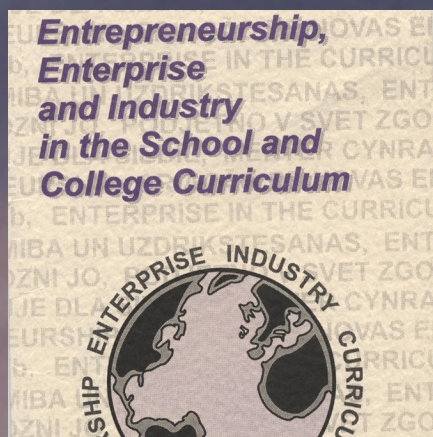


Hosted by
Societal Innovation and Enterprise Forum

Reimagining Our Futures: Webinar No.2 in the Series Inspired by the Ideas of Professor Allan Gibb

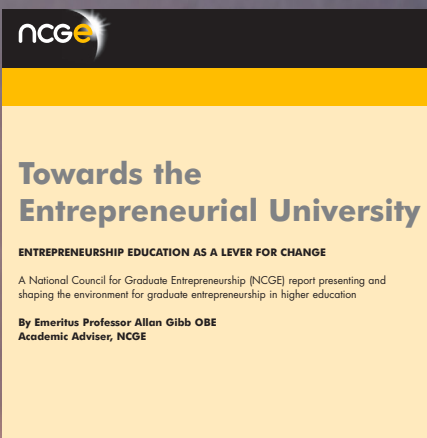


SME Policy, Academic Research and the Growth of Ignorance, Mythical Concepts, Myths, Assumptions, Rituals and Confusions

by Allan A. Gibb

SINCE THE 1980s and PARTICULARLY into the 1990s there has been an explosion of research into entrepreneurship and the small and medium enterprise. This is reflected in a substantial growth in both the academic literature and in the grey literature of the press, journals and consultant reports. Combined with ease of access to information through the new international information technologies the growth in 'knowledge' has been exponential. The article focuses upon the value, in a policy context, of this academic research. It will argue that despite the increase in academic

might fairly be expected to be overcome" (Chambers, 1995). A major manifestation of this growth of ignorance is the emergence of a number of outstanding 'mythical concepts' and 'myths' which are considerably influencing the establishment of policy priorities. The author defines a 'mythical concept' as "a group of words or expression to which is given a set of different meanings and understandings by different groupings of society which may be wholly or partly without foundation". A 'myth' is defined as a "commonly held belief that is untrue or without foundation... which offers an explanation of some facts or



Celebrating the Ideas of Allan Gibb

“Allan built a centre in Durham University which became a mecca for those in academia or business seeking best practice.”

Ken O'Neill
Professor Emeritus
Belfast University

Introduction

Allan Gibb (1939-2019) was an inspirational pioneer in the field of Entrepreneurship and Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development for 50 years. His concept of Entrepreneurship was broad, stretching beyond conventional models. It was not solely focused on new business ventures and business growth but upon the development of the skills, attributes and behaviours of enterprising people to be used in any context (business, government, educational institutions, social enterprise, healthcare, NGOs, charities etc.). It was about building links between concept (ideas/intention) and practice (know how/application/action). Importantly, it was based upon social concern and a belief in the value of entrepreneurial behaviour as a means of making the world a better place.

This series of webinars stem from Allan's teaching and writing. They will be followed by a day in Durham in September 2021 when we will celebrate Allan's work and thinking.

The webinars are hosted by the Societal Innovation and Enterprise Forum (SIEF) which has its roots in the Durham Symposium held in 2015 to celebrate the 50 year anniversary of the Small Business Centre created by Allan. It's aims, in Allan's words, are to *“act as a catalyst for social and economic innovation, stimulate debate and innovative thinking, develop new models and programmes, thereby contributing to inclusive and sustainable regional development, and harnessing the contribution of the independently owner managed business and other stakeholders.”* SIEF stands as a lasting testimony to this bold vision. Hosted by Dr Susan Frenk at St Aidan's College, Durham University, the SIEF will also provide the home for the celebration event for Allan in 2021.

“The real criteria for success in SME learning relates to its ability to learn and adapt, in a creative sense, from the key agents with whom it interfaces.”

- Allan Gibb
Professor Emeritus
Durham University

Panellists for webinar #2:

Moderator: Professor Andrew Atherton, Global Director of Transnational Education (TNE), Navitas

- Professor Suzi Jarvis, Founding Director, UCD Innovation Academy, University College Dublin, Ireland
- Associate Professor Colin Jones, Senior Academic Developer, Office for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching, University of Southern Queensland, Australia, and Visiting Professor, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David
- Professor Lalit Johri, Retired Senior Fellow in International Business at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford & Former Academic Director of the Oxford Advanced Management and Leadership Programme
- Professor Ted Fuller, UNESCO Chair on Responsible Foresight for Sustainable Development, University of Lincoln, UK

Note: The dates and speaker programme for the remaining webinars will be confirmed in due course. The webinar series will culminate in a celebration day conference in September 2021 at St Aidan's College, Durham University.

This webinar series will cover four key themes informed by Allan's work but set in the context of shaping our responses to Covid-19: what this means for entrepreneurship, the small business lifeworld and the leadership required from our universities.

Theme #1: University leadership post Covid-19: the entrepreneurial challenge

How can universities become institutions for and drivers of change in a world where Covid-19 has affected the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society? This is in a context where international student mobility will be constrained, household incomes suppressed, and young people at the greatest risk of employment, housing and financial insecurity. Does the university have a role to play in addressing these issues, not least because the majority of people studying in Higher Education

are young people aged 18-24, who in the current labour market are one of the groups most negatively affected by Covid-19?

More broadly, should universities be taking positions and considering effecting change around wider socioeconomic inequalities and structural disadvantages, such as racial discrimination (Black Lives Matter), environmental degradation, erosion of free speech and 'fake news', 'decolonising' and opening up the curriculum to diverse and hierarchically challenging views and experiences? Can universities be 'secular' and agents of social and economic change? Should they be? And if they should, to what extent (where are the boundaries) and how?

Theme #2: Re-designing entrepreneurial learning around problems and issues

Rather than focus on entrepreneurial learning and education as a means of amplifying or building on particular disciplines, there is an opportunity and case for its focusing within universities on specific issues or problems. This would make entrepreneurial learning and education multi- and cross-disciplinary by nature and exercise. For example, entrepreneurial responses to changing behaviours to reduce global warming could be a major university project for students from all subject areas.

Developing responses and solutions outside of their subjects of study will enable them to work across discipline silos to identify what they can do as students and what they can engage universities and their stakeholders to do to either contain or reduce global warming.

Theme #3: Creating entrepreneurial universities: the new frontier

Successive global shocks and ongoing systemic change to Higher Education in most countries have created an environment of uncertainty and volatility for most universities. This has been significantly amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic and the major shock this has created for universities, almost all of which are facing significant falls in income, and cost saving and contraction as a result.

This raises two questions: (1) how can universities become more able to respond to and indeed anticipate

future change, including becoming more agile and adaptable to unexpected or sudden changes and shocks; (2) has the current model of university finances amplified or exacerbated system and institutional shocks, and if so does this pose a challenge to these models and whether they should be maintained? Becoming more entrepreneurial enables universities to respond to, cope with and indeed potentially benefit from major change, volatility and uncertainty.

Indeed, the core concept that entrepreneurship is understanding, embracing and coping with uncertainty could underpin a re-evaluation and re-positioning of universities around very different ways of operating.

Theme #4: Universities as partnership models for driving positive change

Universities as partnership models. One of the underpinning concepts of Allan Gibb, which shaped the design of the Small Business Centre at Durham University and the development of enterprise and business development agencies and systems, was the Stakeholder Assessment Model (SAM). The SAM model proposed that an organisation is both defined and determined by the needs of its stakeholders, and how it can respond to these contingent demands and requirements.

For example, for research on enterprise to matter it should be driven by the worlds and issues of small business owner-managers and entrepreneurs. Similarly,



Small Firms' Training and Competitiveness. Building Upon the Small business as a Learning Organisation

by Allan A. Gibb

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP (IF ANY) between the training of small business, its performance and competitiveness is currently high on the policy agenda in the UK and indeed in most of Europe. The UK's Second Competitiveness White Paper (DTI, 1993) places great emphasis upon the relationship of education and training to competitive performance and suggests a number of 'innovations' to stimulate training in the smaller firm (*Employment Gazette*, 1995). The 'European Union' attention has focused upon a number of key issues. Among these are the degree to which it can be shown that the investment in the training of small business owner-managers and their staff has a return. Despite the substantial attention given to small firms' research in the UK over the past four or five years there has been very little focus on this issue. A 'finding' of the recent ESRC Small Firms Initiative (ESRC, 1994) was that 'there is no evidence that training pays'; however, there is no attempt in the

SME development and support services should be driven by the business development and emergence challenges and problems of entrepreneurial businesses, not the policy prescriptions or desires of government policy or a view of the desired 'political economy' of a nation state, or indeed the large corporate world.

Stakeholder has become an over-used and slightly hackneyed word in many contexts and can be replaced with the concept of partners and partnerships. In this case, the university is defined, designed and determined by its partners: students, businesses, research funders, communities, and government. Perhaps viewing staff as partners is an interesting and potentially challenging notion - to make staff partners separates them from the institution of which they are a part. It is perhaps better to conceive of staff as the [non-financial] shareholders or owner-managers of their universities?. A university in other words is designed by and for partners, not for its own desires or exigencies. This flips the design of HEIs around, and frames it by the external transactions and dependencies within which a university operates.

Briefing Note: Learning from the small business lifeworld

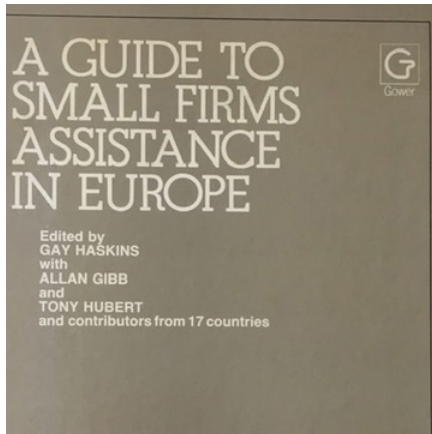
One of Allan's seminal journal articles¹ centred on changing our thinking about learning in small businesses. His research found that learning for small business owner-managers was built on several foundations:

- the networked nature of owner-management and the importance of learning through and from key relationships, especially with customers, suppliers and key professional entities such as the bank;
- the threshold development experiences and the problems and issues associated with them that the owner-manager has to resolve to keep the business operating, whether surviving or thriving.

In essence, the owner-manager is embedded within their own small business and its task and development requirements, managed and mediated through key transactional relationships. The pressure to make the business work rests with the owner-manager, who is dependent on relationships with other entities that create dependence and as a result vulnerability. Being small creates uncertainty as the owner-manager can't control or influence the business's operating environment, other than through relationships, or as Allan framed it "know-who". In this world, a core capability of the owner-manager is to manage these relationships and cope with / mitigate / take advantage of the problems and opportunities they generate - see Figure 1. Business growth is about threshold learning, by owner-managers who haven't done what they are doing to manage and develop the business before. As such, the small business is a context where individuals learn experientially for themselves by dealing with



1. Gibb A.A. (1997) Small Firms' Training and Competitiveness. Building Upon the Small business as a Learning Organisation. International Small Business Journal. Vol 15 No 3: p13-29. doi:10.1177/0266242697153001



problems and issues that arise for the first time for them and need addressing for the business to survive/develop/grow.

This approach frames learning, in an organisation or as a personal dynamic, around dealing with real problems and issues, rather than theoretical questions. Examples would be “how do I win a big customer”, “how do I go to university as a young person and thrive”, or indeed they may be around some of the ‘grand challenges’ facing our society, including climate change.

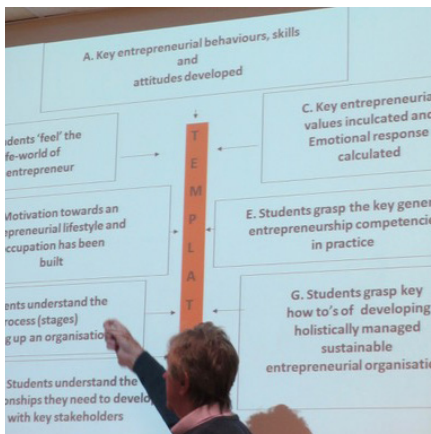
The key is to frame and define the experiential learning around solving/addressing the problem or issue not by applying de-contextualised knowledge to a particular question (or indeed issue).

Learning can be stimulated by identifying and framing key problems or issues, or developing the capability to respond to them as they arise.

As regards understanding the complexity and uncertainty of the task environment of the small business owner-manager and how they learn, some of us will recall Allan’s instructions to students, including bank managers and business advisers, to literally go out of the classroom to find a small business owner-manager to talk with to learn about their lifeworld and how they went about responding to problems and issues. This philosophy of entrepreneurial learning around problems and issues is in sharp contrast with the reliance on assessing theoretical knowledge, which can be seen in many universities. For example, modules on entrepreneurship can favour the business plan as a mode of assessment rather than getting students to really engage with the lifeworld of the small business owner-manager and their entrepreneurial endeavour.

Taking a problem-based approach also offers the opportunity to tear down the silos of subject-centred learning, and adopt multi- and inter-disciplinary approaches, e.g. entrepreneurial responses to changing behaviours to reduce global warming could be a major university project for students from all subject areas. Rather than starting with theory in narrow subject disciplines, perhaps all first-year students should start their studies by working in randomly assigned teams to identify solutions to such big and often ‘wicked’ problems related to key challenges such as climate change, and work closely with industry, civil society organisations and local communities to explore ways of tackling these issues.

There is much in the literature about problem-based learning and its use in academic practice, but often the scale and exposure to the embodiment of experienced learning is a simulation rather than framed in the actual task environment of the stakeholders affected. In universities, summer internships or year-in-industry placements do get students closer to a learning environment in which concept and practice interact (and indeed the practice of experiential



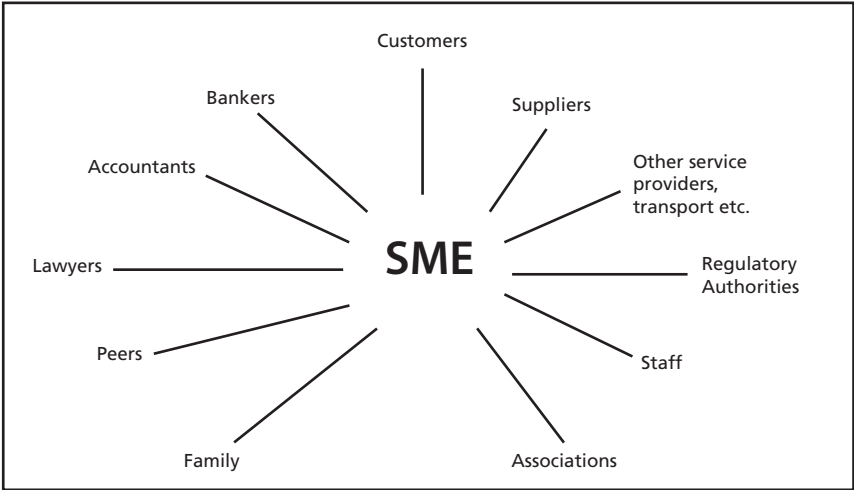


learning creates conceptual insight). However, the modes of assessment and reflection on learning are often framed within the narrow confines of academia rather than as critical reflections on particular experiences.

In a learning context, engagement by students with problems beyond the classroom setting is about helping them to identify and develop entrepreneurial responses to issues as they arise, to think and act beyond subject discipline, and to engage with an increasingly complex stakeholder network across and beyond subject disciplines. Such an approach would more closely mirror the entrepreneurial learning approaches of the owner-manager.

In a discovery context, and hence a research environment, re-framing enquiry around problems and issues experienced by owner-managers, and indeed other practitioners, generates insights that are not bound by disciplinary lenses or perspectives. Problem-driven research offers an alternative way of understanding, and therefore conceiving of, the world and the challenges it faces and complexities it creates. Problem-driven research is by definition trans-disciplinary, and offers a means for researchers with very different disciplinary backgrounds to work together on a shared issue faced by real stakeholders.

Figure 1: Learning from stakeholders around the small business



As we navigate the Covid-19 world of the virtual classroom and online delivery, we are left with the challenge of how we re-think and re-design learning in ways that do not lose sight of learning as a socially engaged experience in which participation in communities of practice and stakeholder management remain at the centre of the learning process.

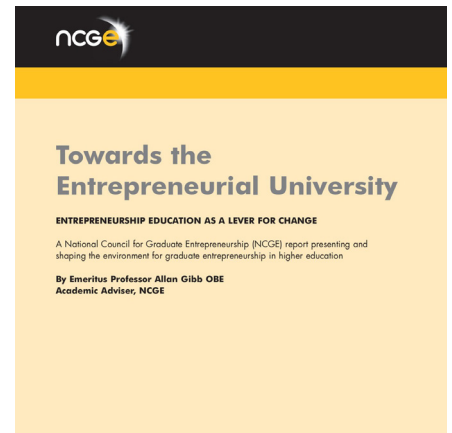
What will this mean for the future of universities and how learning is structured? How can we ensure that student learning embraces engagement with academic theory and learning through practice in equal measure? Could more radical modes of experiential learning – driven by actual problems and issues and generated by engagement in and reflection on practice – emerge that are not framed or offered by or within the university? Are there technologies and platforms that can enable this, and equally are there practices and perspectives individuals can develop to enhance this type of learning?

The panel members in Webinar 2 of the series to celebrate the ideas of Allan Gibb will examine how we should go about re-designing entrepreneurial learning around problems and issues. They will consider how the impacts and consequences of a world changed by Covid-19 will require the education system, especially universities, to adjust their approaches to learning. We may indeed move beyond the university to explore the extent to which such an approach offers a different paradigm for learning and insight.

To quote from Allan:

“Such a shift in focus [in learning design and delivery] will place major demands upon teachers and their institutions. A central challenge is to understand and simulate the ‘way of life’ of those who live with high levels of uncertainty and complexity, to provide a feel for the culture, values and beliefs that reinforce this way of life and provide the associated opportunity to engage in the ‘community of practice’ of enterprising behaviours in a number of different contexts. This in turn means: breaching the apparent barrier between learning ‘about’ and learning ‘for’; being prepared to adopt a stronger agenda for personal development in the learning contract with students; being prepared to choose more carefully from a wide range of pedagogical approaches and being accountable for the impact these might have on behaviours; organising knowledge on a holistic, interdisciplinary, problem-solving basis analogous to the medical school; and maximising the opportunities for learning to learn from a wide range of different stakeholders.”

Note: This Briefing Note was written by Keith Herrmann and Andrew Atherton as part of the SIEF ‘Reimagining Our Futures’ Webinar series to inform the discussion at Webinar 2 on the topic ‘re-designing entrepreneurial learning around problems and issues’.



Speaker bio profiles for Webinar #2

Professor Andrew Atherton

Andrew is a Professor of Enterprise, Global Director of Transnational Education for Navitas, a leading global education business. He is strategic adviser on enterprise to the University of Cumbria and a Board Trustee of SOAS. He was previously Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dundee, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Lancaster University, and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lincoln. Andrew joined the Small Business Centre (SBC) at Durham University in 1995, setting up the Policy Research Institute, and was Director of the Foundation for SME Development, the successor to the Small Business Centre, until 2002. During that time he worked closely with Allan Gibb and SBC colleagues on a range of projects focused on policy research and development, pilot enterprise development initiatives and major international projects. He was involved in setting up a new School of Engineering at Lincoln with Siemens, and in creating the Health Innovation campus at Lancaster University. Andrew's 2018 book 'Entrepreneurship in China', makes the case that the emergence of that country as the second largest global economy has been as a result of the emergence of entrepreneurs and private enterprises in what is still formally a communist state.



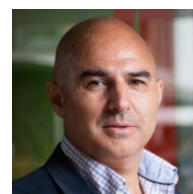
Professor Suzi Jarvis

Suzi is the Founding Director of the Innovation Academy at University College Dublin and Chair of Biophysics (www.innovators.ie). She is also a member of the action group for public service innovation under the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (www.ops2020.gov.ie) and has led higher education transformation programmes in Malaysia and Vietnam. Suzi has always sought to ground her work in real world problems, initially via a Kodak sponsored DPhil whilst at the University of Oxford. Subsequently she has worked on numerous industry collaborations and joint research agreements with multinational companies and start-ups. She has brought this approach with her as one of the foundational principles of the Innovation Academy – grounding learning in real world problems where multi-disciplinary teams of learners can add value. Since the launch of the Innovation Academy in 2010 Suzi has partnered with enterprise and entrepreneurs to develop entrepreneurial mindsets in 21st Century learners, so they can live well in the world and fulfil their potential.



Associate Professor Colin Jones

Associate Professor Colin Jones is a Senior Academic Developer in the Office for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (OALT) at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ). Located in the Academic Development team, Colin works in-situ alongside academics, supporting, promoting and modelling contemporary approaches to university teaching. Prior to joining USQ, taught entrepreneurship at Queensland University of Technology (2016-2020) and the University of Tasmania (2001-2015), and holds Visiting Professor positions at the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David (Wales), Northeast Normal University



(China) and Jilin Sport University (China), and visiting research positions at Liverpool John Moores University (England) and Tampa University (USA). Colin has been a regular contributor to policy discussions at the United Nations (UNCTAD) and has also taught on several teacher programmes in the UK during the past 10 years. He is a regular visitor to the UK, Colin enjoyed many stimulating conversations with Allan Gibb, and had the privilege of having Allan write the foreword to his 2011 book, 'Teaching Entrepreneurship to Undergraduates'.



Professor Lalit Johri

Professor Lalit Johri served and retired as full-time Senior Fellow in International Business at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. He served as Academic Director of the world renowned Oxford Advanced Management and Leadership Programme for senior leaders. Prior to joining the University of Oxford, Lalit served as Professor of International Business at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) School of Management in Thailand, where he was a Founding Director of the School's Executive MBA programme. He was also a tenured Professor at the University of Delhi in India. Along with Gay Haskins and Mike Thomas, Lalit co-edited the first ever research-based book on the theme of Kindness in Leadership published by Routledge. I met Allan in Manila, Philippines in the mid-1980s while teaching on an executive development programme organised by the Asian Development Bank for SMEs and policy makers. Alan took deep interest in my research work on SMEs in the Asian context. After moving to the University of Oxford in 2007 to work with Gay Haskins I had several opportunities to meet Alan. He was a very inspiring thinker and his work continues to be relevant in today's context.



Professor Ted Fuller

Ted holds the UNESCO Chair on Responsible Foresight for Sustainable Development at the University of Lincoln, UK and Editor-in-Chief of *Futures Journal*. He spent about twenty years at Durham University Business School working with Allan Gibb and colleagues, starting in the Small Business Centre, working closely with Allan as Deputy Director, and then founding two research centres in Knowledge Systems and Foresight Research. The influence of Allan on Ted's academic work and career has been profound, as a mentor, friend, critic and role model. It is important that Allan's legacy of ideas, theories, questions and overall approach to humanity are built on for the future. Ted's current academic work reflects responsible enterprising behaviour as a key element of societal futures. The practice of the UNESCO Chair is to work with international partners to help imagine and create sustainable futures. Such prospecting uses imagination, anticipation and aspiration to inspire what should be done and what can be done in each specific context to improve human flourishing. The UNESCO Chair involves a team of people from Lincoln International Business School.

Organising Committee:

Dinah Bennett, Director, Consult-ICE

Dr Susan Frenk, Principal, St Aidan's College, Durham University

Professor Andrew Atherton, Global Director of Transnational Education, Navitas

Professor Ted Fuller, Lincoln International Business School, University of Lincoln

Yolanda Gibb, Director, we-r-net

Gay Haskins, Associate Fellow, Saïd Business School, University of Oxford

Keith Herrmann, Director, Higher Ed Research

Professor Andy Penaluna, Professor Emeritus, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

Kathryn Penaluna, Enterprise Manager, University of Wales, Trinity Saint David

Jane Rindl, Director, Rindl Consulting

Professor Slavica Singer, Professor Emeritus, J.J. Strossmayer University in Osijek, Croatia

Marju Unt, Founder & CEO, Estonian Euromanagement Institute

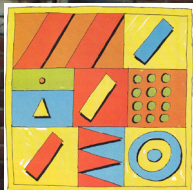
Professor Mike Thomas, Chair, University Hospitals Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust

Contact: dinah@consult-ice.com

Paraphrase of a typical quote from Allan about the lifeworld of the small business entrepreneur:

small business is a way of life;
it is about personal risk;
it means managing interdependencies;
know-who & know-how are most important;
small business means standing alone;
it means the buck really stops with you;
it means learning by doing.

Reference: UNCTAD 2001: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development:
Improving the Competitiveness of SMEs In Developing Countries – The Role of Finance to Enhance Enterprise Development



The logos of the Small Business Centre and the Foundation for SME Development are included here as a testimony to the legacy of Allan Gibb, the people who worked there and the many small business entrepreneurs, students, researchers, corporate partners, national and international governments, funders, international donor agencies and policy-makers involved in the work undertaken by the SBC and FSMED.

