

Entrepreneurship Education for Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

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Abstract

The Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan enjoys global fame for its pursuit of GNH (Gross National Happiness) as an alternative model of development. An increase in youth unemployment has made Bhutan look to entrepreneurship as a possible solution, prompting a need for entrepreneurship education. But what could entrepreneurship education look like in a context where policies and culture promote simple living and contentment, are cautious with regard to cultural change, and seek to constrain wealth accumulation of private sector entrepreneurs? This essay offers a number of suggestions for entrepreneurship education guided by GNH principles. The essay concludes by discussing what Western cultures can learn from GNH infused entrepreneurship education.

Keywords

entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, Bhutan, happiness, gross national happiness, Buddhism, sustainable development

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Introduction

What could entrepreneurship education look like in a cultural context where policies and culture promote simple living and contentment, are cautious with regard to cultural change, and seek to constrain individual wealth accumulation? This context is not just a thought experiment. The kingdom of Bhutan, located in the Himalayas, has taken forward a distinctly indigenous vision of development, and is globally known for pursuing GNH (Gross National Happiness). The aim of this essay is to arrive at suggestions for entrepreneurship education guided by GNH principles. It also briefly discusses what Western cultures can learn from GNH infused entrepreneurship education.

In 2017 and 2019, I spent time at colleges of the Royal University of Bhutan. At Sherubtse College, Gedu College of Business, and Royal Thimphu College, I taught in entrepreneurship courses, held staff development seminars on entrepreneurship education, and conducted a workshop on incubator design. It became evident to me that the Bhutanese are still coming to terms with what entrepreneurship and its implications means in their context. Only relatively did the term entrepreneurship start to surface in national Bhutanese discussions on economic development. Up till a few decades ago, the vast majority of Bhutanese were subsistence farmers, and no concept of unemployment did exist, as there is always something to do on the farm (Karma Phuntsho, 2018). However, with the advent of urbanization and secular education, in combination with population demographics – Bhutan’s population is relatively young – youth unemployment has spiked. Jobs with the government, the preferred option for many young Bhutanese (Burger Araujo Santos & Sangay Dorji, 2021; Karma Utha et al., 2016; Valliere & Gedeon, 2015), are in short supply, and entrepreneurship has come to be viewed as a potential solution (Karma Utha et al., 2016; Sharma & Gautam, 2020).

The fact that entrepreneurship has countless definitions that are all concurrently used is not helpful to achieve clarity about the concept; on the other hand, the vagueness of the term provides an opportunity for Bhutan to develop its own conception of entrepreneurship, which can then also be used for educational purposes. In terms of the three institutional ‘pillars’ (Scott, 1995), the cultural-cognitive understanding of entrepreneurship has not been crystalized, As Baumol (1990: 894) states, “[h]ow the entrepreneur acts at a given time and place depends heavily on the rules of the game”. These rules of the game are formal (regulatory pillar) and informal (normative pillar), and depend on how the game and its rules are understood in the first place (cultural-cognitive pillar). Together, institutions define, create, and limit entrepreneurial opportunities, and the accumulation and appropriability of the returns from entrepreneurship and innovation, amongst others (Baker et al., 2005; Walter & Block, 2016). In the case of Bhutan, the cultural-cognitive understanding of entrepreneurship can be made to align with the regulative and normative pillars. A Bhutanese conception of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education would align with Bhutan’s mainstream cultural values, which are deeply rooted in Buddhist principles. These values are

mirrored in the national development policy of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Once a clear understanding of the characteristics of entrepreneurship that are aligned with GNH is established, it becomes feasible to develop entrepreneurship education that is also aligned with GNH principles.

The aim of this essay is to arrive at suggestions for such GNH aligned entrepreneurship education. It concentrates on examining entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education within the specific context of Bhutan and its GNH framework. The essay takes GNH as its point of departure when building its arguments and deriving suggestions for GNH aligned entrepreneurship education. This is not done by means of empirical research or application of a theory, but rather in the form of an essay building an argument. In doing so, I take the GNH policy framework and values as a given. I do not evaluate or critique GNH. I do not discuss pros and cons of GNH, how it is perceived by various stakeholders, possible flaws in its implementation, or whether Bhutan in reality promotes or should promote GDP rather than GNH (Hayden, 2015; Mancall, 2018; Schmidt, 2017). The essay is also not devoted to the promotion of economic development, the private sector, or entrepreneurship in general in Bhutan.

The essay commences by providing an overview of Gross National Happiness and the associated Buddhist values. The next section proposes conceptualizations of “GNH Entrepreneurship” and “GNH Entrepreneurship Education”. The section that follows provides suggestions for entrepreneurship education guided by GNH principles. As such, it offer a reply to the question raised in the opening sentence of this essay: What could entrepreneurship education look like in a cultural context where policies and culture promote simple living and contentment, are cautious with regard to cultural change, and seek to constrain individual wealth accumulation? The last part of the essay offers a brief discussion of what Western cultures can learn from GNH infused entrepreneurship education.¹

GNH and Buddhist Values

Bhutan is a landlocked country bordered by India and China, and is located in the Himalayan mountain range. Bhutan’s primary sources of revenue are agriculture, hydroelectricity, tourism, foreign aid, and the cottage industry. It is a traditional, conservative society in which Tibetan Buddhism is pervasive. Bhutan was never colonized and remained relatively isolated until the last few decades. This allowed the country’s culture and biologically diverse environment to remain largely intact, and provided the Bhutanese government the luxury of observing the successes and failures of other developing nations (Brooks, 2013).

Gross National Happiness

Bhutan has become globally famous for its Gross National Happiness (GNH) policies. The nation’s progress is judged against a variety of happiness indicators, rather than the sum of production and consumption of goods and services. In the words of

Hewavitharana (2004, p. 496): “GNH, which is deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy and culture, has been adopted by the Bhutanese Government as its development philosophy. It was enunciated by the King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck. The Bhutanese prefer GNH to aggregates of the market values of traded products and services (GDP). Firstly, because GNH includes acts that are not quantifiable nor have a market value, such as performing a good deed. Secondly, because GDP includes products and services such as seductive commercial advertising, which Buddhist values reject on moral grounds as being inimical to people’s well-being and happiness.”

The GNH philosophy is described as having four pillars: equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development, cultural preservation and promotion, environmental conservation, and good governance (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2023). The four pillars are further elaborated into nine domains: health, time use, psychological well-being, education, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards (income, assets, and housing) (Karma Ura, Alkire, Tshoki Zangmo, & Karma Wangdi, 2012). These are assessed by 38 sub-indexes, 72 indicators and 151 variables and associated sufficiency thresholds (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2023).

The concept of GNH is holistic and integrates ecology, economy, social equity, culture, and good governance, and recognizes their interdependency (Schroeder, 2017; Schroeder & Schroeder, 2014). GNH is the guiding framework for any governmental policy or program in any domain, including business. For example, the GNH Certification initiative (Tshoki Zangmo, Karma Wangdi, & Jigme Phuntsho, 2018) is an assessment tool which evaluates a business’s commitment to social responsibility. The tool is inspired by GNH and is comprised of a holistic set of indicators categorized under the nine domains of GNH.

It is a common misconception that the Bhutanese are the happiest people in the world – that the country measures its progress in terms of happiness, does not mean that everyone is happy. According to the 2015 survey, 8.4% of the population were deeply happy; 35% were extensively happy; 47.9% were narrowly happy and 8.8% unhappy. Overall, the mean happiness score of 2015 presents a 1.8% increase over the previous assessment in 2010 (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research, 2016). GNH also does not mean that no attention is given to material needs (Hayden, 2015). On the contrary, living standards are one of the nine GNH domains. Increasing living standards serves the aims of poverty reduction and national self-reliance, and the Bhutanese consider money and financial security as a main source of happiness (Karma Wangdi, 2018). However, the economic advancement process is considered to lead to happiness when conducted under the guidance of moral and ethical values. In the Buddhist conception of happiness, it is important to distinguish between needs and wants. “The satisfaction of basic needs – food, clothing, shelter and medicine, is conducive to material happiness which in turn paves the way for achieving spiritual happiness. Wants, on the other hand, are driven by craving” (Hewavitharana, 2004, p. 513). Which brings us to the next section.

Craving

In Buddhist thought, craving is considered the root of unhappiness. Individuals, including entrepreneurs, are expected to help others to restrain craving. “Based on the Buddhist Philosophy of consumption, one should endeavor to cultivate the virtue of *Santhutti* = contentment. It denotes the ability to be satisfied with little, and by implication, to accept conditions and situations as they arise with equanimity. (...) One should endeavor to practice the ethic and lifestyle of *Appichchata* = simple life or plain living” (Hewavitharana, 2004, p. 514). Of course, this is easier said than done, even in Bhutan. In 2011 the country was hit by a financial crisis which was partially attributed to a spike of domestic credit subsequently spent on imported consumer goods (Karma Ura, 2015). Nevertheless, Chenchu Lhamo (2019) defines happiness as a state of mind characterized by tranquility, calmness and contentment. This is somewhat comparable to what in Western cultures is understood as eudaimonic well-being, as opposed to hedonistic well-being (Burger Araujo Santas & Sangay Dorji, 2021; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryff, 2019). Still, the terms differ, as the Bhutanese conception of happiness puts more emphasis on such factors as collective well-being, cultural preservation, and sustainable development.

Business owners are expected to promote moral and spiritual advancement, both for themselves and for those they serve with their ventures. To this end, “the Buddhist notion of *Aththi Sukha* refers to economic security/independence gained through Righteous Means of Earning Income and by practicing Right Livelihood = *Samma Ajiva*. This encompasses income earning, employment, production, investment, and saving. One should abstain from morally reprehensible (Unrighteous) means of earning income. One should abstain from such practices as cheating), seductive commercial advertising, often using sex symbols, dumping tactics, sub-standard products, and rapacity for gain upon gain, e.g., usurious money lending, and monopolistic exploitation” (Hewavitharana, 2004, p.500).

The imperative to restrain craving also shapes GNH inspired attitudes towards firm growth. Striving for firm growth is regarded with suspicion as it may be a manifestation of craving. “It is the small enterprise and informal sectors that have traditionally been able to provide the favorable environment necessary for Buddhist values to flourish (Schumacher, 1973). While vertical expansion in the scale of these enterprises should take place, it should not go beyond the mini-micro-small-medium continuum in a craving-driven manner. The entrepreneurs should restrain their craving to stop short of expansion up to the large-scale level in order to preserve the relative smallness of their enterprises. Reaping of economies of scale can become an issue here, but it can be resolved by innovative measures. Among the innovative institutional arrangements that could help in preventing enterprises from becoming excessively large and yet reap economies of scale are federation of small units into cooperative organizations; the “putting out” or the farming out system where components can be produced in home-based or cottage scale units; and out-grower arrangements in crop production with a

clustering of a number of small farms around a central processing unit” (Hewavitharana, 2004, p.502).

The suspicion against craving similarly shapes attitudes towards the accumulation of private material wealth. In many countries, small pockets of entrepreneurs have vastly increased their power and wealth (Zucman, 2019). Hewavitharana (2004, p. 516) proposes a solution: “Sharing one’s wealth with others implies a curbing of craving and provides personal happiness for oneself (...) When wealth is shared out to others it spawns happiness among them. Thus, the giver becomes happier in giving and the receivers become happy in using the received wealth and in appreciating the generosity of the giver. If wealth is not shared but rather retained in the form of possessions and conspicuous consumption, it is considered to lead to unhappiness as those with less wealth will now be less satisfied with their own possessions and consumption through demonstration and imitative consumption effects.” While Buddhism does not inherently condemn wealth or material prosperity, it places a strong emphasis on the ethical use of wealth and the potential dangers of attachment to material possessions. Buddhism encourages individuals to cultivate an understanding of the impermanence and unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) inherent in material possessions (Schroeder, 2018, p23).

Pursuing other ends than craving-induced consumption and wealth accumulation, entrepreneurship in Bhutan additionally faces restraints on change. The preservation and promotion of cultural identity, knowledge and practices is one of the four pillars of GNH (GNH Centre Bhutan, 2023). Rinner and Tshering Pelden (2018) see it as *the* challenge for Bhutanese entrepreneurship to embrace change while preserving Bhutanese values. These values emphasize contentment, interconnectedness, spirituality, environmental consciousness, and holistic well-being, which are all aligned with reduced cravings for material possessions and external gratification. One influence of Buddhism on the economy is the imperative not to harm other beings (‘Right Livelihood’) (Lennfors, 2015; Valliere, 2008). This includes animals, plants, and minerals; 70% of Bhutan’s land area is protected nature reserve. Bhutan pledged to the global community that it will remain carbon neutral in perpetuity (Climate Action Tracker, 2023). Bhutan has long drawn on isolation policies, is proud of its culture and goes to great lengths to retain it (Burger Araujo Santos & Sangay Dorji, 2021). For example, it blocks mass tourism by having a high value, low impact policy. Billboard advertising is not allowed, and television was introduced only in 1999. As such, Bhutan is innovative in how it conserves. In the words of Rickseel Namgyel (2021, p4): “While the tiny kingdom may not usually be associated with innovation, its unconventional development strategy through a human-centered and spiritual approach provides an innovative concept to measuring socio-economic progress.”

GNH, Buddhist Values and Entrepreneurship

It has long been recognized that the term entrepreneurship is used in a wide variety of ways (Hébert & Link, 1989; Gartner, 1990). Definitions range from business ownership, new venture creation, and innovation, to the EU EntreComp’s “act of identifying

opportunities and ideas and transforming them into value for others, whether financial, cultural, or social” (Bacigalupo et al., 2016, p16). Considering the primacy GNH and the Buddhist values, I propose that entrepreneurship education in Bhutan focuses on “Gross National Happiness Entrepreneurship” (GNHE). Any definition just listed applies, but with the addition that GNHE concerns entrepreneurship in which consumption is to be restrained, rather than unconditionally furthered; in which individual wealth accumulation of private sector entrepreneurs is constrained or redistributed; and where innovation is critically and cautiously scrutinized, allowing a traditional society to retain values and practices in line with GNH. GNH entrepreneurship incorporates these aspects while recognizing the primacy of moral and spiritual values and the interdependence of all living beings (Schroeder, 2017). It then follows that “Gross National Happiness Entrepreneurship Education” is education focused on the promotion of GNHE. The next section provides suggestions for GNHE education. Before doing so, I discuss briefly how GNHE differs from notions such as notions such as ecopreneurship, social entrepreneurship and sustainable entrepreneurship (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011).

At first sight, these notions appear to suit Bhutan well, given Bhutan’s enlightened, idealistic policies. They may indeed inspire GNHE education, but cannot be imported integrally. For example, Mair and Marti (2006) define social entrepreneurship as a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and address social needs. GNHE and social entrepreneurship share that they focus on social value, while seeing economic value creation as a necessary condition to ensure financial viability (Mair & Marti, 2006). However, GNHE is not necessarily directed at social change or innovation. Instead, it is sensitive towards retaining widely cherished aspects of Bhutan’s culture, and businesses are generally expected to operate in a pro-social manner (cf. the GNH Certification initiative (Tshoki Zhangmo et al., 2018). Moreover, Bhutanese business starters may not be focused on solving large internationally conceived challenges such as the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, but rather on meeting the needs of themselves and their dependents. Bhutan is a developing country, where many individuals become business owners out of necessity (see the sub section on motivation in the next section). In Western settings, social entrepreneurship is typically not driven by necessity entrepreneurship. Finally, GNHE education would set norms and standards which permeate all aspects of any business. As stated by Schroeder (2017, p.45), “It should not be merely a focus on corporate social responsibility or social entrepreneurship as sub-themes within a larger, economic-centric entrepreneurship curriculum.”

Suggestions for GNH Entrepreneurship Education

This section presents suggestions for GNHE education. The suggestions in this section are ordered in line with the venture life cycle: It starts with motivation and ideas for opportunities, and ends with growth and exit.

Before discussing phase-specific suggestions, a first general recommendation is that Bhutan develops its own indigenous educational resources, rather than adopt foreign textbooks and exercises wholesale. Entrepreneurship education around the world has been critiqued for being uniform, relying on a small set of textbooks and techniques (Brentnall et al., 2022; Hytti, 2018). This paper highlights that Bhutan has a specific understanding of entrepreneurship as economic-cultural-ecological interdependence and as an expression of GNH values (Schroeder, 2017). Rather than adopting a global one-size-fits-all approach, GNHE education may want to adapt imported educational resources to reflect its cultural and social conditions and environment, or develop its own, such as the entrepreneur stories book published by the Loden Foundation (Karma Phuntsho, 2018). As pointed out by Schroeder (2017, p.45), “entrepreneurship education should ensure the country’s cultural values are the foundation of curriculum; it should ensure that a culturally appropriate understanding of entrepreneurship as economic-cultural-ecological interdependence is the core of how entrepreneurship is taught.”

While not discussed separately below, the provision of knowledge and training pertaining to small business management remains indispensable. Having a small agricultural or cottage industry venture is nothing new in Bhutan. It is the notion of entrepreneurship and what it entails, that is relatively novel in Bhutan. This is why this section provides suggestions for education focused on entrepreneurship, rather than small business management, while acknowledging that small business management is an indispensable part of entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurial Motivation

In Bhutan, a job as a civil servant is the first preferred career option for many (Burger Araujo Santos & Sangay Dorji, 2021; Fujita et al. 2022; Karma Utha et al., 2016; Valliere & Gedeon, 2015). Feeling external pressure as well as an internal need to provide for parents and grandparents, a job of civil servant provides status and security. Those who would prefer a job with the government, but take up entrepreneurship because the preferred option is available, can be considered necessity entrepreneurs. Ute Stephan (2018), in her extensive review of research on the mental health and well-being (MWB) of entrepreneurs, discusses motivation as one of the contributing factors to MWB. MWB depends on whether entrepreneurship is taken up by choice or out of necessity, with opportunity entrepreneurs experiencing higher MWB than necessity entrepreneurs. Opportunity entrepreneurs not only experience higher work satisfaction, but also higher satisfaction in other life domains (Binder & Coad, 2013; 2016).

Not only the happiness of clients and other stakeholders contributes to GNH, also the happiness of the entrepreneur him/herself. A first task of GNHE education is therefore to promote opportunity entrepreneurship. Opportunity entrepreneurship is enhanced if there is a fit of GNHE with a student’s values and capabilities. This can be facilitated by elective and extracurricular programs that provide entrepreneurial experience and competency development, and knowledge on how GNH principles work

out in the private sector. Taking part in such programs allows students to assess whether the constraints on consumption, production and wealth accumulation within GNHE has a fit with their own motivation, capabilities, and social norms. Discovery of whether such fit exists may also be enhanced if business proposals developed by students align with GNH principles. This will be discussed in the next section.

Opportunity Recognition and Innovation

Baron and Ensley (2006) outline that a range of opportunity attributes can be considered when generating ideas for opportunities, such as profitability, solving a customer problem, manageable risks, having a superior offering, and novelty and uniqueness. Such attributes serve as criteria to spot opportunities as well as to screen them. Attributes aligned with GNH will be emphasized in GNHE education, including the well-being of stakeholders such as the natural environment. For some, such an alignment exercise may change necessity towards opportunity entrepreneurship, if it leads to designing forms of value creation that a student finds motivational.

The relation of GNHE and GNHE education with novelty and innovation is of particular interest. The notion of creative destruction (Schumpeter, 1942) is relevant here. The entrepreneurial ethos of creativity and innovation can bring benefits, but it is important to consider what it destroys (Schipper, 2012). Schipper (2012) points out that the entrepreneurial ethos (or role) as understood in Western settings is to introduce novelty, bring change, and cause creative destruction, all while making a profit. Schumpeter (1942) believed creative destruction to be a positive force that leads to economic development, increased productivity, and higher living standards, despite the temporary disruptions and displacements it may cause in the process. However, in Bhutan, some disruptions and displacements may be seen as negative, and not worth the economic development, increased productivity, and higher living standards that they may bring. Entrepreneurial innovation may result in the modification of widely cherished societal values and practices. As Zahra and Wright (2016, p. 615) note, there can be a destructive aspect of creative destruction: “Innovation often comes with a heavy price tag. Technological innovations, in particular, often bring upheaval, challenge existing cultural (including religious) values, disrupt existing methods of operations, and undermine existing relationships within and across industries.” On the other hand, entrepreneurial innovation may promote the change of existing cultural practices that are currently misaligned with GNH principles, for example those sustaining gender inequality.

GNHE requires its own ethos and ethics to avoid such conflicts. In a country that is keen to conserve its cultural traditions, opportunity recognition and innovation need to give careful attention to what may be lost, in addition to what may be gained. This is especially significant in the wider context of the tremendous change Bhutan has encountered in the last 30 years (Karma Phuntsho (2020). One way that GNHE education can ensure that it is aligned with Bhutanese culture and the GNH framework is to make use of challenges. Any organization that has goals are aligned with GNH,

including governmental organizations, can publish their aims and invite student startups to submit proposals that help to achieve these aims. Those with the best ideas can then have the organization as its launching customer, for example for the first 3 years, or as an investor. Such challenge-based programs are successfully implemented internationally (e.g., www.startupinresidence.com).

Value Creation and Enterprising Competencies

Given the values underpinning GNN-E, GNHE education aligns well with a broad conception of entrepreneurship in which value creation can be of any kind (economic, cultural, social, psychological, ecological) and can be achieved in a wide variety of forms (not necessarily through a venture) (Bacigalupo et al., 2016). Value creation can provide feelings of meaningfulness, participation, engagement, and life satisfaction for both the creator and the recipient of the created value (Lackéus, 2015). A relevant distinction in this regard is between enterprising and entrepreneurial competencies (Gibb, 1993; Lackéus, 2015). Enterprising competencies take on a wider meaning than entrepreneurial competencies and can be decoupled from the commercial business context. Enterprising competencies can be seen as life competencies, which can later be applied in a variety of settings, of which starting a new venture is just one (Lackéus, 2015; Van Gelderen, 2020).

Value creation and enterprising competencies can be trained from a very young age onwards in an age-appropriate manner (Karma Utha et al., 2016; Obschonka, 2016). The current lack of coverage of entrepreneurship in Bhutanese primary and secondary education (Tshewang Dorji, 2021), thus represents an opportunity to introduce formats around enterprising behavior. Rather than requiring children to start a mini venture, such formats would focus on the creation of value for others in daily life (e.g., Van Gelderen, 2023). Being more geared towards creating value than appropriating value, a focus on enterprising competencies geared towards value creation promotes that entrepreneurship may be easier accepted by Bhutanese society. Development of enterprising competencies requires a shift from rote memorizing and teacher centered approaches to a more learner centered pedagogy (Royal Education Council, 2012) and to the employment of value creation pedagogies (<https://vcplis.com/>).

Growth, Value Distribution and Exit

In the GNH view, growth refers to moral and spiritual growth, leading to further increases in happiness. This resembles the aims put forward in the post-growth or de-growth literature (e.g., Cyron et al., 2018; Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014). Rather than entertaining increased consumption or production as ends in themselves, growth orientation is to be directed towards qualitative aims. In GNH entrepreneurship, growth orientation is foremost directed at stakeholders' happiness, for example, through increasing product or service quality, or the development of human capabilities (Brooks, 2013; Cyron et al., 2018). Still, depending on the nature of the business and the

industry, the company may be subject to economies of scale, which, if not attained, may lead to reduced competitiveness. Here, GNHE education can focus on training in forms of organizing that allow these benefits to be achieved while retaining small organizational forms. This would include the study of cooperative modes of production, consumption, and distribution (Hankammer & Kleer, 2018; Hewavitharana, 2004; Schumacher, 1973).

Growth can also refer to the wealth accumulated by the entrepreneur. In some instances, such as when entrepreneurs become philanthropists or investors in responsible entrepreneurship, this has a positive social impact. As downsides, Zahra and Wright (2016, p. 616) have posited that “some entrepreneurs have used their wealth to gain access to greater powers in their society (...) the financial wealth made by entrepreneurs can lock communities, industries and societies into a state of stagnation.” Western entrepreneurship textbooks often conclude with a chapter on successful “exit” (e.g., Kuratko, 2019). The business founder sells the business or organizes an IPO. Some entrepreneurs continue to engage in entrepreneurship, as serial entrepreneurs, as investors, or as “philanthrocapitalists” (Matthias, Solomon, & Madison, 2017). However, such roles currently do not yet feature in entrepreneurship education. GNH entrepreneurship education, on the other hand, could include a discussion and explanation of difference models of what happens next with appropriated value, and outline options such as sharing the wealth with the wider community and utilizing it to invest in new ventures that promote GNH.

GNH Entrepreneurship Education Outside of Bhutan

Bhutan’s implementation of GNH principles in society represent a living alternative model of development. Whereas most economies pursue GDP as a proxy for happiness and hope that technological progress will allow for ‘green growth’ in spite of global warming and crossing of planetary boundaries, GNH represents a sufficiency model: the idea that consumption, production, and wealth accumulation can be curbed at sufficiency levels. In the words of Kabir Saxena (2019, p17): “My limited understanding suggests to me that Bhutan is like the one surviving sober member of a world club of addicts.”

Brooks (2013) stresses that producing a clear alternative vision is a first step in the transition to a sustainable society. Clearly, also in Western economic thought many have considered the role of ethics and happiness, starting with Adam Smith. However, Bhutan offers not just a vision but also its implementation. As such, Bhutan is a living example of how such a way of life may look like. While it works hard to lift its material living conditions, as sufficiency levels of some material conditions have not yet been reached, it does so under the guidance of Buddhist values expressed in the GNH policy framework (Givel, 2015; Hayden, 2015; Schroeder & Schroeder, 2014). Partially inspired by Bhutan, the idea of not merely measuring development in monetary terms has caught on worldwide (e.g., EU’s Beyond GDP (EU, 2022), OECD’s Measuring well-being and progress (OECD, 2022)).

However, just like Western concepts of entrepreneurship cannot be transplanted integrally into Bhutan, a Bhutanese conceptualization of entrepreneurship cannot be transplanted integrally into Western countries, if there is no value system to support this conceptualization (Schroeder, 2017). The suggestions for GNH entrepreneurship education are not exclusively applicable in Bhutan. They can also belong in Western curricula of enterprising behavior and social entrepreneurship. However, in Bhutan they would not be sub-themes within a larger, economic-centric entrepreneurship curriculum, but speak to the core of how entrepreneurship is taught (Schroeder, 2017). Moreover, the Bhutanese conception of happiness is different from the understanding in Western countries. According to Schroeder and Schroeder (2014, p.3523), “The happiness that GNH strives to foster is a state of consciousness known as “Sukha”. Unlike notions of happiness as immediate pleasure fulfillment, Sukha balances mental, emotional and spiritual conditions regardless of changes in material conditions. Key is the disarticulation of “happiness” from individual pleasure, joy and satisfaction.” For many Westerners, this may seem removed from their understanding of happiness.

On the other hand, also in Western countries policy initiatives have emerged for a redirection of economic aims towards well-being, human development and environmental sustainability, for example the well-being budget in New Zealand (Treasury of New Zealand, 2019). As Brooks (2013) states, the Buddhist principles underlying Bhutan’s approach, such as a holistic, ecological worldview, valuing compassion and interconnectedness, the idea of balance, and an emphasis on spiritual rather than material growth, have direct or indirect corollaries in many world religions as well as within secular cultures. The literature on post-growth or de-growth signals the need for a qualitative shift in how affluent individuals produce and consume, given their ecological footprint (Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014; Johnsen et al., 2017; Wiedman, Lenzen, Keyßer, & Steinberger, 2020). Bhutan offers a model of how such a way of life may look like. As Brooks (2013) suggests, the guiding principles of GNH can be adopted elsewhere with appropriate adjustments to how it is implemented in a given socio-cultural and economic context.

Conclusion

As Karma Phuntscho (2018, p.22] states, “Today, we are economic animals more than ever before in human history. The two actions of production and consumption virtually define our personal well-being, community’s progress and nation’s strength and prosperity.” Bhutan aims to channel consumption and production into a conceptualization of entrepreneurship that fits with GNH. GNHE education focuses on entrepreneurship that promotes simple living and contentment, seeks to conserve and promote Bhutanese culture, and considers the responsibilities that come with acquired wealth. Bhutan seeks to implement an alternative path of development. The suggestions for entrepreneurship education provided in this essay are aimed to contribute to that implementation.

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Note

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