

"Shecopreneurship:" Female Ecopreneurs and How they do Business.

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Abstract:

The phenomenon of ecopreneurship is still an emerging one with a developing literature base and definitions (see Linnanen (2002) Pastakia (1998) Schaltegger (2002.)) A working definition is offered to us by Schaltegger (2002, p.47): "Ecopreneurship can be roughly defined as 'entrepreneurship through an environmental lens'." One of the main thrusts in the literature to date, is the development of a typology of ecopreneurs, defined by Pastakia (1998 p.157) to be "...a new breed of eco-conscious change agents who may be called ecological entrepreneurs (ecopreneurs for short.)" As yet there is little consensus on such a typology and almost no reference to the issue of gender therein. This paper explores the concept of what is newly termed "shecopreneurship." The term describes those firms where not only are their entrepreneurs ecologically-minded in devising their business and/or its products - *ecopreneurship* - but further narrows its scope by focusing on instances where those entrepreneurs happen to be women - thus *shecopreneurship*.

We may be forcing the linguistic fun a little too far, but the message remains clearly on-line. Women entrepreneurs are a growing force in our society, and this paper explores an increasing tendency for them to be environmentally-conscious in their business decisions and product ideas¹. There is of course, an original idol in this field in Anita Roddick. As Isaak (2002, p.83) comments: "Her 'green business' was an existential odyssey that took her all over the world combining her financial needs, her political and social needs, her desire for foreign adventure and, ultimately, her effort to move the cosmetics industry towards sustainability." This paper is largely descriptive, in that it presents case studies of a selected few of these shecopreneurship start-ups and describes their shecopreneurs. It does this against a background of the emerging theoretical underpinnings of ecopreneurship and in light of these, draws conclusions as to the possible influence of gender in ecopreneurship in terms of both business and entrepreneurial characteristics. It also necessarily examines the instigating factors that brought these start-ups into being. The paper is by definition cross-disciplinary but rather than getting tangled in the theory, it concentrates instead on the actuality

¹ A further factor is that these types of business often also demonstrate additional social responsibilities as key drivers, and whilst that is referred to here where appropriate, its full discussion is for another paper.

of what is a newly-emergent phenomenon in a western business context. The findings illustrate that shecopreneurs may share multi-success criteria, some of which may be considered anti-capitalist. The shecopreneurs profiled here for example, are looking to other goals ahead of financial ones. The latter are not, however, entirely absent, but the financial goals are very strongly conditioned and over-ruled by the eco-conscious nature of the business. In short, sustainability imperatives come first. In addition, the paper finds that these shecopreneurs typically have very grounded lifestyle reasons for instigating the business operations in the first place. What this research suggests is that the development of at least a strand of eco-entrepreneurship may well be characterised by gender-oriented criteria - "shecopreneurship" may be here to stay.

(517 wds)

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