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From pipe dream, to enterprise incubator, to award winning business: The case of Scriba PR

Abstract

Scriba PR is a very successful award winning technical PR company. This case study examines the journey of Scriba PR and its founder, Katie Mallinson. Seeing business ownership as a pipe dream at first, Katie drew extensively on her support networks, rigorous planning, and a University enterprise incubator to encourage and help her to take the leap into business ownership. Since that point, a dynamic interplay of individual and organisational identity has ensued alongside a growing and developing business. This case study explores issues of business model development, enterprise incubators, identity and female entrepreneurship.

Learning Objectives

- (i) To apply the Opportunity Business Model (Blundel et al., 2018) and identify elements of the business model that are critical to an enterprise's success.
- (ii) To recognise entrepreneurial characteristics and behaviours and critically analyse psychological perspectives on entrepreneurship.
- (iii) To examine, and critically analyse, the role of enterprise incubators, in the creation and development of a new venture.
- (iv) To evaluate entrepreneurial and enterprise identity development.

- (v) To understand barriers to female entrepreneurship and evaluate potential policy interventions to address these barriers.

The Start of an Idea

After four years of working in the public relations (PR) industry, Katie Mallinson wanted more challenge in her work and began to seriously consider setting up her own business. A key trigger was that she loved her PR job but was becoming disillusioned by the industry as she felt corners were being cut by PR firms due to the recession and clients' reduced marketing budgets (Digital Strategy Consulting, 2011). Katie had come to a fork in the road; either she had to prove to herself that PR could still be an important value adding business function for clients, or she had to find another job!

These stark options hung over Katie and unconsciously she began to informally build a business proposition in her mind. Coincidentally, the clients she worked with were all business-to-business and had a technical element to their work such as engineering or software. As Katie's dad was an engineer she had always wanted to work in a technical environment like him. Additionally, she realised that focussing on this niche could offer a potential business opportunity (Burns, 2016). At the same time she could break away from the one size fits all pricing approach adopted by many PR firms. Recognising that this pricing approach makes PR unaffordable for some companies – often those that need it most such as start-up firms with low budgets – Katie felt that a modular pricing structure could differentiate a new company from the competition.

Whilst these thoughts were circulating at the back of her mind, Katie was playing a key role in the organisation she was employed by. This role had afforded her exposure to different client scenarios and challenges that proved to be useful learning experiences (Cope, 2005). At the

same time, she had been bringing in new business for the company and found that the workload was gradually taking over her life. She realised that she was experiencing the all-consuming nature of running a small business, without actually gaining the benefits of owning the company herself. Nevertheless, at this point owning her own business remained a pipe dream for Katie. At times when she felt fed up with her job she wished she could set up on her own but still did not have faith in herself to do so – she lacked entrepreneurial self-efficacy (McGee et al., 2009).

Always being one to plan ahead though, Katie started to actively research the business opportunity she had identified. She did this using online resources, professional body information and anecdotal insights from her contacts. This research remained informal and tentative at this stage, since Katie had still not convinced herself whether she would ever be brave enough to take the leap into new venture creation. One area she did research was how many PR companies were servicing the technical niche that she had identified. She came to realise that the client briefs she enjoyed working on were actually the type of work that many PR companies would shy away from, and this is when Katie suspected this could form a key part of her potential company's value proposition (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010). Indeed, she was regularly receiving comments from journalists that her content was very good and that there were not enough technical PR companies to take on complex briefs in sectors such as demolition and recycling. Katie was also aware of discontent amongst organisations within those industries about the service they were receiving, so Katie viewed this as an additional opportunity to stand out in the sector by offering excellent service levels.

Katie's partner began to encourage her to set up her own company and drawing confidence from her personal support network, and the fact she had little to lose since she was unhappy in her current job, she became more and more tempted to go for it. Setting up in business is not without risk though, particularly in terms of lost earnings during the new venture creation

phase, so Katie informally enquired amongst her personal network if any freelance copywriting work was available. This would provide a fall-back option if she did not generate enough work for her company. The responses she received gave her the confidence that she could indeed pick up freelance work and would not be financially destitute if she did not generate enough business for the new venture. To reassure herself even more, she also reminded herself that if things really did not work out with the new venture then she could quite easily secure another job in the PR industry.

Although he was not an entrepreneur himself, Katie's partner had seen her approach to work and fully believed in her abilities to run her own business. He knew she had carefully considered her options and already had all the planning in place but she just needed the final push and the confidence to put the plans into action. However, despite all of her planning, Katie was still finding it difficult to take the plunge of setting up on her own. Knowing that she could not resist a dare, her partner confronted her with a solution to provide the final push that she needed. He would toss a coin and said 'If it lands on tails, you're going to resign in the morning!'. The coin was thrown up in the air and came down into his hand – tails it was! A resignation letter was drafted that same evening.



Figure 1: Katie Mallinson, Founder and Managing Director of Scriba PR

Bringing the Idea to Life

After working her notice period and having a short holiday with friends, Katie was ready to hit the ground running with her new business. She was 27 and about to embark on an exciting, yet scary, adventure.

Her overhead requirements were reasonably low – all she really needed was herself, her laptop, and a phone. Therefore, she did not need to write a formal business plan to request money from a bank. She had been living frugally recently so had built a cash safety net covering her for a few months in the absence of any additional income. She also had emotional support from her partner and parents who had additionally offered her financial support should she be running low on funds. Whilst all these factors helped satisfy Katie's risk averse nature, some risk still inevitably remained (Sonfield and Lussier, 2000). For example, she would be leaving a job which provided a secure income and in which she had built up strong client relationships, and she knew the financial climate meant that spending on PR was currently limited. However, the risk was a calculated one and Katie felt comfortable enough with the level of risk she faced (Spinelli and Adams, 2016).

Her dad had discovered that support was available through the enterprise incubator at the University where she had studied BA (Hons) Business Management. In a twist of fate, Katie only found out about this enterprise incubator scheme five days before the deadline by which she needed to apply, since support was only provided within five years of graduation. Fortunately, Katie had been preplanning the business in her head for a number of months, so within this short time she was able to prepare a business plan, work with a design agency to develop company branding, produce financial documents and prepare a pitch for a Dragon's Den style panel. Without being ferocious, the panel grilled her to make sure she had thought through the process for taking her idea to market, the opportunities available, the competition

and finance. Her ability to withstand this grilling was helped significantly by the prior planning Katie had done. Indeed, she already had the basics in her head of what she wanted the business to do, how much she would charge and what the company name would be. She had even completed some red tape such as registering with HMRC¹.



Figure 2: Scriba PR Logo

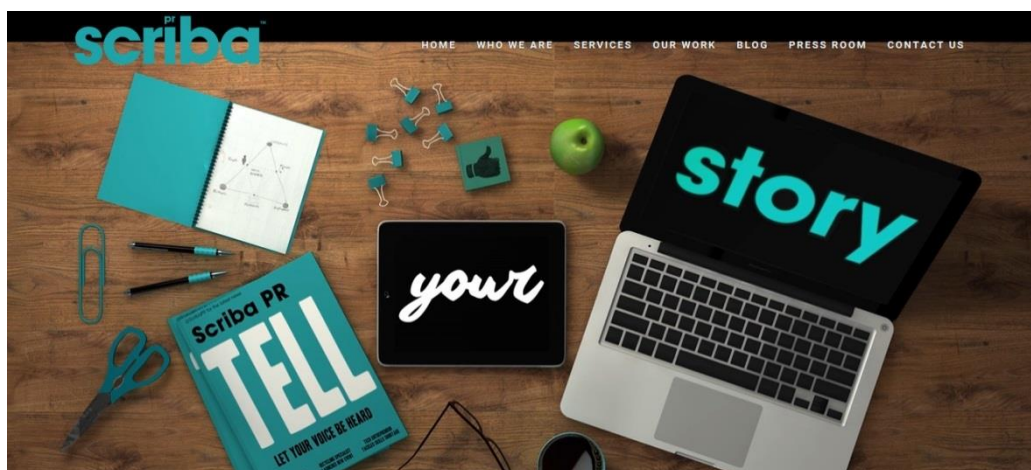


Figure 3: Scriba PR Website (<https://Scriba PR.com/>)

After a whirlwind few days Katie secured a place on the enterprise incubator scheme. The scheme provided her free office space in a hot desk environment. In addition to the financial benefit, this helped Katie avoid the feeling of isolation, since it was like working in a company with other people alongside her in the office. She also gained access to business mentors and received a small monthly grant of £500. This reduced risk for Katie even further as the grant helped buy a laptop, business cards, phone lines and subscriptions to sector analysis data; all the things her new business needed. Furthermore, the enterprise incubator had a meeting space

¹ Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs

so Katie could meet with clients before they decided to invest in her services. Her previous contract of employment meant that she could not contact anyone she had a prior relationship with, including former clients, for twelve months. She was therefore forced to seek new clients which she mainly did through social media and word-of-mouth recommendations. She felt that being located in the enterprise incubator, which was housed in a modern corporate-style building, gave new clients confidence in her business and indicated that the enterprise team had seen sufficient potential in her business to provide support (McAdam and McAdam, 2006).

The enterprise incubator scheme also provided access to experienced business advisors who could review Katie's business plans and provide advice and support. Valuable peer support and camaraderie was also available, since Katie could share her journey with other new businesses (McAdam and Marlow, 2008). It did not matter that the nature of the businesses were different to hers as they were encountering the same milestones together, for example, how to price themselves in the market and how to choose an accountant. This made Katie feel she was not on her own, which was crucial since she was used to working in a team in her previous job and wanted to avoid a feeling of isolation. In effect, the other entrepreneurs and the business mentors in the centre became an informal team for Katie.

All in all, the help of the enterprise incubator scheme, business mentors, and her peers enabled Katie to bring her business to life and to put her plans into action. This support network was invaluable as it allowed Katie to ask for opinions and advice to make informed decisions as she established her business. One problem did emerge though. Katie was conscious from the beginning that it was important to establish the company's identity as separate from her own, as this would enable business growth. Indeed, she had chosen the name Scriba PR (Scriba means writer in Latin) to establish a distinctive identity for the organisation and to stand out in an industry where it is common for PR companies to use their owner's name. She had hoped that clients would become familiar with this brand name so that if word of mouth reputation

began to spread and colleagues were hired to support expansion, clients would be unconcerned as to which member of the team supported them. She was finding, however, that this was not working. Since she was the only person in the business clients were seeing it as her, rather than the business, completing work for them. In the eyes of clients, Katie Mallinson and Scriba PR were one and the same.

Moving Out and Expanding

The enterprise incubator allowed new businesses to base themselves at the centre for twelve months. At that point the entrepreneurs needed to find their own office space. This coincided with Katie needing to recruit her first member of staff since the workload had grown too much for one person. Therefore, she was requiring a larger office space anyway. Although she was sorry to leave the enterprise incubator, the social capital she had amassed during her time there (Bandera and Thomas, 2017) proved fruitful as she had an open invitation from the business advisors to contact them for continuing support and advice should the need arise.

Whilst studying at university, Katie had taken a year-long sandwich placement at a small PR firm. This placement was a valuable experience and proved to be the start of her career in the industry. Katie was committed to offering the same opportunity to others. Therefore, before employing permanent staff she had several placement students working for Scriba PR. Bringing these placement students into the company showed Katie that she had sufficient work to delegate to others and that delegated work could be completed to a good standard. She realised, therefore, that she did not have to complete all the work herself and that employing staff would provide capacity to take on further clients (Brettel et al., 2010). It was still not easy for her to delegate work though, as she was keen to protect the trust and reputation she had built with clients.

To protect this trust, Katie wanted her employees to care about the clients' businesses as much as she did. Employing staff represented a risk so Katie recruited slowly and carefully, demonstrating her calculated approach to risk taking (Spinelli and Adams, 2016). For example, her first member of staff was only on a part-time short-term contract and, since she was a personal contact, Katie already knew her skill set and work ethic. When this member of staff moved on to full-time permanent employment, Katie recruited an older person with significant amounts of administrative experience. However, this new employee found it difficult to take instructions from someone younger than herself and her values did not align with Katie's. Seeking legal advice, Katie eventually asked this member of staff to leave. She reflected on this whole episode as a learning experience (Cope, 2003). After this Katie recruited staff who matched the values of the organisation even if this meant she needed to teach them the technical aspects of PR herself.

New clients continued to come on board at a rapid rate. Not wanting service levels to drop, Katie quickly found that she needed to build her team further. Her next two recruits had little experience in the PR industry; the first was looking for a career change and the second was a placement student who had impressed Katie. Both were capable, hardworking and keen to learn. Katie harnessed these qualities by providing clearly defined learning plans so that both members of staff could continually progress. It is important for Katie that new staff embody Scriba PR's values, so this forms a key part of their induction. This means that staff are then consistent when representing the company to clients. Katie also took a collective approach, openly consulting with her employees about future plans for the business in order to generate a shared vision.

Now that Scriba PR comprised three individuals, the team required a bigger working space so Katie expanded by also acquiring the office next door. This led to a substantial rise in overheads meaning this office expansion was a large risk for the company. As usual though, Katie had

undertaken detailed financial planning and calculations, and this gave her the confidence to believe that was the right move for the business.

Pre-Start-Up	-4 years -1 year -2 weeks -1 week	Upon graduation Katie worked for a PR company Began to develop ideas to establish her own business Handed in her notice Submitted bid to the incubator unit for enterprise funding and support
Start-Up	0	Scriba PR established and first client secured
Post Start-Up	+1 year +2 years	Moved into own premises and first member of staff recruited Scriba PR is a team of three and continues to expand

Figure 4: Timeline of the development of Scriba PR

What Next?

Scriba PR has experienced a continual growth in revenues and profits, and the business is again expanding with Katie offering a full-time position to a previous intern and recruiting another account manager. Katie and Scriba PR have also had their success recognised by winning multiple awards, including the Duke of York Young Entrepreneur Award, Forward Ladies' UK Start Up of the Year Award (Forward Ladies, 2017) and the company's blog being ranked the third top PR blog in the UK (Feedspot, 2018). Katie was also included in Yorkshire Business Insider's 42 under 42 list, which profiles 42 successful young entrepreneurs under the age of 42 (Insider Media Limited, 2017).



Figure 5: Katie being awarded the Duke of York Young Entrepreneur Award

The continuing expansion of the business does, however, leave Katie in a quandary as to what to do next and how to manage the business expansion. Whilst she is happy to grow the business to employ up to ten staff members, she currently has no desire to grow any further than this. She feels this would damage the personalised approach that Scriba PR offers its clients, thus losing one of the company's key competitive advantages. Furthermore, she never intended to run an empire, partly because this would mean her role would focus solely on leadership and overseeing the work of other people. This would be problematic since Katie wishes to remain hands on in the PR side of the business as much as possible.

Whilst large scale business growth is not currently in her plans, Katie does acknowledge that her feelings about this may change. This would represent a remarkable transformation for Katie who, upon creating Scriba PR, found it difficult to identify herself as the owner of a company and considered herself first and foremost to be a PR practitioner. Already this perception has evolved somewhat, with Katie now identifying with two roles in the business – that of PR practitioner and that of employer. Nevertheless, when asked about her occupation she still tends to reply that she works for a PR company, only revealing her ownership of the company in professional settings. As the business develops though, she is increasingly describing herself

as an entrepreneur. Whilst she thinks this sounds conceited (Thompson, 1999), with time she is identifying more with this label.

Whether Katie's role and associated identity develops again in the future depends largely on whether her current feelings about large scale expansion change. The future, as they say, is unknown.

Teaching Note

1. Synopsis

Since founding her company, Katie has successfully expanded Scriba PR from an enterprise start-up to an award winning company. Specialising in working with organisations offering technical products or services, Scriba PR's client base has grown through a reputation for high quality PR. This case study examines Katie's approach to creating and growing her business, with a specific focus on the business model adopted, the psychology of entrepreneurs, enterprise incubators, identity and female entrepreneurship.

2. Discussion Questions

Divide students into groups with a maximum of four members and ask them to discuss the following questions using material from the case and supplementary literature.

- (a) Using the Opportunity Business Model (Blundel et al., 2018), what are the drivers and dimensions of Scriba PR's business model? Which elements of the business model are particularly critical to the success of the company?
- (b) Making use of psychological theories of entrepreneurship, discuss to what extent Katie can be considered to be an entrepreneur.

- (c) How did the enterprise incubator support the creation and development of Scriba PR?
Were there any challenges that the enterprise incubator scheme could have posed for Katie?
- (d) How has Katie established an identity for herself as an entrepreneur and for Scriba PR as a business? Why was it important for her to keep the identities separate?
- (e) What barriers can potential female entrepreneurs face in setting up and running a new business? How might policy initiatives help address these barriers?

3. Analysis and Conclusions

- (a) Using the Opportunity Business Model (Blundel et al., 2018), what are the drivers and dimensions of Scriba PR's business model? Which elements of the business model are particularly critical to the success of the company?

Students should map the information in the case narrative into the different dimensions and drivers of the Opportunity Business Model (Blundel et al., 2018), as shown below. To address the second half of the question students should prioritise the critical factors within the business model that contribute to delivering the company's value proposition. Compelling arguments put forward for these critical elements can be the identification and servicing of the niche market, the support of wider networks in the enterprise incubator, Katie's consultative leadership style, and the use of a distinctive modular pricing structure. This is because these factors facilitate and provide key inputs (unique selling point, support networks, resources) to enable and support the company's value proposition. Nevertheless, other elements of the business model could also be

seen to be critical by students, and any such assertions should be supported by strong argumentation.

Dimensions – Dimensions are the building blocks of the business model and these are generally factors that the business can influence (Blundel et al., 2018).

- **Proposition:** Providing high quality PR services and excellent customer service to organisations offering technical products or services (for example, engineering, software, demolition, recycling).
- **People:** Katie has made important use of wider networks to facilitate the creation of Scriba PR, particularly the enterprise mentors and peers within the enterprise incubator. Katie herself has been a huge part of the business and has built a team based on individuals with the capacity and desire to learn. She values her staff and adopts a consultative team approach to the business, holding regular meetings and involving staff in developing and implementing the business' strategy. As a service-based organisation she believes this approach means new staff are socialised into the company values and offer clients the same level of service that Katie would.
- **Place:** Scriba PR serves a niche market that is often avoided by competitors. Providing a high quality service to this market offers an important source of competitive advantage. Key promotion channels include social media and word-of-mouth.

- **Process:** The technological infrastructure of Scriba PR is relatively simple, with laptops, phone lines, and internet connection being the main technologies required and utilised. Some processes can be identified within the case study, such as the use of learning plans for staff.
- **Profit:** The start-up capital requirements were low with the enterprise incubator scheme grant covering a large proportion of this. Revenues and profits have continued to grow for Scriba PR. Scriba PR adopts a modular pricing structure, which is an important unique selling point.

Drivers – Drivers are factors that enable a business opportunity to be captured (Blundel et al., 2018). Personal, Commercial, Societal and Technological drivers have all enabled the creation and development of Scriba PR.

- **Personal:** Katie’s knowledge of the PR industry and her experience with clients in the niche she targets were key enablers of the business. This enabled her to identify a niche in the market allowing Scriba PR to specialise and gain a reputation for high quality technical writing.
- **Commercial / Societal:** Arguably the societal and governmental pressure on Universities to demonstrate impact (Penfield et al., 2014) and to encourage entrepreneurial behaviour amongst students (Jones et al., 2017), as well as the growing competition in the higher education sector (Pucciarelli and Kaplan, 2016), have required Universities to undertake innovative and impactful

schemes, such as the enterprise incubator scheme Katie participated in. The enterprise incubator scheme was a key factor in Katie bringing Scriba PR to life.

- Technological: Although the technology requirements within Scriba PR are quite limited, the development of high capability low cost computing and internet facilities undoubtedly enabled Scriba PR to be set up with low overheads.

(b) Making use of psychological theories of entrepreneurship, discuss to what extent Katie can be considered to be an entrepreneur.

Whilst she is still a little uncomfortable with it, Katie is increasingly identifying with being labelled an 'entrepreneur'. Students could debate whether this label is appropriate. At a basic level, students could identify Katie as an entrepreneur by virtue of her being self-employed (Klein, 2008).

Nevertheless, students could consider the question more deeply by drawing on psychological perspectives on entrepreneurship. Psychological perspectives have focussed on identifying traits and cognitive tendencies of entrepreneurs (Kolvereid and Isaksen, 2012). Evidence can be found for Katie displaying some commonly considered entrepreneurial traits, such as need for achievement and innovativeness (Rauch and Frese, 2007). For example, students could find need for achievement in Katie's desire to show the value that PR can add for companies. Innovativeness can be seen in the value proposition she crafted for Scriba PR.

However, other traits and cognitive tendencies, such as over-optimism and perceived self-efficacy, are not so visible. Katie's lack of optimism can be seen by her preparing fall back options in case the business was unsuccessful. She also lacked entrepreneurial self-efficacy, doubting her ability to be an entrepreneur prior to business start-up. Higher self-efficacy is often seen to signal greater entrepreneurial intentions (McGee et al., 2009). Katie's lack of self-efficacy and successful establishment of her business could be argued by students to challenge this assertion, highlighting limitations and contradictions in different approaches to determining who is and is not an entrepreneur.

Whilst entrepreneurs are often seen to be risk takers, in many respects Katie could be considered to be risk averse. She has always planned extensively and, where possible, minimised risk and provided fall back options. Nevertheless, she has taken a number of risks, such as launching the business during a recession when companies were cutting back on marketing and PR budgets, and investing in hiring staff and expanding office space. Students could consider these factors in relation to debates about the degree to which entrepreneurs need to be risk takers (Caliendo et al., 2009).

Other typically cited entrepreneurial traits and cognitive tendencies, such as locus of control and alertness to opportunities, could also be considered by students in relation to the information in the case study. Students should relate their answers to critiques of trait theory and cognitive theory (Gartner, 1988; Kolvereid and Isaksen, 2012).

(c) How did the enterprise incubator support the creation and development of Scriba PR?

Were there any challenges that the enterprise incubator scheme could have posed for Katie?

Enterprise incubators offer a range of support to new start-up businesses (Battisti and McAdam, 2012). Scriba PR was provided with practical facilities, for example, desk space, access to meeting rooms, computers and printing. Students may identify how this helped keep start-up costs down and attract new clients through creating a professional image. This could be identified as an antidote to the resource poverty often experienced by new ventures (Winborg, 2015).

Katie was able to access both peer and professional support networks in the enterprise incubator. She found it helpful to be based with other start-up businesses as they shared experiences and discussed challenges they were facing (McAdam and Marlow, 2008). Professional support was also provided by experienced business advisers (McAdam and Marlow, 2007). They regularly reviewed Katie's business plans providing helpful guidance and advice. After leaving, Katie could still return for advice as she completed her transition from a start-up business to an independent enterprise. Students may wish to link these benefits to discussions around the value of social capital (Bandera and Thomas, 2017) and entrepreneurial learning (Cope, 2005) in the new venture creation process. It could be noted that the form of entrepreneurial learning experienced by Katie here was learning from others, rather than the more predominant experiential learning that can be identified in other parts of the case study (Blundel et al., 2018).

Students could be challenged, perhaps as part of a wider group discussion, to consider how overreliance on the support provided by the enterprise incubator scheme could have posed a potential risk for Katie once she was no longer part of the scheme. In particular, there was a risk that Katie could feel isolated when she left the enterprise incubator. A further potential challenge could have been becoming overly reliant on the advice provided by the business mentors (McAdam and Marlow, 2007), thus negatively affecting Katie's entrepreneurial self-efficacy (McGee et al., 2009). Nevertheless, this did not prove to be a problem for Katie as she never contacted them for advice after leaving the enterprise incubator.

- (d) How has Katie established an identity for herself as an entrepreneur and for Scriba PR as a business? Why was it important for her to keep the identities separate?

Students could note that when Katie started working for herself she was conscious that she was no longer an employee but she found it difficult to identify herself as the owner of Scriba PR. She saw herself predominantly to be a PR practitioner. She still feels that it sounds conceited and egotistical to label herself as an entrepreneur (Thompson, 1999) and, although she is becoming more comfortable with the term, she still rarely refers to herself as an entrepreneur and feels a certain disconnect with this identity. Students could engage with the literature on entrepreneurial identities, and particularly the masculine nature of traditional characterisations of the entrepreneur (Chasserio et al., 2014). Katie's personal identity appears to have evolved rather naturally alongside the development of the business and the development of her role in the business, rather than being actively managed by her.

Students should recognise that establishing Scriba PR with its own identity was important to Katie from the start. She did not want the business to be purely associated with herself and felt that this was important to enable business growth. She chose the name Scriba PR for this reason. As new members of staff joined the organisation they could then work under the company's identity and clients would still identify that they were receiving quality service from Scriba PR even if it was no longer Katie completing the work. Katie has tried to more actively manage the identity of the company (for example, through the name given to it), but has not always been successful, particularly in the early days of the new venture, in separating the identity of the business from her own identity.

- (e) What barriers can potential female entrepreneurs face in setting up and running a new business? How might policy initiatives help address these barriers?

In the European Union men are currently far more likely to be entrepreneurs than women (Halabisky, 2018). Whilst Katie has successfully started and grown a new venture, women can face a number of structural barriers that restrict their ability to become entrepreneurs and lead high growth businesses (Marlow and Swail, 2014). The following are some barriers, but students could identify others in their answers.

Inequality in employment opportunities, means that women may have less opportunity to accumulate credibility in the eyes of others and may have fewer influential networks to support the creation of a new venture (Marlow and Swail, 2014). Katie was able to build some helpful networks prior to starting up the business. For example, she drew on her journalist contacts to identify the viability of her business idea. She also utilised

her networks prior to business start-up to see if there was freelancing work available that she could undertake in case Scriba PR was slow to gain clients. Importantly, she also built a strong network with peers and business advisors in the enterprise incubator, and this network may have made up for any deficiencies in her entrepreneurial networks prior to starting up Scriba PR. The business advisors at the enterprise incubator also offered Katie an open invitation to ask for advice and support after leaving the incubator, meaning they formed an ongoing entrepreneurial network for Katie.

Access to finance can also be an issue for female entrepreneurs. Women are more likely than men to perceive barriers to securing finance which can affect their intention to start a business (Roper and Scott, 2009). Katie's new venture required very low start-up costs and she saved money to provide a buffer of capital for the business. Katie also had the option of financial support from her family if she needed it. These factors may, therefore, have mitigated potential issues with accessing finance. Whilst Katie successfully pitched for a place in the enterprise incubator and associated funding, research has found that investors can display bias against behaviours that are considered feminine (Balachandra et al., 2019). Students could determine that this may result from dominant masculine conceptions of what it means to be an entrepreneur.

Women also typically undertake the majority of household labour and caring responsibilities (Marlow and Swail, 2014). This can be at odds with typical notions of entrepreneurial careers as full-time, continuous and all consuming, whilst more flexible entrepreneurial options like home working and partaking in the gig economy are inherently insecure (Marlow and Swail, 2014). Students may also identify this as a potential barrier to women becoming entrepreneurs.

Whilst these are some potential barriers to female entrepreneurship, students could note that female entrepreneurship rates and some barriers to their entrepreneurship can differ between different countries (Brush and Cooper, 2012; Halabisky, 2018). Therefore, the identification of barriers is always context dependent. This could inform their consideration of policy interventions that may help support female entrepreneurship. Students could consider how it is important for policy initiatives to address the structural barriers that female entrepreneurs face and to be tailored to the specific geographic and / or industry contexts in which they will be implemented, rather than focussing too much on the individual level (for example, seeking to address perceived skills gaps of potential women entrepreneurs) and being generic and universally applied (Foss et al., 2018).

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