

PhD Studentships for Academic Year 2026-27

Durham Enterprise Centre (DEC)

About the Research Centre

The Durham Enterprise Centre is a multi-disciplinary research centre that aims to establish, maintain, and develop a group that carries out world-leading research, which significantly impacts scholarly and practice communities. We address major issues and challenges relating to entrepreneurship, small business management, self-employment, and social enterprise across the public, private and non-profit sectors.

Find out more at: [Durham Enterprise Centre - Durham University Business School](#)

Topic 1

Title of Proposed Research Topic:

Social Class in Entrepreneurship

Potential Supervisors:

[Grant Murray](#)

Description of Possible Research Topic:

Historically, social class has been considered a significant barrier to social mobility. Social class draws upon a range of social, cultural and economic capitals to structure opportunity across society, and has been closely linked to occupational type. More recently, social class has become harder to define, and the link with occupation has become ambiguous, leading to an obscuration of the ways and means by which social class confers barriers and privileges in society. Recent attempts to define social class have provided some clarity, resulting in a resurgence of interest in the topic (Friedman et al., 2015; Savage et al., 2013).

Against the background of barriers to social mobility, governments and researchers often point to entrepreneurship for its potential to create economic growth through

egalitarianism (Rindova et al., 2009; Zahra and Wright, 2016). Empirical studies are less encouraging, with a growing community of scholars looking at the ways and means by which entrepreneurship becomes inflected with distinctions and barriers of social class. In this project, we seek to explore the subtle ways in which this new model of social class interacts with the growing field of entrepreneurship. The project seeks to deepen an understanding of modern social class, of entrepreneurship, and the relations between the two.

The successful candidate may come from a background in entrepreneurship, wider management studies, or sociology. It is likely that they will take a qualitative approach.

Key References:

Amis, J.M., Mair, J., & Munir, K.A. (2020). The Organizational Reproduction of Inequality. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 14(1), 195–230.

<https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2017.0033>

Brändle, L., & Kuckertz, A. (2023). Inequality and Entrepreneurial Agency: How Social Class Origins Affect Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy. *Business & Society*, 62(8), 1586-1636. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00076503231158603>

Campbell, J. T., & Kish-Gephart, J. J. (2023). Where the Past Meets the Present: Upward Mobility, Environmental Stimuli, and CEOs' Investment in Corporate Social Responsibility. *Human Relations*, 77(5), 650-679.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00187267231151512>

Friedman, S., Savage, M., Hanquinet, L., & Miles, A. (2015). Cultural Sociology and New Forms of Distinction. *Poetics*, 53, 1-8.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2015.10.002>

Ge, J., Li, J.M., Zhao, E.Y., & Yang, F. (2022). Rags to Riches? Entrepreneurs' Social Classes, Resourceful Time Allocation, and Venture Performance. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 37, 106248. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2022.106248>

Kish-Gephart, J.J., & Campbell, J.T. (2015). You Don't Forget Your Roots: The Influence of CEO Social Class Background on Strategic Risk Taking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(6), 1614–1636. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.1204>

Murray, G., Carter, C., & Spence, C. (2024) The Importance of Being Privileged: Digital Entrepreneurship as a Class Project. *Journal of Professions and Organization*, 11(1), 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/joae001>

Rindova, V., Barry, D., & Ketchen, D.J. (2009) Entrepreneurship as Emancipation. *Academy of Management Review*, 34(3), 477–491.

<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2009.40632647>

Savage, M., Devine, F., Cunningham, N., Taylor, M., Li, Y., Hjellbrekke, J., Le Roux, B., Friedman, S., & Miles, A. (2013). A New Model of Social Class? Findings from the BBC's Great British Class Survey Experiment. *Sociology*, 47(2), 219-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038513481128>

Vladasel, T., Lindquist, M., Sol, J., & Praag, M. (2020). On the Origins of Entrepreneurship: Evidence from Sibling Correlations. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 36(5), 106017. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusvent.2020.106017>

Zahra, S.A., & Wright, M. (2016) Understanding the Social Role of Entrepreneurship. *Journal of Management Studies*, 53(4), 610–629. <https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12149>

Topic 2

Title of Proposed Research Topic:

How Do Innovation Actors Experience a Hype Decline?

Potential Supervisors:

[David Johnson](#)

[Christina Koutouroushi](#)

Description of Possible Research Topic:

Technological advancements are based on innovation actors' (e.g., first-mover entrepreneurs) expectations, which provide momentum to the development of "cutting edge" industries (Bakker et al., 2012; Logue & Grimes, 2022). When inflated expectations peak, an industry becomes hyped. While some industries become hyped, others fall away, in somewhat predictable hype cycles with established stages. Innovation actors (i.e., entrepreneurs, scientists, and related ventures) play an important role in creating hype. However, sustaining hype involves heterogeneous external stakeholders - from consumers to institutions - that innovation actors are typically unable to control (Dedehayir & Steinert, 2016; Konrad et al., 2012). Inevitably, initial expectations lead to disappointment, stakeholders are disillusioned, and hypes fade. When initial excitement diminishes, innovation actors are faced with unique challenges (e.g., adapting after loss of investment). We aim to understand how innovation actors (with a focus on entrepreneurs) experience the disappointment phase of a hype cycle, and how they continue to innovate and stay relevant. The study will deepen our understanding of hype cycles in emerging industries, with a focus on individual actors' emotions, experiences, and strategies.

We aim to capture the lived experiences of innovation actors through longitudinal interviews (Hoppman et al., 2020). Please note that the student may benefit from the supervisors' existing links to industries which have been hyped and that are believed to experience a decline in hype.

We can also supervise a quantitative investigation of the topic, guiding the student as they collect and analyse archival and experimental data from a specific industry/ies, with a focus at the individual-level of analysis.

Key References:

Bakker, S., van Lente, H., & Meeus, M. T. (2012). Credible Expectations—The US Department of Energy's Hydrogen Program as Enactor and Selector of Hydrogen Technologies. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 79(6), 1059-1071. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2011.09.007>

Dedehayir, O., & Steinert, M. (2016). The Hype Cycle Model: A Review and Future Directions. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 108, 28-41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2016.04.005>

Goldfarb, A., Taska, B., & Teodoridis, F. (2023). Could Machine Learning be a General Purpose Technology? A Comparison of Emerging Technologies Using Data from Online Job Postings. *Research Policy*, 52(1), 104653. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2022.104653>

Hoppmann, J., Anadon, L. D., & Narayanamurti, V. (2020). Why Matter Matters: How Technology Characteristics Shape the Strategic Framing of Technologies. *Research Policy*, 49(1), 103882. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2019.103882>

Konrad, K., Markard, J., Ruef, A., & Truffer, B. (2012). Strategic Responses to Fuel Cell Hype and Disappointment. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 79(6), 1084-1098. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2011.09.008>

Logue, D., & Grimes, M. (2022). Living Up to the Hype: How New Ventures Manage the Resource and Liability of Future-Oriented Visions within the Nascent Market of Impact Investing. *Academy of Management Journal*, 65(3), 1055-1082. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2020.1583>

Van Lente, H., Spitters, C., & Peine, A. (2013). Comparing Technological Hype Cycles: Towards a Theory. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 80(8), 1615-1628. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2012.12.004>