but it is also clear that these business owners must draw upon additional creativity, resilience and resourcefulness to succeed against a backdrop of discrimination and exclusion.

The challenges are well documented. Small business owners tend to work long hours; have a ‘fortress enterprise’ mentality; eschew non-trading networks; and are reluctant to avail themselves of external support, in the form of consultants, enterprise agencies or training (Curran et al., 1995). Moreover, academic research on small firms has attracted criticism for its lack of relevance to the concerns

of practitioners (Gibb, 1996). Arguably, the task of addressing such challenges is intensified from a psychodynamic perspective because of the commitment of actively engaging with emotional and political dynamics. In applying a systems psychodynamic lens, I explore the relationship of the organisation as a system, specifically how diversity, power relations and emotions are experienced in the daily working lives of ethnic minority business owners. The political view of the small enterprise recognises that the business owner is embedded in a web of social and economic relationships that both enable and constrain his/her scope for action. System psychodynamics – with its heightened sensitivity to emotional and political context – is particularly well-placed to elicit the complexity and multi-layered nature of diversity in small firms.

A systems psychodynamic approach provides a vehicle to assist minority entrepreneurs in engaging reflexively with power relations that are the inevitable backdrop to any policy, programme or intervention. By advancing a psychodynamic approach, business support practitioners can develop a detailed understanding of how minority entrepreneurs engage with the micro-political dimensions of power relations. Further, systems psychodynamics demonstrate how diversity policy interventions are invariably mediated by social relations of power between business support agencies, policy makers and business owners. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. I commence by reviewing the extant literature on ethnic minority business and highlight the under-researched area of how power dynamics and emotions impact upon ethnic minority businesses. I then outline the research setting and key methodological considerations. The discussion that follows demonstrates how systems psychodynamics can contribute to

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our understanding of the desires and aspirations of ethnic minority firms, which can only be accessed from an intimate, personal perspective. Growth-oriented entrepreneurs provide the context for this inquiry. This community has significantly lower levels of self-employment than other ethnic minority groups and has been a particular focus of government policy (Mascarenhas-Keyes, 2006). Evidence from the USA suggests that supporting ambitious growth-oriented minority entrepreneurs can be effective in promoting inner-city regeneration (Bates, 2001; Boston, 1999). Such businesses remain in distressed urban areas, and significantly, are likely to employ co-ethnic workers. This is important when one considers the high level of economic disadvantage experienced by the African-Caribbean community.

DIVERSITY AND SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Over the past fifty years, there has been growing participation of migrants in self-employment in the UK, especially in establishing small businesses (Fairchild, 2010). Migrant businesses contribute at least £40 billion a year to the UK economy, a contribution that is continually increasing as new national and international markets are opened up. In the UK, migrant entrepreneurs create one in seven companies and are reported to be twice as entrepreneurial as the British-born working age population (Centre for Entrepreneurs, 2014). Migrant entrepreneurs often provide employment, particularly in deprived areas, and play a highly visible and dynamic role in sustaining neighbourhoods and transforming the economic and social landscape of cities in the UK. Small businesses have experienced an ongoing process of transformation as they cope

with austerity, new forms of competition, and the changing nature of work driven by new technologies, enhanced diversity, migration inflows, mutable local infrastructure, and alterations in the make-up of families and households. Self-employment is a necessity for some migrants. Waldinger (1986) and Kloosterman et al. (1999; 2001) have identified key motivating reasons why self-employment is critical for migrant businesses.

Migrants may be pushed into self-employment due to the discriminatory practices of employers, who either will not employ them, or fail to offer opportunities for progression (Light and Gold, 2000). Parker (2009) reveals factors which prevent migrants from finding employment, including employers' refusal to validate overseas qualifications, government regulation of the legal right to work and cuts to funding for language classes. Self-employment becomes an imperative because other labour market opportunities are restricted. Equally important are pull factors, related to migrants' willingness and capacity to take advantage of economic opportunities. Business opportunities for migrants can include enterprises to meet a demand for goods and services, which are specific to particular migrant groups. Portes (1995) suggests that such niche markets are frequently fulfilled by migrant businesses.

Tight-knit community relations among migrants have often amalgamated social networks that provide informal finance arrangements, entrepreneurial experience and emotional bonding to share common strategic goals in business (Vershina et al 2016). The notion of the 'corner shop' migrant entrepreneur's willingness to work long hours and invest social capital in making a family business may be stereotypical, but it is nonetheless rooted in evidence (Vershina, et.al, 2011). When migrants are faced with limited employment opportunities, self-employment can be a necessary vehicle for upward mobility.



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NARRATIVES OF SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Ram and Trehan (2010) argue that, whilst many migrants have a propensity to start up new businesses, they face additional barriers which may prevent their full business potential being realised. One of these barriers is the perceived failure of mainstream business services to support small and medium-sized migrant enterprises. Mainstream providers of business support are often found by migrants to be inaccessible or are viewed as irrelevant to migrant businesses (Carter, Ram, Trehan, and Mwaura, 2014). Small business owners per se are often reluctant to avail themselves of public sector business support. This is at least partly a function of the business owners' mind-set of autonomy and self-reliance.

For migrant business owners, the drive into self-employment can be viewed as a survival mechanism in response to job losses which, in a discriminatory job market, affect migrants even more heavily than other workers. It is also important not to under-emphasize the barriers facing migrants in the wider job market, which may lead them to set up their own businesses. For example, a recent OECD report found:

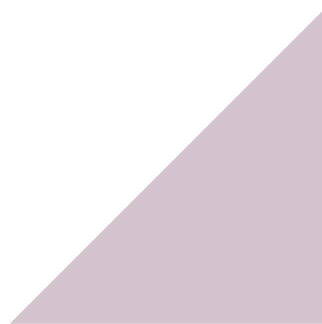
Immigrants tend to be more likely to do temporary and part-time jobs – in Spain, more than half of immigrants, about 56%, have only temporary work, compared with 31% of locals. And, increasingly, immigrants are becoming self-employed. The reasons for this vary: It could indicate that immigrants are becoming more well established in their adopted countries and have the financial means to set up businesses; or it could be a sign that the barriers to finding a job are so high that it's easier for them to work for themselves. (OECD 2014:90)

A report by the Enterprise Research Centre (2016) finds that migrants are likely to have rare human capital compared to non-migrants, which can help in developing and sustaining new ventures. This is also important within a globalized economy, because it opens up new opportunities in developing transnational networks. Glick Shiller et al. (1995) explain that 'trans-migrants' become firmly rooted in their new country but maintain multiple linkages to their homeland. Similarly, Harris (2014) points out that, unlike earlier migrant generations, migrants to the United Kingdom from Poland and other East European countries since 2004 have retained easy access to their homeland, and to goods and services. These transnational exchanges can have important implications when migrants choose to set up a business. It is clear that self-employment plays a vital economic role in urban economies, but studies of the everyday emotional practices which attempt to supplement an individual's experiences of action (learning from experience) with the reflection of existing organisational and emotional dynamics created in action (learning from organising), are scarce.

ENGAGING WITH SYSTEMS PSYCHODYNAMICS IN THE CONTEXT OF ETHNIC MINORITY ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Psychodynamic theories assume that motivation and actions are inaccessible to the conscious mind even though behaviour and emotions are affected, looking at an individual's or group's inner dynamics (Newman & Hirschhorn, 1999). In seeking to illuminate unconscious behaviour and dynamics at work (Vince, 2002, Vince & Mazen, 2014), exploring the connections to the conscious enables us to examine the emotional connotations of ethnic minority entrepreneurship by allowing the investigation of power (Vince, 2002).

What makes the psychodynamic approach viable and valuable is the ability to explore emotion and power relations within the context of ethnic minority entrepreneurship which simultaneously limit and legitimise individual action. The lived experience of ethnic minority business owners is often neglected in small firms, organisational and management theory (Kets de Vries,



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It is recognised in the literature that emotions play a role in small businesses and these emotions permeate the organisation ultimately affecting how the firm conducts its activities (Bjornberg & Nicholson, 2007; Trehan & Glover, 2015). There is an array of different theoretical approaches to explore emotions in family business; for a detailed discussion of these see Shepherd (2016), however, scholars have neglected to explore the merits of psychodynamic approaches. Despite entrepreneurship research recognising the importance of emotion

Carlock, & Florent-Treacy, 2007; Vince, 2002, Trehan and Blackledge, 2018). Psychodynamic theory can help us to explore the unconscious nature of entrepreneurial work by studying the extent to which ethnic minority entrepreneurs are constrained by organisational arrangements and their capacity to disrupt the status quo to effect change. Furthermore, the approach offers an additional view to the rational and economic approaches to work (Sievers, 2009). There is an emphasis on the centrality of unconscious processes and balancing the view of organisations as rational entities with that of organisations as emotional and emotion-generating environments (Hirschhorn 1993; Gould, Stapley & Stein, 2006; Vince 2002; Stein 2005, 2007; Trehan & Glover, 2017). Psychodynamic approaches, therefore, recognise that the unconscious dynamics of individuals can have a significant impact on life in organisations and vice-versa (e.g. Newman & Hirschhorn, 1999). This is a critical theoretical underpinning when exploring the role of emotions in ethnic minority entrepreneurship and leads to a deeper understanding of tensions and dynamics operating below the surface (Newman & Hirschhorn, 1999; Trehan 2007; Vince 2002).

in understanding decisions and actions (e.g. Brundin and Härtel, 2014) contend that there are substantial gaps in our understanding. There has also been limited empirical research that explores relationships and how they affect the different dynamics of the group relations in the business (Dunn, 1999; Zachary, 2011). An important, yet largely neglected point of intersection between the two fields is the role of emotion (Shepherd, 2016). Shepherd (2016) and Jiang et al. (2016) advocate the exploration of the ‘micro foundations’ of small firms and it is here that systems psychodynamics offers the greatest contribution through seeking to engage openly with the individuals emotional and power experiences in organisational settings, and with their personal experiences in the world. Systems Psychodynamics enables us to explore the close connection between the person’s internal world and personal experience in the world, collective emotional and political dynamics, and the structures of power or control within which we conform and contest those power relations.



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Vince (2010) highlights the complexity of relations and the ‘interplay between emotions and politics creates surprising, self-limiting, unexpected, uncomfortable and unwanted structures for action’ (S28). This interplay can be at both a conscious and unconscious level and in a system whereby emotions are inseparable from power and how it is exercised and contested. This presents challenges for the ways in which entrepreneurship is inclusive, and explores the connection between diversity, minority enterprise, social and economic

development with respect to entrepreneurial activities. Evidence from the US suggests supporting the leadership ambitions of growth-oriented minority entrepreneurs can be effective in promoting inner-city regeneration. This is important in the light of the high level of economic disadvantage experienced by minority businesses. The work that has been done on leadership from a systems psychodynamic perspective provides a totally different frame of reference for leaders (see Petriglieri & Stein, 2012). They acquire a leadership map that includes the idea that leadership roles are taken up in a context that exerts influence on the leader just as much as they influence the context (James and Arroba, 2005, p.310). Petriglieri and Stein (2012) focus their study on how individuals craft their leader identities and the unintended consequences of tailoring their identity to the role of leader. Psychodynamic scholars have also uncovered relationships between leaders and organisational cultures underpinning organisational systems (e.g. Stein, 2005, 2007). However, there has as yet been little attention given to unveiling the unconscious and emotional dynamics of leadership practise in ethnic minority firms.

THE POLITICS OF DIVERSITY

Exploring the politics of diversity in Ethnic Minority enterprise from a psychodynamic perspective is enigmatic in that the importance of this context involves extending one’s gaze behind the often mythical notion of the ‘entrepreneurial individual’. Rather, as Ram and Trehan (2009) argue, it requires an explication of ‘organizing insight’ (Vince, 2001). Systems psychodynamics, with its heightened sensitivity to emotional and political context – is particularly well-placed to elicit the complexity and multi-layered nature of life in small firms. An important, yet largely neglected, point of intersection between the two fields is that systems psychodynamics views organisations as emotion-generating systems. This is particularly valuable in the context of ethnic minority businesses where ‘the real world is so complex that the notion of perfect rationality must also be abandoned’ (Gasson & Errington, 1993, p.89). Much policy attention is focused upon the promotion of enterprise in disadvantaged areas and amongst under-represented

groups. For example, Marta and Mair's (2009) study of entrepreneurship in a context of poverty illuminates the resourceful and effortful practices of individuals to overcome adversity. This kind of work has echoes in the more celebratory accounts of ethnic minority entrepreneurship. It reminds us that the resilience of such communities, and their potentially valuable contributions to the 'mainstream' economy. This study seeks to illuminate how systems psychodynamics can contribute to our understanding of the political, emotional, and community work performed by minority entrepreneurs to change taken-for-granted practices, and how collective action is pivotal to diversity work.



APPROACH

This study is best understood as 'organisational ethnography'. Organisational ethnographies study the meaning-making of people and/or the 'in situ' organising processes, commonplace practices within a particular organisation and organisational sense making (Cunliffe, 2010); in order to understand the complexity, intricacy and mundane actions of organisational life (Ybema et al., 2009). It is about temporality, not a single snap shot of organisational life (Cunliffe, 2010).

Ethnography is an approach to research which emphasises the significance of rich moments of 'felt' experience (Symon & Cassell, 2012). As Hammersley (1992) states, the aim is to 'get inside' the way people see the world. It is 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) with a purpose 'to uncover and explicate the ways in which people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situation' (Van Maanen, 1979, p.540). Ethnography allows us, as researchers, to experience the organisation and the 'real life' dynamics of family firms (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2012). Crucially, it is about how people live their lives (Cunliffe, 2010).

Watson (1994) suggests ethnography is an extension of the processes we use in everyday life: 'Ethnographic research involves feeling one's way in confusing circumstances, struggling to make sense of ambiguous messages, reading signals, looking around, listening all the time, coping with conflicts and struggling to achieve tasks through establishing and maintaining a network of relationships. But that is what we do all the time as human beings.' (Watson, 1994:8).

The sense in which this research was an ethnographic study derives from the time which was spent in the setting – listening, collecting accounts, interviewing people, or having conversations, and at other times joining in with different activities (sometimes both together). As Saunders et al (2009:142) put it, the ethnographic study attempts to, '...describe and explain the social world the research subjects inhabit in the way in which they would describe and explain it'. Therefore, in the context of small firms, it has the ability to connect the everyday, mundane reality of entrepreneurial life with that of broader political and strategic practices (Boyle & Parry, 2007; Karreman & Alvesson, 2001); as well as providing insights about knowledge and processes of social settings by getting to know the people in their own environment (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). It enables explorations 'beyond surfaces' (Ciuk & Kostera, 2010, p.193), which is critical for exploring the unconscious emotions and the power relationships in ethnic minority firms.



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DATA COLLECTION

The research process involved personal collaborations from across the academic, public, private and voluntary sectors, working together to develop new ways of supporting business owners from 'diverse' backgrounds (primarily ethnic minority communities and women) to 'make diversity and enterprise everyone's business'. This signifies its ambition to promote awareness of di-

iversity as it relates to small firms and to as many stakeholders as possible. Three features are germane to the present discussion. Firstly, the emphasis on practice: each member was committed to exploring ways in which they could engage with ethnic minority businesses. Secondly, collaboration was central to effectiveness, with members working together to develop strategies and initiatives to address the complex issue of diversity and enterprise. Thirdly, each member was committed to promoting diversity and its objectives within his or her own organisation and peer network. The data presented in this paper is informed by a desire to capture my own 'research affectivity' (Kenny and Gilmore, 2014), which 'highlights the centrality of desires, wishes and past experiences' (Kenny and Gilmore, 2014: 167). Therefore, in addition to making interpretations of others' (individual or collective) emotions, I have interpreted my own underlying emotions in order to make sense of personal and political difference in the everyday work of the developing ethnic minority entrepreneurs. This reflects a dual task as researchers and participants desire to make a difference to contribute to organisational and social change and the desire to make diversity count.



As such, the creations of stories are mediated by the minds of the participants, the researcher and by unconscious processes (Hunt, 1989). The extracts are illustrative of organised reflection.

METHODS

A variety of methods were used to record the interactions. Firstly, thirty-eight 'action learning' groups or 'sets', were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. The groups took place over a three-and-a-half-year period, lasting on average three hours each. Secondly, as a supplement to the audio recording, I kept 'process notes' to document what I saw as the political and power-related dynamics that unfolded during these meetings. Thirdly, each of the participants was interviewed at the start of the inquiry and at two yearly intervals over a six-year time frame. This enabled detailed information to be gathered on the perceptions of change at an individual business and community level over a significant period of time. Finally, I reviewed written material that the entrepreneurs generated during the inquiry (including minutes, emails and detailed personal reflections).

The data was analysed in accordance with the key research themes. A psychodynamic framework was utilised, supplemented by categories that emerged during the course of the inquiry. Hence, all interactions were qualitatively analysed. The data analysis followed the sequence of reading and re-reading interview and inquiry transcripts, summarising, category formation (or thematising), followed by the description and analysis. But as a qualitative informed psychodynamic study, the analysis was iterative rather than linear. This has produced a rich set of data and forms the basis of the case vignettes presented in the paper.

»» As an ethnographic researcher I select, interpret, colour, emphasise, and shape my findings.

The psychodynamic framework centres on three main themes:

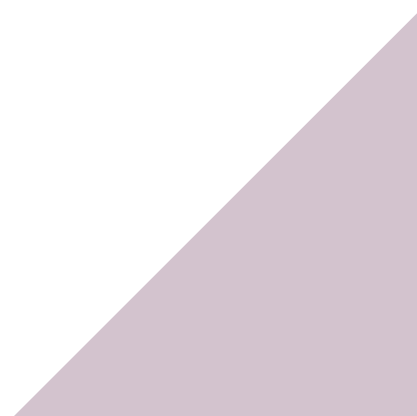
- The rhetoric of equality
- Interplay between power, emotions and organised reflection
- Emotion, politics and entrepreneurship work

Psychodynamically informed inquiry has a dimension that separates it from many other forms of interpretive exploration: it reflects on possible meanings of observed behaviour or communication and seeks to infer the ongoing contradictions within work 'below the surface' (Huffington, Armstrong, Halton, Hoyle, & Pooley, 2004), i.e. the 'non-rational, unconscious, and systemic processes' (Armstrong & Huffington, 2004, p.3) underlying organisational dynamics (Prins, 2006). As such, the creations of stories are mediated by the minds of the participants, the researcher and by unconscious processes (Hunt, 1989). The extracts are illustrative of organised reflection (Vince, 2002). By organised reflection, I draw from Vince's work that:

'Reflection is not primarily an individual process, but a collective capacity to question assumptions, which means that it implies an ongoing inquiry into the nature and consequences of social power relations within organizations' (Vince, 2002: 67).

The entrepreneurs' reflections in this paper are presented as empirical evidence but the aim is (processual) insight not (procedural) truth (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992). Within this study, when I write about events and people, I am not simply describing or reporting what happened. I cannot be objective in that way. But equally I am not making up what I am writing. As an ethnographic researcher I select, interpret, colour, emphasise, and shape my findings. The organisation studied was the 12/8 network, which is a group of growth-oriented African-Caribbean business owners who share a commitment to developing successful businesses and ensuring that their achievements can assist in nurturing existing and aspiring African-Caribbean entrepreneurs in the community. In the course of this six-year long collaboration, the companies (together with Business Link Birmingham and Solihull and leading academic researchers), worked together to grow their businesses, develop new forms of business support, and encourage enterprise in the wider African-Caribbean community.

The approach to the initiative was one that was owned by the participating businesses; responsive to their stated needs (rather than a re-packaging of existing business support); and had a clear appreciation of wider community benefits. We (the researchers) had a longstanding research interest in diversity (Reynolds and Trehan, 2009) and initiatives directed towards ethnic minority entrepreneurs (Ram and Jones, 2008). The entrepreneurs involved in our deliberations were keen on interventions that supported businesses like theirs and helped develop their business capabilities. The outcome of these interactions was an agreement to establish a network to develop African-Caribbean entrepreneurs. This action learning set comprised eight African-Caribbean entrepreneurs, the agency chief executive and two researchers. The participants in this study were all



ethnic minorities' entrepreneurs from across diverse sectors, including food manufacturing, security, information technology, small retail holdings and professional services. Each business had developed a niche market and shaped a clientele that connected to their own migrant histories. In other words, they actively utilised their own social biographies to create and respond to, in part, a migrant customer and client base. Given the nature of their businesses, they also found themselves blending home and business life. In my observations I saw the participants managing domestic and work arrangements across sites so that connections between their different networks were continuously reinforced, revised and reconfigured. Entrepreneurial activity commonly continued at home, whilst work also involved care for social, community and family relationships. Both the home and the workplace provided the social space for business-related discussions.

»» The entrepreneurs' reflections in this paper are presented as empirical evidence but the aim is [processual] insight not [procedural] truth.

The illustration presented in this paper focuses on how key elements of organising reflection was embedded in the design of the research project; illuminating the systematic documentation of the process in action which all too often remains implicit within extant SME research. The illustrations are examples of 'text production' which explicitly locates the author in the text (Tierney, 2002) and, like field notes, achieve a more dynamic, accessible and public representational strategy of both ourselves and those we observe. The key focus was to ensure the research design procured active engagement by the participants with the emotional and political context in which the research intervention was embedded.

ILLUSTRATION 1:

The first extracts are an illustration of how the entrepreneurs acknowledged 'difference' as a positive resource, a means of contributing to unity and social cohesion. The entrepreneurs highlighted the paradoxes in which difference contributed to the normalisation of diversity and helped to counter negative discourses about minority enterprise, whilst at the same time grappling with inequality and a lack of access to social and economic resources. The extract below is from a reflective discussion, the six entrepreneurs explore how the process of organised reflection has developed their understanding of the policy landscape and the extent to which their businesses can serve as a means of economic and social development.

The Rhetoric of Equality: Who is Empowering Who?

Engaging with external agencies, such as Business in The Community (BITC) has helped us to understand the wider political process or political issues in relation to ethnic minority businesses. While I can see that there is a willingness to engage with minority businesses, I think personally that a business is a business, so it doesn't matter what ethnic origins the business is from. They are good at doing stuff or they're not; either they can deliver, or they can't. I think it is a good thing in terms of them stating that there is a willingness to engage with minority businesses, because otherwise there wouldn't be an arena for smaller business to get to meet these other [private sector] organisations, but then I think that it boils down to the individual company. I think that, if they are just going to do business with a business just because they are a minority business, then that's just wrong, I think that you need to do business with whoever can do the job - if they happen to be from a minority then it ticks all your boxes, but I am not sure if they should be engaging with businesses just because they are from a specific ethnic background.

[Carl – Group encounter]

So, in terms of us and them having that political understanding – it's good in a way, because it allows people like myself to be in an arena with the big players [policy makers, private sector organizations] and now I am at the table, they can see how good I am, whereas if there was no political agenda, I might not have that opportunity. It's like the Dragons' Den thing – if Theo picks the phone up, someone will see me and that's what they have done, they've picked the phone up, got the big and little companies there and now I can show them how good I am and get them to do business with me. But again, if they are doing it just because we're an ethnic minority business, then I think that's out of order.

[Leroy – Group encounter]

I think being members of the large business networks is important, especially as that comes with the opportunity to attend events and to be seen, as there aren't that many black people there. So, if we go, people are going to remember us, and that's a good thing (it's like we were in a pink suit!) so I think it is about presence really. We have to be there engaging with them because they are a very, very influential group of people. They have got some heavy dudes in there and by doing the stuff that we do hopefully one day we will be recognised for some of the community work that we do, or some project we have been involved in. Maybe, if we are fortunate enough to win an award, this will raise our profile to that level that gets everybody talking about us and that will give us the opportunity to bring other people in, other people from the community, for example Taisha's Youth event – getting more recognition will allow us to help other small businesses as well. It's not just about us. Yes, we do want to get business out of it and grow our own companies, but I think one thing about the group is giving back. That's a strong thing for us and it helps sustain our community and dispel the myth about black people, break down the stereotype, you always see youngsters in the papers in gangs and stuff, but you never hear about the young black person who started their own business.

[George – Group encounter]

These illustrations highlight the interaction between power and emotions in relation to diversity work. Whilst the day-to-day practices of enterprise development was on the surface characterised by good humour, conviviality, generosity of spirit and people's willingness to get on with others, it was clear that the backstory was more complex as the entrepreneurs faced challenges and a sense of dissatisfaction when confronted with the lived reality of the social and political worlds in which the action occurs. This involved managing the difficult balancing act of being sensitive to the particular problems of minority entrepreneurs, whilst also recognising such firms want to be seen as part of the mainstream small business population. Access to resources and power structures were critical and important in establishing possibilities for the members; they realised that they needed gatekeepers to broker entry into valuable networks that would alter the landscape for these entrepreneurs in terms of helping them to get into value added networks or helping them to access appropriate resources.

A reflection about the nature of their own journey helps us to understand how the group become more politically aware of the emotional and political intricacies of leveraging resources and knowledge from policy makers, and businesses intermediaries. Elucidation of this extract also highlights how the unconscious dynamics of the group relate with the wider organisational system in this particular setting – businesses networks. The unconscious defences prompted a systematic avoidance of their feelings rather than working with the anxieties inherent around the table which was masked by humour, and an avoidance to address racism, and the social inequalities they clearly experienced. On the surface, they acknowledged their anger at the consequences of discrimination, yearning for change, and persistence in their own desires to make a difference whilst realising that they, too, are positioned on this landscape and both shape and are shaped by the landscape.



Got the big and little companies there
and now I can show them how good I am
and get them to do business with me.
But again, if they are doing it just because we're an
ethnic minority business,
then I think that's out of order.

ILLUSTRATION 2:

The next illustration highlights how systems psychodynamics has a significant role to play in illuminating the complex dynamics that influence collective reflection. Within this project, the group were encouraged to actively pursue a review of the emotional and political basis of experience and how they impacted on wider micro-political processes and power relations in and between members and their businesses. It is clear that the transition from a structure that reflects to one that connects is a developmental process that involves planning, tensions, and a willingness to enact the deliberations of collective reflection on power relations. As Nicolini's et al. (2004:101) study reinforces 'reflection works at individual and organisational levels if it is public, participative, and authorised'.

Throughout this inquiry, emotions and inequalities were evident in conversations on how to get access to resources and power structures which impacted on the legitimacy and sustainability of the network and how, though the process of emotional engagement, individual and collective understanding about diversity was transformed. Hence the process of collective reflection and argumentation that ensued was fundamentally shaped by the nature of power relations in the setting, as the second illustration highlights.

Power, emotions and organised reflection – Seeking to contribute to change

The extracts below illuminate the groups' attempt to influence policy agendas; the account offers fragments of the conflictual and contradictory nature of undertaking diversity work and the emotional labour required.

“There are not enough African-Caribbean businesses that are achieving a turnover or status of millionaires, for whatever reason... We need to take the lessons learnt by the Asian community and superimpose them across the business community, irrespective of creed or colour; I think that is what the emphasis of work is concentrated upon.

[Lee – reflective meeting]

I have always had a passion for wanting to develop the black business community and develop the black pound, I don't think as an ethnic group in terms of business we have ever been taken seriously I feel where an African, Caribbean entrepreneur goes to the bank it is harder for them to raise finance than say their Asian counterpart because the bank establishments naturally see Asian entrepreneurs as business-minded whereas they don't necessarily see African Caribbean people. So when you start with that perspective I have always been involved and wanted to develop that Black business community so one has always tried to engage with whoever can help facilitate that agenda.

[Andy – reflective meeting]

➤➤ The account offers fragments of the conflictual and contradictory nature of undertaking diversity work and the emotional labour required.

I think the Twelve Eight is an organic model I think and we have to adapt and change and the Twelve Eight is going through another change and which is going to change the policy side and drive this political agenda forward I think there is a mileage in here, I mean everybody's been talking about this Twelve Eight model, so there's something here

it's just how do we harness it not for our own individual benefit. We want to make sure people understand what we do and how other people can benefit and utilise it, not to say well here's the right way, and you have a lot of these organisations talking about the Twelve Eight group and I say hang on you need to involve us in this, let us know and then we need to be strategic in being at the table where this model is talked about and try to get to the people who make policy because now Business Link has gone who make the policy about business support, so it is having all of that in place and how we are going to push that forward?

[Charlie – reflective meeting]

The narrative above develops our understanding of how engaging with feelings opens up opportunities to study the ways in which the group explore authority, the exercise of authority and power, the relationship of the group to their social, political and economic environment. In seeking to change the landscape of business support for minority entrepreneurs, learning about and engaging with policy makers was clearly an emotional and political endeavour, Psychodynamic insights highlights how the group balanced cognitive level and learning which involves the whole experience. The implication of this for the group was that it unveiled a myriad of tensions, contradictions, emotions and power dynamics that inevitably exist in understanding the front stage and back stage performance.

The process also provides a way of examining how commitment, belief and passion intersect with behaviours and activities geared towards rational task performance and those geared to emotional needs and anxieties. The application of this approach emphasises the importance of understanding group dynamics through the idea of connectedness and relatedness. In doing so, the emphasis is placed on ‘learning from the conscious and unconscious levels of connection that exist between and shape selves and others, people and systems’ (French and Vince, 1999, p.7). The disclosure and access to ‘emotions... are bound up with how we inhabit the world “with” others’: they are about ‘the intimate relationship between selves, objects and others’ (Ahmed 2004: 28).

➤➤ The narrative above develops our understanding of how engaging with feelings opens up opportunities to study the ways in which the group explore authority, the exercise of authority and power, the relationship of the group to their social, political and economic environment.

The importance of psychodynamic insight to the study of ethnic minority entrepreneurs is that it provides a vehicle for scrutinising *the inseparability of emotion and politics; and acknowledges that this relationship is at the heart of what it means both to learn and to organise* (Vince, 2002:73).



The process also provides a way of examining how commitment, belief and passion intersect with behaviours and activities geared towards rational task performance and those geared to emotional needs and anxieties.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The intention of this paper was to explore the individual and collective emotional experience of ethnic minority entrepreneurs. The illustrations presented in this paper reveal the granular experiences of ethnic minority entrepreneur’s do not take place in an insulated vacuum but are embedded in the entrepreneur’s everyday experience. Systems psychodynamics helps extends our understanding of the need to pay attention to the myriad of role that ethnic minority entrepreneur’s play and their emotional and political relationship with gatekeeper institutions, notably business support providers, financial institutions and professional bodies.

Applying a systems psychodynamic lens, to the power and emotional dynamics in building strategic networks exposes a process of mutual manipulation on a conscious and unconscious level in order to secure their investment (Voronov and Vince, 2012). In the illustrations above the entrepreneurs realised that diversity and inclusion was at least on the surface, an important agenda for business support institutions which they could exploit by using their own level of power and legitimacy to shape the enterprise and diversity agenda. Through the study of micro-level, everyday emotional analysis in the daily working lives of these business owners we are able to study the interplay between power, politics and emotions at work.

Ethnic minority entrepreneurship is an emotional and political endeavour and not simply about resourcing and planning, but rather about ‘intervening in the emotions and emotionality of organisation life’ (James and Arroba, 2005: 302). In this study I have attempted to illuminate how ethnic minority entrepreneurs take up personal authority to manage power dynamics by mediating, manoeuvring and negotiating various manifestations of emotions. In doing so I have highlighted that in attempting to break down boundaries, they also re-construct them as they questioned the potential exclusionary impact of their own capacity to handle the changes that attend to business growth, and their capacity to engage with key gatekeepers without colluding with political dynamics they were so critical of.

Finally, I have revealed how systems psychodynamics exposes ‘tension-management’ in action, by examining sites of tension within the group we ‘can reveal the complex relationship between organizing and learning’ (Vince, 2004: 77). This is captured in Vince’s (2004) concept of ‘organizing insight’. Yet current debates within entrepreneurship studies are short of appropriately designed empirical examples. Such an undertaking can also enhance our understanding of how and why policies work (or not) and how (organising) insight into an intervention designed to support growing businesses in disadvantaged communities can facilitate change.



In doing so I have highlighted that in attempting to break down boundaries, they also re-construct them as they questioned the potential exclusionary impact of their own capacity to handle the changes that attend to business growth, and their capacity to engage with key gatekeepers without colluding with dynamics they were so critical of.

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