

Research is Art is Entrepreneurship is Innovation

Dr. Sharon M. McIntyre, M.Ed., DSocSci,
President, New Cottage Industries & Co.

As American writer and humourist Mark Twain (whose real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens) said, “The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter—’tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.” With this in mind, I’m intrigued with the different English-language words we use to describe the following phenomenon:

Creating or discovering something new for the world that eventually displaces what existed before and ends up generating some kind of value for both the creator and the audience who wants the new thing.


Which word would you use to describe the above process? For example, author Seth Godin says it is art. For Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter, it was *innovation*. Business schools often call it *entrepreneurship*. All of those words resonate with me in different contexts, but it is important to note that the phenomenon is also *research*. Why does this matter? From my perspective, there are two reasons. First, each discipline (art, economics, entrepreneurship, research) can learn so much from the other because each often excels in different aspects of this phenomenon; artists often excel at generating a flow of new ideas, innovators deliver new shared value, businesses understand the needs of their audiences, and researchers displace old concepts with new discoveries. Second, the artificial silos of these differently named disciplines diminish opportunities for interdisciplinary

work and appreciation—each believing their methodologies and goals are unique.

As the value and impact of interdisciplinary applied research gains visibility and significance in our society (particularly in our colleges and polytechnics), I hope we will begin to see increased collaboration between these disciplines and grow to understand these words are synonyms: research, art, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

Author Note

Dr. Sharon M. McIntyre is the president of New Cottage Industries & Co.

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