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Exploring the Discourses of Small Enterprise Proprietors.

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EXPLORING THE DISCOURSES OF SMALL ENTERPRISE PROPRIETORS.

ABSTRACT

Over the last three decades the discourses of strategy and enterprise have developed significantly in the context of large corporate organizations and increasingly within and for the public sector. The discourses of strategy and enterprise have developed in relationship with each other and are generative of various attributes and dilemmas for the identity of the strategist/entrepreneur. This study looks at how these important discourses are deployed by small enterprise proprietors in periodical publishing in Ireland as they construct their business identities with one of the authors. Interview data from one proprietor is subjected to a discourse analysis drawing particularly on the traditions of Gilbert & Mulkay (1984), Potter & Wetherell (1987), McAuley, Duberley, & Cohen, (2000) and Wood & Kroger (2000). A key feature of the discourses is the salience of the vocabulary of the enterprise culture which is embraced, deployed, developed and yet also resisted by the proprietors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Enterprise discourse has been discussed on a macro level by authors such as Fairclough, (1991), Selden (1991), Carr & Beaver (2004) and du Gay, (2004). Enterprise discourse has been traced to the political project of the New Right, particularly associated with the governments of the British premier Margaret Thatcher (Fairclough, 1991), though it has persisted beyond the political lives of particular office holders. The discourse of strategic management has been similarly analysed on a macro level by authors such as Knights &

Morgan (1991), Hendry (2000), du Gay (2004) and Thomas (2003). Strategy discourse has been traced as emerging from the need for legitimacy of the professional non-owner manager (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Strategic management has also been seen as key to the emergence of managerialism within the public sector (e.g.Stoney, 1998 and McAuley et al., 2000). Both the generic discourses of strategy and of enterprise function to reshape how individuals construct their identities through the use of these discourses (du Gay, 1996:152).

The relationship between the discourses of management and enterprise is an interesting one, since there is an implied tension between the creative, revolutionary nature of enterprise and the staid, bureaucratic nature of management: For example Grey (2004) argues that management and enterprise are to some extent contradictory but nevertheless serve complementary ideological functions, whereas Hendry (2004) sees the emergence of enterprise culture as indicative of a historical shift in the balance between the discourses of hierarchy and the market. Since strategic management is possibly "the most managerialist of the management specialties" (Levy, Alvesson, & Willmott, 2003:93) its relationship with enterprise is particularly controversial.

This study looks at how these important discourses operate when small firm proprietors' talk about their enterprises. It contrasts with much work in the area which has been concerned with larger organizations (e.g. Knights & Morgan, 1995; Eriksson & Lehtimäki, 2001; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Räisänen & Linde, 2004; and Samra-Fredericks, 2003). Rather this work is part of a smaller but growing stream concerned with the metaphors and discourses manifest in and around small firms (e.g. Cohen & Musson, 2000; Rae, 2004 and Rigg, 2005). Small firms are the subject of much policy

interest (Carr, 2000:105) and many discursive resources are made available for their proprietors' use (Aligica & State, 2005). Indeed those who run small enterprises are the ideological heroes of the enterprise culture (du Gay, 1996:152 and Carr,2000:105). Additionally small enterprise proprietors should be particularly well-placed to take the integrated view of the firm held to be a key feature of strategic management (Johnson & Scholes, 2002). Yet there is a disconnect between the more recent historical development of these discourses (of strategy and enterprise) and their current deployment within small enterprises. Thus small firm proprietors are valuable new sources for an exploration of the discourses of enterprise and strategy.

The rest of this paper is divided into four sections. The first of these elaborates on what is written about the discourses of enterprise and strategy and their interrelationship. It also provides in diagrammatic form a view of some of the attributes of these discourses and their interrelationship. The next section describes the methodology used in this study and the larger study with which it is associated. Choosing the context of small publishing firms in Ireland provides not only an interesting scale of organization in which to study the discourses of enterprise and strategy but also an interesting social and economic macro environment as well as a particularly intriguing industry. Section four then presents a discourse analysis of one interview which illustrates the deployment of strategy and enterprise discourses in such a context. Finally the paper closes with a discussion of the implications of the research.

2. THE DISCOURSE OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND ENTERPRISE

The relationship between the discourses of management (including strategy) and enterprise is an interesting and contested one. There is an implied tension between the

creative, revolutionary nature of enterprise and the staid, procedural, bureaucratic nature of management generally and strategy in particular (e.g. Kanter, 1983). Hendry (2004) sees the emergence of enterprise culture as indicative of a historical shift in the balance between the discourses of hierarchy and the market. Others see enterprise discourse as including both dimensions of creativity and control:

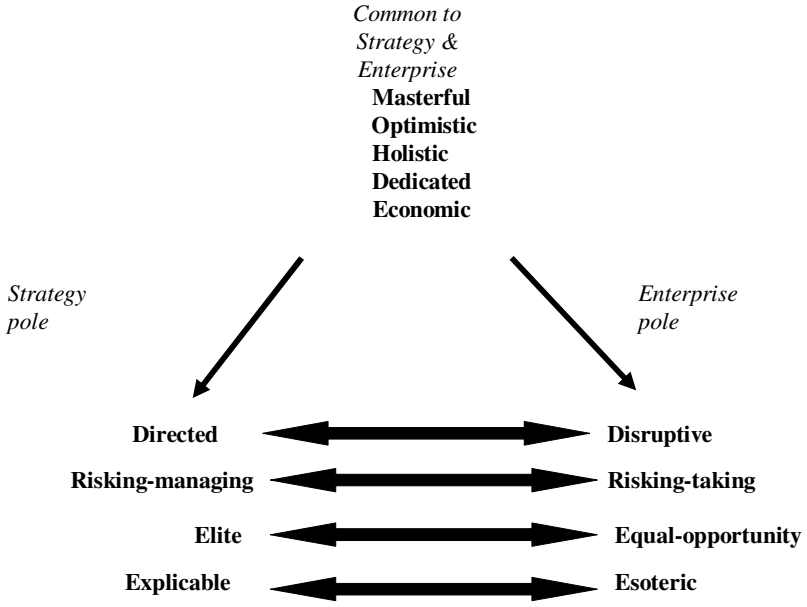
> "The first of these dimensions places an emphasis on intuition, spontaneity, creativity, dynamism, daring and risk-taking ..... The second dimension focuses on management and control… … the relationship between these two dimensions of the entrepreneurial management discourse should not be understood in terms of 'either/or', rather it should be understood as a 'both/and' relationship." (Carr, 2000:99)

On the other hand Heracleous (2003) argues that strategy can include creativity through double-looping strategic thinking. Grey (2004:9) argues that while management (including strategy) and enterprise are to some extent contradictory they nevertheless serve complementary ideological functions: "… enterprise is the solution to the problems of management and management is a solution to the problems of enterprise."

Part of the disagreement on what the relationship between management (and strategy as management *par excellence*) and enterprise discourses depend on how these discourses are defined and what are considered their limits. In Figure 1 we list five attributes which can be seen as core to both strategy and enterprise: masterful, optimistic, holistic, dedicated and economic. While each of these attributes might be broken down into aspects that are more prominent in one discourse or another they do capture major elements common to both the discourses of strategy and enterprise. Also in Figure 1 are four attributes (Directed, Risk-managing, Elite, Explicable) listed on the left of the figure which are considered as belonging to a more traditional, extreme, or conventional pole of what is meant by strategy. This pole of strategy might be identified with strategy as

typified by the design, planning and positioning schools of strategy (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998). Clearly there are many other views of strategy from the 'evolved strategic management' of Wilson (1994) through to the entrepreneurial double-looping strategic thinking of Heracleous (2003). However where enterprise and are strategy are in tension with strategy the four attributes listed are a good representation of the strategy side of that opposition. On the right hand side of Figure 1 are presented four oppositional (to conventional schools of strategy) attributes (disruptive, risk-taking, equal-opportunity and esoteric) of enterprise discourse. Again this characterization of enterprise discourse concentrates on the more traditional and extreme schools of enterprise (typified perhaps by the unruly destructively creative entrepreneur of Schumpeter). Here we are downplaying more complex portrayals such as that of Hjorth (2002) or the "strategy of entrepreneurial management" of Amit, Brigham, & Markman, (2000:97). When the oppositional poles of strategy and enterprise are broadened out to include more nuanced characterizations the discourses of strategy and enterprise stretch into each other. Both of because this overlap and because of the binary oppositions at each pole we therefore - in line with the work of Carr (2000) and Grey (2004) - see enterprise and strategy as being intimately related. They are part of one overall set of discourses which contains ideological dilemmas (Billig et al., 1988). These dilemmas make the discourse productive and are the bands that tie the discourses together.

Figure 1 Descriptors of Strategy-Enterprise Discourses



Masterful

Both the discourses of strategy and enterprise are masterful in the sense they imply an active powerful intentional masculine agent who drives and shapes the world (Knights & Morgan, 1991:267; Liedtka, 1998:123 and Lilley, 2001:73). In the case of the entrepreneur Nicholson & Anderson (2005:161) puts it as follows:

"The entrepreneurial myth remains resolutely male. The entrepreneur is still the active seducer, aggressor, pursuer, rather than an object of affection or action. He bridges worlds, bends time with an 'unquantifiable, limitless' impact on the world around him."

And Clegg, Carter, & Kornberger (2004:26) put it as follows for strategy "It used to be the gods that determined the fate of men and women; now, at least in MBAs, it is the strategists."

Optimistic

The discourses of enterprise and strategy are both optimistic: enterprise and strategy are part of the modern condition (Nicholson & Anderson, 2005:153 and Clegg et al., 2004:21) and a keen part of the modern idea is that most optimistic of ideas: progress. Clegg et al., (2004:21) declares that modernism " …underpins the very foundations of strategy", while Nicholson & Anderson, (2005:153) states that enterprise is "…a true (or nearly true) reality of wealth creation, a righteous production of modernity." Eriksson & Lehtimäki (2001) identify in their study of a local council's strategy that strategic discourse involves a rhetoric of 'developmental optimism', while Nicholson & Anderson, (2005:155) note that "Notions of progress, development, and universality are inherent in the enterprise culture paradigm."

Holistic

Both strategy and enterprise are discourses concerned in their very core with portraying a holistic view. This cannot be said of, for example, of marketing discourse which at least in its origins and functional expertise is focused on the revenue side of profit-making. Hendry (2000:970) notes that "Strategic discourses are characterized by a generality that is absent from discourses associated with the functional areas of management…", a view with which (Lilley, 2001:75) agrees and which can be confirmed by looking at authorities on strategic thinking (e.g. Liedtka, 1998:122) and popular strategy textbooks (e.g. Johnson & Scholes, 2002:10). Enterprise too is concerned with expressing an overall grasp of the situation: "I found that the entrepreneurial spirit producing innovation is

associated with a particular way of approaching problems that I call 'integrative' .."(Kanter, 1983:27)

Dedicated

Both strategists and entrepreneurs are a dedicated hard-working bunch, at least in the dominant accounts of their activities. According to Bygrave, (2004:5-6) most entrepreneurs "are totally dedicated to their business, sometimes at considerable cost to their relationships with friends and families. They work tirelessly." Those small business propretoires who sacrifice the growth of the firm for an easy life may well be shorn of their entrepreneurial identity: "Those who choose a model of 'small and stable business' (called trundlers) over a model of 'fast growth business' (called gazelles) are less likely to be recognized and accepted as entrepreneurs." (Lewis & Llewellyn, 2004:7).

Strategists are no sloths either: Porter (1996:77) talks of the strategist being subject to "constant pressures to compromise, relax trade-offs, and emulate rivals". While disagreeing with Porter on many issues, Mintzberg (1973:29) characterises the life of the manager as "Much work at unrelenting pace" and it is this typical manager who he observed "..juggled a large number of strategic issues; [and it is] the manager not the group[that] made the strategic decisions." (Mintzberg, 1973:257). Dedication is clearly a key component for the identities created by enterprise and strategy discourses.

Economic

Both strategy and enterprise are key ideas in economics. They relate to economic life and together with consumption construct many of our understandings of the market, and increasingly of society more generally. One of the earliest modern uses of the word strategy came with Von Neumann and Morganstern's foundational work in the game

theoretic approach of economics (Braecke, 2001:219) . Economics remains a dominant discipline in strategy with the success of Michael Porter's work being the most well known (see Foss, 1996 and Bromiley & Papenhausen, 2003 for discussions on strategy and economics). Much of the economics influencing strategy (the Structure-Conduct-Performance approach, game-theory etc) stresses the rational and calculative nature of actors and helps economists identify the equilibria in which actors will somehow find themselves optimally settled. These analyses of economists involve the comparison of one static situation with another without any explanation of how one situation evolves into another. For this missing dynamic, economics needs the vivacity of Schumpeter's entrepreneur. Schumpeter's value creating entrepreneur has become a key actor in economics restoring action and history to the static equilibrated world into which neoclassical economists had locked themselves (Schumpeter, 1976). While strategy helps economics look for equilibrium and stability, the entrepreneur provides a destabilizing force to economics thus ensuring the search for stability can be an issue.

So the common ground of enterprise and strategy discourses share quite a lot of attributes which we have summarized with masterful, optimistic, holistic, dedicated and economic Having discussed the areas in the spectra of enterprise and strategy which overlap the most, we will now discuss the aspects of both discourses that are most in tension using the four poles identified in Figure 1 above.

Directed/Disruptive

Strategy stresses direction (Barry & Elmes 1997 and Samra-Fredericks, 2003), rule-following (Ansoff, 1968:106), and hopes to steady the organization through stormy

waters. Enterprise disrupts and destroys (Schumpeter, 1976)- it is the creative wave so destructive of those who wish not to rock the boat. Strategic discourse evolved to provide legitimacy for professional managers (Knights & Morgan, 1991) whereas for entrepreneurs two characteristics seems to stand out

> "One is self-interest, not in the pejorative sense of 'selfishness' but in the sense of being driven by one's own goals rather than by anyone else's. The other is unaccountability. Real entrepreneurs are certainly willing to take risks in pursuit of goals, but it is their own goals that motivate and energize them, not other people's. They are resolutely independent." (Hendry, 2004:55)

Risk-Managing /Risk-Taking

Strategy is about managing risk and turning uncertainty into risk, it is "… the means of transforming uncertainties in the environment into calculable risks." (Knights & Morgan, 1991:270). Strategy focuses on the sure development of core competence to handle risk, whereas enterprise is about pushing beyond the comfort zone of competence into uncertainty: "Entrepreneurs - and entrepreneurial organizations - always operate at the edge of their competence , focusing more of their resources on what they do not yet know (e.g. investment in R & D) than on controlling what they already know."(Kanter, 1983:27)

Elite/Equal-opportunity

In the traditional discourses of strategy the strategic decisions tend to be the preserve of elite directors and top managers with the consequences of those decisions flowing downwards forcing the less powerful to act within the direction set by the elites (Samra-

Fredericks, 2004:126). On the other hand enterprise is more about bottom-up sources of change, with "…how the microchanges introduced by individual innovators relate to macrochanges or strategic reorientations." (Kanter, 1983:36). Enterprise is an equal opportunity discourse empowering even the underdog and often those shaped by adversity (Pitt, Rothman, & Burnard, 2002:3). Indeed this tension between strategy and discourse is well-recognised and may form an important part of the bind between the poles of both discourses for "Enterprise is the solution to the problem of management and, in particular, as with its other anti-elitist applications, it challenges the elite privileges of the hierarchical manager."(Grey, 2004:12).

Expliciable/Esoteric

Strategic discourses at least partly evolved to allow professional managers to rationalise their positions to shareholders and other stakeholders so " It is characteristic of the discourse [of strategy] that everything is explicable in the end" (Knights & Morgan, 1991:263). Strategy therefore –at least in its traditional forms – must make the most of "its roots in rationalist reference points (i.e. logic, objectivity, technique) and abstractions (i.e. modelling, simplification). " (Grandy & Mills, 2004: 1157). Enterprise on the other hand is more esoteric, acting as the spirit which drives capitalism forward in unpredictable and innovative ways through incarnate entrepreneurs. Even critics like Jones & Spicer (2005: 237) refer to "….the paradoxical and apparently mysterious nature of entrepreneurship discourse that allows it to be so effective in enlisting budding entrepreneurs and reproducing the current relations of economic domination."

3. METHODOLOGY

We have seen that there is a disconnect between the more recent historical development of these discourses (of strategy as a legitimizing professional managers and enterprise as a way of reinvigorating the public service) and their current deployment within small enterprises. A major site of the development of the development of both enterprise and strategy discourses has been in the United Kingdom and in the United States. Thus small firm proprietors in Ireland are valuable new sources for an exploration of the discourses of enterprise and strategy.

Below we present extracts from an interview conducted by the first author as part of a larger research project where the primary method of data collection was interviewing managers in small Irish firms. Interviews were chosen as an efficient way of stimulating strategy and enterprise discourse, and because interviews tend to involve much performance of identity.

The particular industry context of this study (part of the publishing sector) has been subject to considerable technological innovation over the last decades, yet the professions of advertising, sales and journalism remain important in forming the paradigms of the industry. Ireland – where the interviews were conducted- is an interesting context for a number of reasons: its rapid economic growth since 1990; its exposure to, but separateness from Anglo-American culture; the central role of EU policy in its success and its comparatively recent emergence as an advanced capitalist country.

The analytical approach followed is influenced by all forms of discourse analysis but particularly the traditions of Gilbert & Mulkay (1984), Potter & Wetherell (1987), McAuley et al., (2000) and Wood & Kroger, (2000). Within this approach "… it is

possible to distinguish two broad emphases which are largely complementary to each other. On the one hand, studies have been concerned with the general resources that are used to construct discourse and enable the performance of particular actions. This style of work is most akin to Foucauldian analysis in that it attempts to map out broad systems or 'interpretative repertoires' which are used to sustain different social practices.... On the other hand, studies have concentrated more on the detailed procedures through which versions are constructed and made to appear factual. This style of work is closer to the concerns of conversation analysis..." (Potter & Wetherell, 1994:48-49). Given the aim of this present research it is more closely aligned with the former emphasis – that which attempts to identify interpretative repertoires in a particular area of social practice – than with the details of deployment of those repertoires. However it would be a mistake to draw a very sharp distinction between these two emphases as it is in performing functions in particular discourses that interpretative repertoires appear. While we aim to provide transparent and detailed analysis, we see this work as being incorrigibly interpretative: For "… try as they may, analysts cannot prevent themselves engaging with human products in a human, and therefore interpretative way." (Fairclough 2001:22).

4. ANALYSIS

Here we present a detailed analysis of one interview which though unique has characteristics in common with a number of other interviews conducted with small firm proprietors. For example although the initial interest of the research was in strategy discourses the experience of the interviews themselves forced a reappraisal and the

decision to also analyse the very prevalent enterprise discourses. This phenomenon is as true in the other interviews as in the interview analysed below.

Ashling is the co-founder and part-owner of a small firm. Brendan is the researcher and full-time academic. Brendan and Ashling had met each other previously but were not well acquainted. An email sent to Ashling prior to the interviewer declared that the "research is about strategic thinking" and involved "unstructured face to face interviews with directors of small to medium sized enterprises.." Turn numbers are given for ease of reference, and where turns from the interview itself have been omitted the timing of particular extracts within the overall interview are noted. A complete transcript of the extracts is included in Appendix 1 A Jefferson type transcription notation is used and detailed in Appendix 2. Pseudonyms are used for reasons of confidentiality. The extracts in text are presented in the order in which they occurred in the interview.

This excerpt is about 1 minute into the the 48 minute interview. Ashling like many of the interviewees introduces enterprise discourse into the interaction:

3 Ashling: So I was there, I was lucky it was a small organisation and [name of Managing Director and Firm founder] was very entrepreneurial and very kind of go ahead and give people a chance and that. And there was a great I remember at my interview he said to me `oh so you want to be a journalist?' and I said `oh yes, I do I do.' And eh, then I proceeded to tell him that I was signing up for an evening course in journalism in Rathmines. He kept nodding,

4 Brendan: [Mm
5 Ashling: sagely.] Unbeknownst to me the course doesn't actually exist.
6 Brendan: [(Laugh)
7 Ashling: (Laugh)]It was only full time during the day.
8 Brendan: [Right
9 Ashling: from] there we went on

Clearly Ashling sees at least the enterprise discourse as relevant to her situation as describes her previous employer as masterful being "very entrepreneurial and very kind

of go ahead" (Turn 3). Furthermore the way she talks here clearly is more towards the enterprise pole than in the common ground of strategy-enterprise discourse. Her previous employer is portrayed as a risk-taker by having the attribute of being willing to "give people a chance and that" (Turn 3) and there is something of the disruptive 'rogue' rule-breaking about the conversation as Ashling laughs at her claims to be starting a course that doesn't actually exist (Turn 7), a pretence that may have been colluded in by the entrepreneur (Turns 3 and 5).

Our next excerpt is about 2 minute 20 seconds into the the 48 minute interview, and again uses the strategy-enterprise discourse weaving them together in a way that contrast the poles of the discourses:

13 Ashling: And Frank had always been speaking about the idea of doing a magazine.
14 Brendan: Right, yeah, yeah.
15 Ashling: And 'cause of his family background in the business and I was, I mean, I read, there isn't a magazine in Easons bookshop that I haven't read.
16 Brendan: Right.
17 Ashling: I store them up right there's the deposit for my house. But anyway.
18 Brendan: Yeah
19 Ashling: And eh so I thought this was interesting. And I thought I'd prefer to do it with someone who actually knew the business
20 Brendan: Right,right.
21 Ashling: To me (.) being entrepreneurial is one thing, but you can't be stupid [either.
22 Brendan: Right] [right, right.
23 Ashling: You know, and going into] the great unknown with no experience is probably not the best strategy. And eh, so we were talking about it. ((three lines excluded here to avoid identification)) And I had thought this sounds interesting, but I hadn't really committed beyond that. So a few people had actually turned him down and said no this is too risky etc.

Ashling hints that not everybody presents an equal opportunity but rather that it was preferable to work with a particular type of person – "someone who actually knew the

business" (Turn 19) who had a "family background in the business" (Turn 15). This commonsensical explication of the need for knowledge is contrasted with pure enterprise: "being entrepreneurial is one thing, but you can't be stupid [either" (Turn 21). It is noteworthy how despite the interview requested as being 'about strategic thinking" the word 'strategy' or 'strategic' only appears four times in the entire interview: two of these times Brendan uses the word and two times the word is uttered by Ashling. One of these times a strategy word is used is a polite agreement with Brendan's labeling of a trivial and humorous list as strategic (not shown in extracts). In the last turn of this extract there is the only unprompted explicit mention of strategy by Ashling and here it carries a rather ironic and sarcastically understated sense "going into] the great unknown with no experience is probably not the best strategy" (Turn 23). Ashling is keen to not deny the risky entrepreneurial element of the venture stressing that "few people had actually turned him down and said no this is too risky etc." (Turn 23) and though she was interested she had dedicated herself at that stage" but "I hadn't really committed beyond that" (Turn 23). Her dedication and love of publishing is evident however in that the money she has spent is equivalent to a "deposit for my house" (Turn 17).

About 5 minutes 30 seconds into the 48 minute interview, Ashling talks of her relationship with the lead entrepreneur of the venture she helped start:

27 Ashling: But then em, then the work kind of kicks in. But we were very fortunate from the start because em like (.) in a small business you have to, while two of us had done it, were in it from (.) the [start.

28 Brendan: Mm.

29 Ashling: I always, em kinda, I didn't defer to him, but there can only really be one boss.

30 Brendan: Okay, right yeah.

31 Ashling: And if one has more, has more experience well then it will work if (.)

32 Brendan: Right and you were happy to (.)

33 Ashling: More than happy, because I didn't know anything.

34 Brendan: Right.

35 Ashling: But like me, you know, I knew absolutely nothing, I mean I know a lot more now.

36 Brendan: Right, right.

37 Ashling: Seven years down the road. I knew nothing at that point. So we worked well as a team because em, he'd be a lot more, like we'd be meetings for example and he'd say to someone `well why aren't you talking to the Sunday Business Post, they're a lot bigger?' And I'd be going `hello'. (Laugh).

38 Brendan: Yeah. (Laugh).

39 Ashling: Kicking him under the table. So we were kind of, we made a point, it doesn't sound to be saintly or anything but we were very, very, very straight, from the off.

40 Brendan: Right.

41 Ashling: You know, we never inflated our figures, we never did anything like that, we just said look, we're small but we're neat, but at least we deliver what we say we do, and we're audited and all that kind of stuff. So that kind of kept, that got us going. And there we were, we were, we just kept, we kept, we've always kept it quite tight.

That any deference to the lead enterprenuer is a little uncomfortable is evidenced by the hesitations in the first turn of this extract (Turn 27), and the denial of deference in the third turn – "I didn't defer to him, but there can only really be one boss" (Turn 29). This hierarchy is justified by the experience of one – "And if one has more, has more experience well then it will work if (.)" (Turn 31) and the lack of knowledge of the other - "because I didn't know anything" (Turn 33). Ashling accomplishes this delicate balancing of the equality of the enterprise discourse with the more elitist element by using a hierarchy based on possession of knowledge. Such a hierarchy of knowledge based in explicability is- we have argued in the theoretical section of this paper - typical of strategy discourse. The portrayals of both Ashling and her partner now become much more those of directed strategists who "were very, very, very straight, from the off" (Turn 39) The rule-breaking, slightly roguish entrepreneur is no longer present instead the

legitimate accountable language of strategy is invoked: “we never inflated our figures, we never did anything like that, we just said look, we're small but we're neat, but at least we deliver what we say we do, and we're audited and all that kind of stuff” (Turn 41)

At various points in the interview Ashling does portray both herself and her business partner as portraying the attributes common to both strategy and enterprise discourses. This following excerpt starts about 26 minutes 38 seconds into the 48 minute interview.

45 Ashling: What annoys me about my work? Em (3)Nothing, nothing really, no, em the things that annoy me about myself for example, I can be impatient sometimes

46 Brendan: Mmm

47 Ashling: Unnecessarily impatient and I'm that's something I'm trying to correct. I can be kind of, it's something like, you know I can be <u>tetchy</u>

48 Brendan: Right.

49 Ashling: unnecessarily. Or it's because I see things that are not being <u>done</u> (.)

50 Brendan: Right

51 Ashling: like for example when Frank asks me to do something I'll do it, because I figure, well, you know, or vice versa. But then if other girls you ask >in the office< and it doesn't happen for about a week.

52 Brendan: Right.

53 Ashling: That really bugs me. But I learnt to kind of, say, 'ok well hang on, they have other things to do and step back and don't

54 Brendan: Right.

55 Ashling: lose the plot. And So that's something I've had to work on and I think it's going to be a life long.[

56 Brendan: Right. (laugh)

57 Ashling: job.(laugh)] Because I don't think I think it's just in me that I'm kind of, I can be impatient if I don't see, because I exact very high standards

58 Brendan: Right.

59 Ashling:. from myself. So therefore, I impose the same high standards

60 Brendan: Right.

61 Ashling: on other people. Which isn't fair.

62 Brendan: Right.

63 Ashling: And

64 Brendan: They mightn't be as committed or (.) yeah.

65 Ashling: Exactly. And it's not right. You know you can't expect everyone to be as anal as I am, you know what I mean, about things. So that's something that annoys me about myself, yeah.

66 ((10 turns are exluded here because they provide details that would allow identification of the interviewee))

67 Ashling: Em, and that, It is tricky though, because you, you kind of, you expect people, you expect, as I said to you earlier, you expect very high standards from people because you're imposing the same standards. And you have to realise that, you know they're not all going to have the same level of huge com- they're very good, I mean, they're all, we're very lucky with the staff that we have.

68 Brendan: Right.

69 Ashling: But em, you have, not make allowances, allowances is the wrong word, but you have to allow for people to have a life.

The above extracts opens with Ashling reconsidering the question she has been asked about what annoys her about her work. Such a questions seems to pose some difficulty as Ashling hesitates for a full three seconds before answering "Nothing nothing really no em" (Turn 45). It seems to be the passive role in which the question casts her that is the problem as she reconfigures the question in a way which makes it more about things within her locus of control so it is about "the things that annoy me about myself for example" (Turn 45). Such a cruce (Fairclough 1992:230) and the resulting reconfiguration of the question seems to be in line with both the strategy and enterprise discourses tendency to portray the entrepreneur/strategist as masterful. Another feature of this masterfulness is the active doing nature of being an entrepreneur/strategist which Ashling portrays herself as having when compared to others: "like for example when Frank asks me to do something I'll do it, because I figure, well, you know, or vice versa. But then if other girls you ask >in the office< and it doesn't happen for about a week" (Turn 51). Ashling also works her dedication (another common feature of the enterprise and strategy discourses discussed in the earlier section of the paper) in the last turns of this extract "you kind of, you expect people, you expect, as I said to you earlier, you expect very high standards from people because you're imposing the same standards.

And you have to realise that, you know they're not all going to have the same level of huge com- they're very good, I mean, they're all, we're very lucky with the staff that we have" (Turn 67) but "you have to allow for people to have a life" (Turn 69). Thus Ashling contrasts her dedication to the business with employees who however good are allowed to have a life.

In the above extracts we see Ashling skillfully and at times very subtly present herself and her business partner as both strategists and entrepreneurs. She accomplishes this presentation carefully handling the tensions –identified in the literature – between the poles of strategy and enterprise. Ashling in interaction with the interviewer delicately fashions a discourse which smoothly reconciles the extremes of both discourses in a credible account.

In addition to skillfully handling the tensions and unity of the enterprise-strategy discourses Ashling makes an interesting move towards the end of the interview. After demonstrating her entrepreneurial and strategic credentials Ashling is now able to present a more reflexive self when a question allows her to escape or at least resist the more heroic elements of the enterprise-strategy discourses. The excerpt starts about 36 minutes 52 seconds into the 48 minute interview:

73 Brendan: I think, I think that covers most things, right, but is there anything that I've kinda of left out that's

74 Ashling: Em

75 Brendan: that's fairly obvious (.) or anything you'd like to add.

76 Ashling: I think there's a lot of (.) I think personally you read all this hype, I mean that's one thing, that it doesn't annoy me, but you read all this hype in the newspaper about entrepreneurs and

77 Brendan: Mm.

78 Ashling: You know it's kind of almost taken on a glamorous (.)

79 Brendan: Right.

80 Ashling: role. Which it, it isn't actually, it's not glamorous, but it's just a job at the end of the day, like you know. Being an entrepreneur or setting up a business doesn't mark you out as being any different from people who have jobs and contribute within firms. I mean that's my view.

81 Brendan: Right, yeah, yeah

82 Ashling: I mean there's a whole load of hype, oh aren't entrepreneurs very special people and they're not really, They're just working and they just happen to be kind of, maybe working that bit harder sometimes, but not necessarily.

83 Brendan: Mm.

84 Ashling: You know and I think that's one thing that grat, doesn't grate on me, but ah here like, you know you see these entrepreneurs and they're always being interviewed like, going `oh aren't are great,' `or aren't I great I did that', or

85 Brendan: Right yeah, enterprise culture stuff.

86 Ashling: Yeah, you know it's all a bit like, a lot of it is over hyped as well, you know, you know so that's em, that's one thing I suppose. I think it's kind of part of the whole tiger culture, you know, and everyone thought `ah I become an entrepreneur and I'll make squillions'. And, em, you know life isn't like that, you know, you're kind of, unless you're Denis O'Brien ((very well known and rich Irish entrepreneur)) of course or somebody.

87 Brendan: (Laugh).

88 Ashling: Someone like extraordinarily lucky. But. You know, for the most part it's just em, life about having a nice life, about having kind of a nice lifestyle and being healthy and that kind of stuff.

89 Brendan: Right.

90 Ashling: But like this, I just, I heard three more of them on the radio on Saturday morning, going `oh yes, well we're entrepreneurs, we don't know much about this, but we're very good that' ah, going on like, just learn it then like.

91 Brendan: (Laugh).

92 Ashling: You know what I mean, it's not like you're a peculiar species that cannot learn another (.)

93 Brendan: Right, right.

94 Ashling: skill or something. And I just think that there is a lot of hype about entrepreneurs and how brillant they are. I just think people in big companies actually do work just as hard and contribute just as much, and in actual fact, sometimes it's actually riskier staying in a big company than it is going out on your own.

In these passages Ashling clearly conducts a very efficient prebuttal against any charge that she is caught up with "all this hype" (Turn 76) about entrepreneurs. Success is not

just a matter of having the attributes of the entrepreneur or the strategist but some who is very rich is “Someone like extraordinarily lucky” (Turn 88). The important thing seems to be “about having a nice life, about having kind of a nice lifestyle and being healthy and that kind of stuff” (Turn 88) that is the goal for everybody rather than being “a peculiar species” (Turn 92). Clearly Ashling resists some of the more limiting aspects of being an entrepreneur.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the theoretical section of this paper we identified some attributes of strategy and enterprise discourses from the literature. We also illustrated how strategy and enterprise discourses are in a certain tension with each other. The descriptions developed there not only provides a summary description of the literature but also found many echoes in our empirical work.

We have seen that a key feature of the discourse was the salience of the vocabulary of the enterprise culture. Furthermore many of the attributes identified and portrayed in the theoretical section of this paper as of the enterprise pole were prominently and explicitly seen in the interview presented and are present in the other interview of the broader study.

While explicit naming of strategy was much less prominent than explicit invocations of enterprise discourse Ashling also skillfully deployed many of the features of strategy derived from the literature in the theoretical section of this paper. Strategic discourses were deployed with self-deprecating, ironic or sarcastic humour reflecting perhaps its

association with larger organizations or perhaps a difficultly that the proprietors have with using such an accountable discourse. This latter effect may have been exaggerated in the particular context of an interview with a 'strategy academic': Ashling might be more comfortable in constructing an enterprise identity than in constructing a strategy identity in such an interaction. Despite its less explicit presence the theoretically derived descriptions of strategy were recognizable in their skillfull deployment by Ashling. Certain issues such as the power relationships between proprietors in the organizations, and between the proprietors and the employees seemed to involve some issues of concern in this interaction (and in other related interviews) as was seen in the hesitancies and other cruces in the talk concerning these issues.

In the talk of this proprietor too was a skillful balancing of the tensions identified between the strategy and enterprise poles of the discourse. The obvious efforts needed to perform this balance evidences that such tensions are a matter of concern in even such a skilled deployment of discourse by a small enterprise entrepreneur.

Another area of difficulty concerned the more masterful and heroic aspects of the enterprise discourse. While enterprise was skillfully performed there was at the same time in the particular interview presented a rejection of the entrepreneurial masterfulness especially when it seemed to almost suggest 'a separate species'. Although the analysis did not reveal it is perhaps still an open question as to what extent the gender of a proprietor might affect the comfortableness with the masterfulness element of enterprise discourse. A further question that needs more analysis is how much the discourse of enterprise and strategy differ in the context of Ireland as opposed to the context of the

United Kingdom and the United States of America –such a difference did not seem particularly pronounced in the interview presented.

This paper has shown how the analysis of an interview with a particular proprietor demonstrates that the discourses of enterprise and strategy are embraced, deployed, developed and yet also resisted. While very prevalent in the discourses of the proprietors studied, the tensions and structure of the discourse seem not only to facilitate the discussion of their businesses but also seem to be productive of certain dilemmas and difficulties. Further explication of how such small proprietors draw on the discourses of enterprise and strategy are warranted.

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Appendix 1 Extracts from the Interview with Ashling

Line Number	Extract
1	This excerpt starts about 1 minute into the the 48 minute interview.
2	
3	Ashling: So I was there, I was lucky it was a small organisation and [name of Managing Director and Firm founder] was very entrepreneurial and very kind of go ahead and give people a chance and that. And there was a great I remember at my interview he said to me `oh so you want to be a journalist?' and I said `oh yes, I do I do.' And eh, then I proceeded to tell him that I was signing up for an evening course in journalism in Rathmines. He kept nodding,
4	Brendan: [Mm
5	Ashling: sagely.] Unbeknownst to me the course doesn't actually exist.
6	Brendan: [(Laugh)
7	Ashling: (Laugh)]It was only full time during the day.
8	Brendan: [Right
9	Ashling: from] there we went on
10	
11	The excerpt below is about 2 minute 20 seconds into the the 48 minute interview.
12	
13	Ashling: And Frank had always been speaking about the idea of doing a magazine.
14	Brendan: Right, yeah, yeah.
15	Ashling: And 'cause of his family background in the business and I was, I mean, I read, there isn't a magazine in Easons bookshop that I haven't read.¤<161328>
16	Brendan: Right.
17	Ashling: I store them up right there's the deposit for my house. But anyway.
18	Brendan: Yeah
19	Ashling: And eh so I thought this was interesting. And I thought I'd prefer to do it with someone who actually knew the business
20	Brendan: Right,right.
21	Ashling: To me (.) being entrepreneurial is one thing, but you can't be stupid [either.
22	Brendan: Right] [right, right.
23	Ashling: You know, and going into] the great unknown with no experience is probably not the best strategy. And eh, so we were talking about it. ((three lines excluded here to avoid identification)) And I had thought this sounds interesting, but I hadn't really committed beyond that. So a few people had actually turned him down and said no this is too risky etc.
24	
25	The excerpt below begins about 5 minutes 30 seconds into the 48 minute interview.

26

27 Ashling: But then em, then the work kind of kicks in. But we were very fortunate from the start because em like (.) in a small business you have to, while two of us had done it, were in it from (.) the [start.

28 Brendan: Mm.

29 Ashling: I always, em kinda, I didn't defer to him, but there can only really be one boss.

30 Brendan: Okay, right yeah.

31 Ashling: And if one has more, has more experience well then it will work if (.)

32 Brendan: Right and you were happy to (.)

33 Ashling: More than happy, because I didn't know anything.

34 Brendan: Right.

35 Ashling: But like me, you know, I knew absolutely nothing, I mean I know a lot more now.

36 Brendan: Right, right.

37 Ashling: Seven years down the road. I knew nothing at that point. So we worked well as a team because em, he'd be a lot more, like we'd be meetings for example and he'd say to someone `well why aren't you talking to the Sunday Business Post, they're a lot bigger?' And I'd be going `hello'. (Laugh).

38 Brendan: Yeah. (Laugh).

39 Ashling: Kicking him under the table. So we were kind of, we made a point, it doesn't sound to be saintly or anything but we were very, very, very straight, from the off.

40 Brendan: Right.

41 Ashling: You know, we never inflated our figures, we never did anything like that, we just said look, we're small but we're neat, but at least we deliver what we say we do, and we're audited and all that kind of stuff. So that kind of kept, that got us going. And there we were, we were, we just kept, we kept, we've always kept it quite tight.

42

43 This following excerpt starts about 26 minutes 38 seconds into the 48 minute interview.

44

45 Ashling: What annoys me about my work? Em (3)Nothing, nothing really, no, em the things that annoy me about myself for example, I can be impatient sometimes

46 Brendan: Mmm

47 Ashling: Unnecessarily impatient and I'm that's something I'm trying to correct. I can be kind of, it's something like, you know I can be <u>tetchy</u>

48 Brendan: Right.

49 Ashling: unnecessarily. Or it's because I see things that are not being <u>done</u> (.)

50 Brendan: Right

Ashling: like for example when Frank asks me to do something I'll do it, because I figure, well, you know, or vice versa. But then if other girls you ask >in the office< and it doesn't happen for about a week.

Brendan: Right.

Ashling: That really bugs me. But I learnt to kind of, say, 'ok well hang on, they have other things to do and step back and don't

Brendan: Right.

Ashling: lose the plot. And So that's something I've had to work on and I think it's going to be a life long.[

Brendan: Right. (laugh)

Ashling: job.(laugh)] Because I don't think I think it's just in me that I'm kind of, I can be impatient if I don't see, because I exact very high standards

Brendan: Right.

Ashling:. from myself. So therefore, I impose the same high standards

Brendan: Right.

Ashling: on other people. Which isn't fair.

Brendan: Right.

Ashling: And

Brendan: They mightn't be as committed or (.) yeah.

Ashling: Exactly. And it's not right. You know you can't expect everyone to be as anal as I am, you know what I mean, about things. So that's something that annoys me about myself, yeah.

((10 turns are exluded here because they provide details that would allow identification of the interviewee))

Ashling: Em, and that, It is tricky though, because you, you kind of, you expect people, you expect, as I said to you earlier, you expect very high standards from people because you're imposing the same standards. And you have to realise that, you know they're not all going to have the same level of huge com- they're very good, I mean, they're all, we're very lucky with the staff that we have.

Brendan: Right.

Ashling: But em, you have, not make allowances, allowances is the wrong word, but you have to allow for people to have a life.

The excerpt starts about 36 minutes 52 seconds into the 48 minute interview:

Brendan: I think, I think that covers most things, right, but is there anything that I've kinda of left out that's

Ashling: Em

Brendan: that's fairly obvious (.) or anything you'd like to add.

76 Ashling: I think there's a lot of (.) I think personally you read all this hype, I mean that's one thing, that it doesn't annoy me, but you read all this hype in the newspaper about entrepreneurs and

77 Brendan: Mm.

78 Ashling: You know it's kind of almost taken on a glamorous (.)

79 Brendan: Right.

80 Ashling: role. Which it, it isn't actually, it's not glamorous, but it's just a job at the end of the day, like you know. Being an entrepreneur or setting up a business doesn't mark you out as being any different from people who have jobs and contribute within firms. I mean that's my view.

81 Brendan: Right, yeah, yeah

82 Ashling: I mean there's a whole load of hype, oh aren't entrepreneurs very special people and they're not really, They're just working and they just happen to be kind of, maybe working that bit harder sometimes, but not necessarily.

83 Brendan: Mm.

84 Ashling: You know and I think that's one thing that grat, doesn't grate on me, but ah here like, you know you see these entrepreneurs and they're always being interviewed like, going `oh aren't are great,' `or aren't I great I did that', or

85 Brendan: Right yeah, enterprise culture stuff.

86 Ashling: Yeah, you know it's all a bit like, a lot of it is over hyped as well, you know, you know so that's em, that's one thing I suppose. I think it's kind of part of the whole tiger culture, you know, and everyone thought `ah I become an entrepreneur and I'll make squillions'. And, em, you know life isn't like that, you know, you're kind of, unless you're Denis O'Brien ((very well known and rich Irish entrepreneur)) of course or somebody.

87 Brendan: (Laugh).

88 Ashling: Someone like extraordinarily lucky. But. You know, for the most part it's just em, life about having a nice life, about having kind of a nice lifestyle and being healthy and that kind of stuff.

89 Brendan: Right.

90 Ashling: But like this, I just, I heard three more of them on the radio on Saturday morning, going `oh yes, well we're entrepreneurs, we don't know much about this, but we're very good that' ah, going on like, just learn it then like.

91 Brendan: (Laugh).

92 Ashling: You know what I mean, it's not like you're a peculiar species that cannot learn another (.)

93 Brendan: Right, right.

94 Ashling: skill or something. And I just think that there is a lot of hype about entrepreneurs and how brillant they are. I just think people in big companies actually do work just as hard and contribute just as much, and in actual fact, sometimes it's actually riskier staying in a big company than it is going out on your own.

Appendix 2 Jefferson Style Notation Used

Symbol	**Meaning**
(.)	A brief but noticeable pause.
.	A stopping fall in tone
,	A continuing intonation
-	Indicates a sudden stop
?	A rising inflection
(#)	A timed paused where # is the number of seconds
>text<	enclosed speech was delivered more quickly than usual
<text>	enclosed speech was delivered more slowly than usual
…	Deliberating excluded talk within a turn
[text]	Square brackets enclose overlapping speech
ALL CAPS	Shouted or increased volume speech
<u>Underlined text</u>	Speaker is stressing the underlined speech.
(text)	Unclear speech in the transcript, enclosed speech is the transcriber's best guess.
((*text*))	Enclosed Text is a report of non-verbal activity, deliberate replacement of part of speech or an inserted clarification.

<u>Note</u> This transcription notation is based on the notation developed by Gail Jefferson as described in Atkinson & Heritage (1984)