

10. Mennonite entrepreneurship in Belize

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INTRODUCTION

While economic integration is expanding over the world, its influence appears to be less remarkable on ethnic communities. Entrepreneurs in ethnic communities tend to remain untouched by most developments in the outside world. Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) believe that an ethnic enterprise is a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people who share a common background or migratory experiences. In this chapter we will focus on an Anabaptist group, the Mennonites of Blue Creek in Northern Belize. Because of their common religious belief and shared migration history the entrepreneurs in this community can be described as ‘ethnic entrepreneurs’. The Mennonites in Belize can be easily distinguished from their non-Mennonite neighbors by their religion, their appearance (not only their white phenotypic characteristics but also their way of dressing), their language (Low-German) and their way of living. Being born and raised in a Mennonite environment makes the individual part of a strict community, in which almost every aspect of life, from the naming of children, to the use of modern technology, to personal appearance and lifestyle, is regulated (Plasil and Roessingh, 2006).

From its early beginnings the Anabaptist movement enclosed significant differentiations concerning religious principles, ideas and opinions (Urry, 1989). Segregations like the Amish, Brethren, Hutterites and Mennonites derived from this movement and spread out over the world. The Anabaptists live according to their religious beliefs, in communities that are alienated from society. However, as a result of their entrepreneurial activities they are able to remain in business and be part of the economical system of their country. The impact of religion on entrepreneurship is a long debated topic that was first addressed by Weber. In his 1904–05 study *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002), Weber introduced a link between socio-economic change and religious belief. He argued that Protestants were in possession of all the conditions

that are needed for successful entrepreneurial activities. He intended that the skills needed for running a business are similar to the skills that one needs for practicing a religion: trust, loyalty and a sober lifestyle (Roessingh, 2007). For Anabaptists this lifestyle entails that they do not take processes of modernization or any advanced technology for granted and that they basically focus on religion, family and work (Dana, 2007). These social structures connect people from an ethnic group, and the group members use them either inside or outside the community. Ethnic social structures strengthen the networks of kinship and friendship among a community and can be utilized when someone is looking for a job, a place to live or a contact in an institution of the host society (Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990). As a part of their ideology the Anabaptists prefer an independent position towards institutions, which are controlled by the national or local government of the country in which they live, including also aspects of the way they do business and the way they organize their entrepreneurship.

Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) provide a framework to understand the development of ethnic enterprises by using the concepts of opportunity structures, group characteristics and ethnic strategies. Opportunity structures focus on the market conditions and situations that support products or services, which are not available on the non-ethnic market, but also deal with the degree of access to business opportunities. Ethnic entrepreneurs gain advantage from the set of special characteristics that arises within a community of like-minded spirits sharing the same religious background, because the ones who share their needs are best equipped for the job.

Aldrich and Waldinger (1990) identified two dimensions of group characteristics: predisposing factors and resource mobilization. The first is related to the skills and goals that people put into an opportunity, such as selective migration, culture and aspiration levels. Resource mobilization relies on ethnic social networks, organization capability and government policies. Family members are often providers of financial as well as labor capital and therefore ethnic groups with larger families might reap more benefits than others (*ibid.*).

The third concept, that of ethnic strategies, is a mixture of opportunity structures and group characteristics, concentrating on the adaptation of ethnic groups and their environment. Ethnic entrepreneurs face a number of challenges in establishing and running their business, like acquiring the education and skills needed to run an organization; recruiting and managing efficient, honest and cheap employees; managing relations; surviving business competition and protecting themselves from political attacks (*ibid.*). For the recruitment of employees the Mennonites in Belize, for instance, mainly use their social network consisting of family and

community members. In this manner the Mennonites often make use of the social capital that is present within the community.

The aim of this chapter is to reveal which relations exist between self-employment, ethnic entrepreneurship and social capital. In the first section we will draw attention to the theoretical concepts of self-employment, entrepreneurship and social capital. The methodology of the research is incorporated in this first paragraph. The second section describes who the Mennonites are and why they immigrated to Belize in the first place. With regard to the case of the enterprise 'Maya Papaya' in the third section we will show how the labor recruitment process works in an EMMC Mennonite community in Belize. This chapter ends with a conclusion based on the research findings and the theoretical concepts.

1. SELF-EMPLOYMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

The Theoretical Concepts

Roessingh (2007) emphasizes that a similarity can be seen between Weber's argument on the relationship between Christianity and the development of a Calvinistic working ethos, and the entrepreneurial success of religious movements like the Mennonites in Belize. Anderson et al. (2000) and Dodd and Seaman (1998) also confirm a linkage between religion and entrepreneurship. They demonstrate that religion does not only shape society, but is shaped by society as well. Morrison (2000) declares that there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurship and cultural specificity. She states that the cultural context in which people develop themselves plays an influencing role in shaping and making entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial behavior that they aspire (Morrison, 2000). Beside the cultural context, Morrison advocates that also personality, intuition, society and a certain enterprising spirit are required to be a successful entrepreneur (Smits, 2006). When talking about an enterprise culture, the concept of self-employment should definitely be included. According to Filion one can describe self-employment as 'a person working for himself or herself, and working basically alone, although possibly interacting with others as part of the work' (2004, p. 311).

Filion (2004) has divided self-employment into two types; involuntary and voluntary self-employment. The first group consists of people who were pushed into creating their own means of income by starting to work for themselves. Typically, this group of people never intended to be self-employed, but due to circumstances were forced to work for themselves.

The second type of self-employment, the voluntary one, comprises those who always knew that they did not want to work for a boss and would rather work for themselves. The distinction between voluntary and involuntary self-employment can be compared to the two types of self-employment that Dana (1997) identified: orthodox entrepreneurship and reactive self-employment. In his research Dana took a closer look at the fundamental values of entrepreneurial actors to explain the roots of their decision to opt for entrepreneurship. In his literature review he recognized four spheres of influence with respect to the origins of self-employment in ethno-cultural communities. The factors that influence the decision to become an entrepreneur are first of all a focus on the self, secondly a focus on the ethno-cultural milieu, a third focus on the host society, and finally the fourth sphere is a combination of these factors (Dana, 1997). The conditions that Dana used for describing self-employment within an ethnic enterprise can be related to the Mennonites in Belize.

The first factor centers on the individual, the person as an entrepreneur. In this perspective entrepreneurship is more of a personal quality than it is a profession. One needs certain traits to be able to overcome obstacles that an innovator faces when he exposes his ideas in public (Ripsas, 1998). Ripsas (1998) summarizes some characteristics such as a need for completion, self-confidence/a locus of control, the courage to take risks, personal values and age. Morrison (2000) elaborates that the process of entrepreneurship initiation has its foundation in person and intuition, but also in society and culture. She emphasizes that an enterprising spirit is necessary to be successful. 'The key to initiating the process of entrepreneurship lies within the individual members of society, and the degree to which a spirit of enterprise exists, or can be initiated' (Morrison, 2000, p. 59).

In this respect not only the person but also the culture one lives in has a great influence on entrepreneurship (Smits, 2006). For Morrison (2000) both the culture of a society and the characteristics of the people who live in this society are substantial influences on decisions relating to entrepreneurship. This premises are directly in line with the second factor that Dana (1997) formulated as a sphere of influence for self-employment; the focus on the ethno-cultural milieu. Culture and background can be the variables that not only give people the drive to become a self-employed entrepreneur; they can also push people towards entrepreneurial activities. Cultural beliefs and values can persuade them into entrepreneurial behavior. The third factor that can influence their decision to become an entrepreneur is the focus on the host society. Dana and Dana (2007) are convinced that marginal groups have a sense of separateness from their host society and therefore construct their own adaptive mechanism through entrepreneurship. As a follow-up, entrepreneurship can lead to

social recognition, status and respect. With regard to a combination of the three spheres of influence on entrepreneurship, Dana (1997) concentrates on the resources that ethnic groups can use in their host society to expand their entrepreneurial activities. As ethnic groups have contacts in other societies, knowledge of their products, a different attitude, access to values and so on; their business will be able to enlarge based on their marginality in the host society.

An important aspect of being an entrepreneur who uses self-employment as a means of doing business is the amount of social capital that is present in the community. Social capital is an important source that is obtained from a network of connections that allow persons or organizations to enhance access to needed openings and changes (Ryman, 2004). According to Ryman religious affiliation provides a network of relationships that are likely to generate trust, goodwill and mutual aid. Like-minded individuals in a community gain shared security, solidarity and trust based on their connection with the same religion. To a certain extent, religion is a rich and efficient foundation of social capital because it creates a shared background and common thoughts that bind people. The entrepreneur receives significant advantages from social capital (Ryman, 2004).

The term social capital originates from Bourdieu (1977), who argued that society cannot be divided in terms of economic classes, and instead used the concept of fields. This concept can be explained as a social arena in which people interact in search of advantageous resources. A field is a network of social relations between internally structured positions in terms of power, such as laws, norms and created values. Within this social arena people retain capital that they are able to use as their power. Bourdieu (1977) separated four different kinds of capital: economic capital (that is, land and livestock), cultural capital (that is, education), symbolic capital (that is, traditions) and social capital (that is, relations). Social capital is the network that constitutes one's social power. This network of contacts is based on basic assumptions: shared history, common values, shared beliefs, faith and trust. Kraybill and Nolt (1995) described social capital as cultural resources that include the values, norms, customs and skills coupled with kinship and religious arrangements that are available to empower the work of prospective entrepreneurs. By making use of their social capital entrepreneurs are able to expand their activities with support from their friends, family and community members.

Consequently, one could say that access to social capital and the benefits that accumulate from community bonds will stimulate entrepreneurial activities and success. Also, Yeung (2002) emphasizes that social networks serve as an essential source of finance and capital for entrepreneurs who gain these resources from their social and family ties. This

'network capital' is of great value and the main factor for the expansion of entrepreneurial activities (ibid.). The existence of trust is embedded in relationships, because it increases information and financial flows and thus improves opportunities. Yeung (ibid.) defines trust as some kind of common understanding through which interacting parties in a group are expected to avoid opportunism and to promote welfare among members of the network. He states that trust is a constitutive of social life because disputes and clashes can be resolved through shared understandings (ibid.). Trust improves correlations at all levels and can prevent organizations from acting in an opportunistic manner. As a consequence, trust becomes a surrogate for hierarchical contracts and performs as an alternative control mechanism (ibid.).

Self-employment is a function of social capital because the more people support an entrepreneur in his business the more merits an entrepreneur can obtain. In contrast with business studies that see self-employment as being self-sufficient, we argue that this is too narrow an explanation of the concept. In our opinion self-employment can be put into a broader perspective by explaining the concept in the form of recruitment. What the businesses analysts seem to overlook is that self-sufficiency sometimes means less independence and more homogeneity. Does self-sufficiency produce independent agents or more closely, connect stable networks? In our opinion the latter holds true, since recruiting people from the same 'suit' means building a stable network of employees. Companies tend to hire people that are equal to them; they select their employees not just on skills but also take into account their background, values, attitude and interest. When recruiting new employees an entrepreneur has certain traits in mind, predominantly dependability and trustworthiness (Kraybill and Nolt, 1995). Most business people involve their offspring in their work and new employees are usually members of the immediate family or are related to the same religious ethnic group (ibid.).

Redekop et al. (1995) agree that the economy of the Mennonite society is based on a network of personal relationships. Over the years the Mennonites developed a strong set of values and beliefs that were focused on living in harmony, supporting fellow believers through mutual aid and encouraging members to remain faithful (Ryman, 2004). Elements of social capital such as trust, goodwill and mutual aid contribute to the productive Mennonite lifestyle (ibid.). Also cultural resources such as an energetic work ethic, managerial skills, frugality, strong kinship networks and large stable family units facilitate the Mennonites in expanding their entrepreneurial activities (Kraybill and Nolt, 1995). Mennonites are known for their hard work, their sincere attitude, and their quality goods and services that generate opportunities for broader economic possibilities

(Ryman, 2004). Because market demands have increased and companies enlarged, this has influenced the daily operations of the organizations. Whereas most Mennonite organizations were first built upon the help of family members, along with the growth of the company it became necessary to employ workers from outside the family.

Methodology

The data presented in this chapter are the result of an ethnographic research conducted in a Mennonite community in Belize from February until July 2007. As the Mennonites are an offshoot of the Anabaptists and are known for their entrepreneurial activities in Belize, they will be considered ethnic entrepreneurs. The ethnic identity of the Mennonites can be found in their common religious belief, their basic assumptions on life values and life style, and their shared migration history from Western Europe towards Belize. In his other research among the Mennonites, Roessingh (2007) focused on entrepreneurship and changes in the use of technology within different Mennonite communities.

Compared to other Mennonite settlements in Belize, the community in Blue Creek is the most developed in terms of their use of technology, their social-economic position and management thoughts. Since the intention is to offer an insight into the daily life settings of the Mennonite entrepreneurs, qualitative research methods were used to collect information about the Mennonite companies and the role of self-employment within the community. The advantage of qualitative research is that it aims at an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the participants' social world by learning about the context (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). The best method to gather information about the daily routine of the Mennonite entrepreneurs is through participant observation, hence by living and participating in their community. Next to participant observation informal conversations and semi-structured interviews were used to collect information on the entrepreneurial activities and self-employment within the community. Before the fieldwork period in Blue Creek, general information was collected and a literature review was written in order to gain a better understanding of the Mennonites and the community itself. This review served as input for a topic list that was created in order to organize the process of data collection in the field. As the research progressed this topic list changed to more specified terms and was extended with extra subjects to investigate.

Interviews were held with entrepreneurs, employees and community members. Most interviews had an informal character and were conducted in the natural environment of the respondent; in the organization, on the field or at the house of the respondent. Near the end of the research

some more structured interviews were held in order to fill the gaps or to obtain more detailed information. Most informants were approached after the Sunday service at church, since this is one of the most prominent social events within the community. Other informants were mainly approached after, and as a result of, previous interviews with respondents. This method of sample selection is called snowballing (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Informal conversations with community members took place on several occasions, while cooking dinner, cleaning the church, helping out on the farm, visiting, and so on. In the course of the research findings were related to academic literature to be able to gain a deeper analytic perception. In the next paragraph we will explain the Mennonite background and clarify the context of this research.

2. THE MENNONITES AS A COHESIVE GROUP WITHIN THE ANABAPTIST MOVEMENT, AND THEIR ROAD TO BELIZE

The Mennonites are a religious group of people who came to Belize in 1958. They hailed from Mexico and Canada, but a long history lies behind this. The Mennonites originate from the Anabaptist movement of the Protestant Reformation in Europe during the first half of the sixteenth century (Everitt, 1983). This movement has its origin in a 'religious-social rebellion' in sixteenth-century Europe (Redekop, 1989, p. 6). The term 'Anabaptist' stands for 're-baptizer', which means that this religious group believed that adults should be baptized based on their choice to follow Christ. In contrast to the then popular approach that children should be baptized soon after birth, the Anabaptists thought that the basis of faith must be a conscious rational decision. The Anabaptists were convinced that a clear distinction was needed between church and government. Therefore, they rejected the authority of a civil/religious government, demanding to baptize children, swear oaths and join military service, because they felt that the scripture suggested a different approach to a life of faith (Ryman, 2004).

A Catholic priest from a town called Witmarsum in the western part of Friesland in the Netherlands, whose name was Menno Simon (1496–1561), became an important leader of the Anabaptist movement. The Anabaptists first emerged in Switzerland, during a time of important social and religious conflicts all over Europe. From the start there have been many separations within the Anabaptist movement with regard to religious principles, ideas and opinions (Urry, 1989). One of the earliest schisms was the breakaway of the followers of Jacob Ammann (the Amish) from the

movement in 1693 (Hostetler, 1993; Kraybill, 1989). Other groups within the Anabaptist movement are the Brethren and the Hutterites. A specific group of Anabaptists around Menno Simons, situated in the Northern part of the Netherlands and Germany, formed a cohesive community and were soon called 'the followers of Menno'; the Mennonites.

The Anabaptist distinguished themselves from other movements by their requirement for a separation between religious life and state control, their claim to pacifism and their demand to live in self-controlled communities. The Mennonites, as other Anabaptist groups, are not organized in churches but in congregations or communities (Redekop, 1989). The concept of community (*Gemeinde*) has been and still is very important. The Mennonites distance themselves from certain principles such as worldliness, which means that they believe in 'separation from the world' (Loewen, 1993, p. 17). They aspire to maintain their traditional way of life as much as possible by rejecting influences from the world outside of their communities. Due to this they have little contact with the outside world and are recognized as being focused inward. In their attempt to preserve their traditional way of life the Mennonites have been forced to migrate several times, because they were often seen as antagonists by the ruling churches and governments in the countries they lived in. They first migrated to Poland and Prussia, then to Russia, from where they moved between 1874 and 1880 to Manitoba, Canada (Roessingh, 2007). Once in Canada the Mennonites could still not escape from the country's legislation, so the most traditional Mennonites decided to move further south into the Americas (Loewen, 2006). Via Mexico some Mennonite groups finally relocated in Belize.

Belize, formerly known as British Honduras, is a small country that borders Mexico and Guatemala. The country covers 22,966 square kilometers of the Central American continent and has approximately 300,000 inhabitants (Belizean Government, 2007). Belize is a multi-ethnic society, with the Mestizo and Creole as the largest ethnic groups, and English as its official language. As said, the Mennonites arrived in Belize in 1958. In 2000, of a population of 232,111 in Belize, 4.1 per cent of the inhabitants were Mennonites (Central Statistical Office, 2000).

The ethnic identity of the Mennonites is based on a combination of shared assumptions, life values and life style (Roessingh, 2007). Their religious beliefs are based on the way they interpret and use the Christian religion to fulfill their life (Roessingh and Plasil, 2005). According to Everitt (1983) the Mennonites developed their farming to be an important addition to Belizean agriculture and food production. Nowadays Mennonite entrepreneurs lead the national market when it comes to milk, dairy products and poultry. They often visit shops and supermarkets

in the cities to sell their products and some Mennonite companies even export their goods.

The government of Belize accepted the Mennonites because they were known for their agricultural skills. The Mennonites were allowed to stay in order to give an impulse to the agriculture in Belize, which at the time was not functioning, and the Belizean government gave them the space to do this by signing the *Privilegium* (Mol, 2005). In this document the Mennonites' exemption of military duty, their freedom to establish their own schools, the right to have their own social system and the abandoning of swearing the oath were included. Their obligations towards the Belizean government were also described: the Mennonites had to bring in investment money, had to produce for the local market and export, and must pay regular taxes (Higdon, 1997). With this agreement the Belizean government aimed at an improvement of the economical situation of the country.

The Mennonites who bought land in the Orange Walk district, in which Blue Creek and Indian Creek are situated, were members of the Old Colony congregation, a group that originated from a split in Canadian Mennonite settlements in the 1870s and that was known for their traditional way of life. Outsiders used the name Old Colony to refer to 'those people who were loyal to a rigid belief-system and a traditional way of life' (Redekop, 1969, p. 10). This name was also adopted by the members themselves.

Members of the Old Colony church aim to preserve their lifestyle and reject innovations and modern technology (Roessingh and Plasil, 2006). Horse and buggy is still the main use of transportation within Old Colony communities. As the Old Colony Mennonites maintained their traditional values in life and in their agricultural practices, they experienced more problems than other communities in expanding their cultivated acreage (Hillegers, 2005). The group that came down to settle in Spanish Lookout, in the Cayo district, derived from the *Kleine Gemeinde* congregation that was founded in 1874 as a response to the establishment of the Russian Mennonite Church (Loewen, 1993; 2006; Roessingh and Plasil, 2005). Originally this congregation led a traditional life, but the *Kleine Gemeinde* Mennonites became more progressive after their migrations towards Belize. Over the years another Mennonite congregation called the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church (EMMC) came to Belize. This congregation had its roots in Canada and built its first church in Belize in Blue Creek. The EMMC church is the most progressive congregation within the Belizean Mennonite communities. Services on Sunday, in contrast with the other congregations in Belize, are active, women and men are sitting side by side and the sermons are accompanied by music. During the week several bible study groups are organized in people's houses.

Nowadays there are 12 communities in Belize that are related to the Mennonite religion, not all of which can be divided strictly into this partition because some are related more closely to the Amish offshoot of the religion, and are therefore more traditional, and some congregations are a mixture of the Old Colony and *Kleine Gemeinde* adherents. The communities of Spanish Lookout and Blue Creek can be seen as the most progressive Mennonite communities in Belize because they both have a strong economic position and an intensive economic exchange beyond the boundaries of their community (Roessingh, 2007). In the next paragraph the Maya Papaya case will provide an insight into a Mennonite enterprise and reveal how recruitment is practiced within this Mennonite organization.

3. MAYA PAPAYA: NOT MACHINERY BUT HANDS ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT INSTRUMENTS TO CULTIVATE PAPAYAS

Blue Creek: The Community

Blue Creek is located in northwestern Belize, east of the Guatemalan border, south of the Mexican border and near the intersection of the Azul, Bravo and Hondo rivers. This isolated area is part of the Orange Walk district of Belize. Driving from the city of Orange Walk to Blue Creek, you follow an unpaved, bumpy road, passing small Belizean villages called Yo Creek, Trinidad, San Lazaro, August Pine Ridge and San Felipe. After a one-hour drive the hills of Blue Creek appear in sight and once you have crossed a little bridge across the Bravo, the road is paved again. You have now arrived in Blue Creek.

When the Mennonites arrived in Blue Creek in 1958 this area was nothing more than a dense jungle, covered by forests interspersed with swamp savannas with tacky and though soils (Hillegers, 2005). The Mennonites had to overcome difficulties related to the agro environment and suffered from the malaise caused by the tropical climate that was new to them. They also had to learn how to grow crops in this climate and changed to different products than they were used to cultivating; from oats and wheat in Canada and Mexico to rice, beans and tropical fruits in Belize.

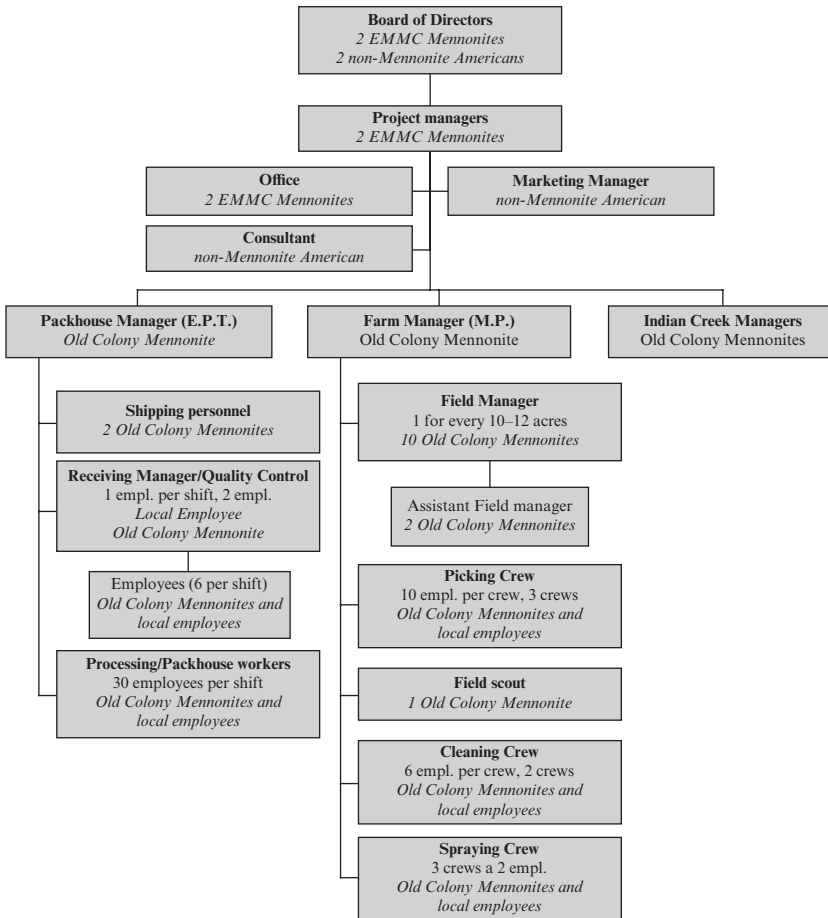
In the first years a shift from a traditional towards a more progressive Mennonite lifestyle took place in the community; the frictions about the use of technology became stronger. Some men were convinced that it was impossible to clear the land with steel tires, whereupon they started

to use machines with rubber tires. For this reason the more traditional Mennonites left the community and started a new settlement located about 25 kilometers eastwards: Shipyard. Since the uproar in the community kept on going, the EMMC church from Canada sent help in order to structure and organize life in the community. The EMMC is more progressive than the Old Colony and therefore a partition between the two different churches appeared. The EMMC built a new school, church and clinic for the people who had turned away from the Old Colony and peace returned. What once was a dense jungle has been transformed into cultivated hills where crops are grown and cattle are raised. In 1978 the Old Colony partisans had become a minority in the community and most of them left for Bolivia, whereas others joined the *Kleine Gemeinde* church (Kok, 2006).

Nowadays followers of the *Kleine Gemeinde* live in harmony with the EMMC Mennonites in Blue Creek. Both churches have their own school, clinic and shops, but there is no more uproar about the practice of the Mennonite religion. In 2007, the community has about 800 inhabitants and is known as an advanced Mennonite community in the country. The progressive Mennonites distinguish themselves by making use of a more developed economic system of commercial agriculture and agribusiness in their community (Roessingh and Schoonderwoerd, 2005). The organizations in the community do not only produce in order to supply the inhabitants of Blue Creek, but export their products to the local market as well. The Mennonites have created a well-organized network of distribution and transport, and deliver quality products; this way their organizations have become dominant businesses in the country (ibid.). The businesses that are established by Blue Creek Mennonites are all related to agriculture; for example Circle R. is a rice mill, Caribbean Chicken is a chicken slaughterhouse, Valley Ranch Enterprises is a construction company, the Rempels maintain a mechanic shop, practice crop dusting and raise cattle, and Maya Papaya produces papayas. The smaller firms also concentrate on chicken, rice, beans, fruit or cattle. This chapter addresses Maya Papaya and emphasizes to what extent the social capital within the community has had an influence on self-employment and entrepreneurship. We will illustrate how two Mennonite communities work together and exclude outsiders in the recruitment process.

Maya Papaya: The Company

When the Mennonites arrived in Blue Creek, they had no experience with the tropical climate and with producing food in this environment. It took them years of trial and error to anticipate on the circumstances in Belize.



Source: Smits (2006).

Figure 10.1 Organization chart Maya Papaya

Hard work, perseverance and a strong internal cohesion resulted in the advantages the Mennonites needed to expand as a thriving community. Risks were taken, chances exploited and opportunities developed; the Mennonites expanded business where possible.

Maya Papaya (Figure 10.1) started in 2006 as an initiative of a Canadian Mennonite (Mr Thiessen) who had come over to visit his family, decided to survive the Canadian winters in Blue Creek and built a house in the community. For over four years he and his family have been traveling back

and forth between Canada and Belize. During the Canadian winters they live in Blue Creek and when the rainy season in Belize starts, they move back to Canada. In Canada Mr Thiessen runs an asparagus company and through this business he came into contact with two American businessmen (Phil and his son James) who run an asparagus company in Arkansas, USA. Mr Thiessen posed the idea of starting a business in Belize and asked for support. The Americans only wanted to be involved in a company in Belize if Mr Dyck would take part in this business. They had known Mr Dyck for a long time and had discussed several business proposals with him before. At that time, Mr Dyck was involved in a rice business that he had inherited from his father. He owned many acres of land close to Hillbank (further south in the Orange Walk district), which appeared to be fertile soil for papayas. Mr Thiessen and Mr Dyck met via the American businessmen and determined to set up a papaya company, although neither of them had any experience with growing tropical fruit. Beside the fact that the soil seemed to be of the right quality to grow papayas, the investors also anticipated that the closely located Mennonite community Indian Creek could offer labor to work on the papaya fields.

Indian Creek is a sister community of the Old Colony Mennonites in Shipyard. A shortage of land among the farmers in Shipyard resulted in the 1970s in a split in the community, when the younger couples left to find their own property. In Indian Creek they built an Old Colony community according to their traditional religious values and tried to set up a farming system. The farmers tried to live off the land as much as they could by logging trees and planting corn. However, there was little financial capital so most Mennonites from Indian Creek worked in wage labor for other Mennonite communities, in furniture manufacturing, slaughterhouses, feed mills or rice fields.

The Old Colony Mennonites in Indian Creek maintain a traditional way of life; horse and buggy are still used for transportation, women wear long dresses and head covering (white for non-married, black for married women) and men are dressed in overalls with plain colored shirts and wear straw hats. For field work the Old Colony Mennonites use tractors with iron tires, because rubber tires are not allowed. The inhabitants of Indian Creek are focused inward and most of them only speak Low German. Indian Creek is known as a very poor community and according to several respondents the population needs help to survive. Even manufacturing products such as rice or beans are too expensive for this Mennonite group because the purchase of machinery for farming is invaluable. Maya Papaya has become an important opportunity for Indian Creek; not machinery but hands are the most important instruments to cultivate papayas.

To start up Maya Papaya the shareholders all invested money and were

involved in the strategic decisions about the company. Officially, they constitute the Board of Directors of both Maya Papaya and the asparagus company in Arkansas, but the tasks are divided. Mr Dyck and Mr Thiessen (who still runs an asparagus company in Canada as well) are responsible for the daily operation of Maya Papaya and the Americans are responsible for running the company in Arkansas. When it comes to major decisions such as investment or strategic changes the shareholders get together to discuss these. Both Mrs Thiessen and Mrs Dyck support their husbands by taking care of the administration in the office. Every two weeks the marketing manager (son in law of one of the US shareholders) organizes a conference call, which is used to keep each other informed about both organizations.

Since none of the shareholders had any previous experience in growing papayas, they had to conduct research first. They visited a local papaya company in the north of the country and learned a lot through Mennonites in a community called Little Belize, who had been growing papayas for several years. The men also went to Guatemala to observe similar projects in order to collect as much information as possible. An American consultant was hired to advise the company on the quality of the fruit. He visits the fields in Belize about every two months and teaches the workers how to prevent spots on the fruit and how to produce the best size and shape for the export market. As Mr Dyck states, 'half the taste is in the looks' (interview 17 April 2007). After doing research about growing papayas and setting up a business in Belize the shareholders learned that it would be to their benefit to set up two companies. This way they would be able to profit from the Belizean tax system that contains a law on export processing zones (EPZ). An EPZ is a free trade zone where duty and quotas are reduced and governmental business laws are lowered in favor of new businesses and foreign investments. In general, EPZ areas are the core of intensive manufacturing labor and the import of materials or components and the export of goods form the main industry. With this in mind the shareholders decided to divide the growing and picking of the papayas (Maya Papaya) from the treatment and packaging of the fruits (Eagle Produce Tropics). As a result the company is known in Belize as Maya Papaya and in the United States as Eagle Produce Tropics, because this company actually exports the products. In this chapter we will refer to Maya Papaya for the organization as a whole.

Hillbank is located about 50 kilometers further South of Blue Creek and since the road to this area is not paved it takes over an hour to drive to Maya Papaya. Therefore, Mr Dyck and Mr Thiessen share a little plane (Cessna) with which transport to the plant only takes about 15 minutes. When flying from Blue Creek to Maya Papaya they can see the papaya

fields and the buildings that belong to the company from high above. A fence surrounds Eagle Produce Tropics to indicate the EPZ border. From the air they can see that everything is properly organized; fields and buildings are situated perpendicularly in relation to each other. In the fields people are working; spraying the trees, picking fruit or cleaning the ground by taking away leaves. Maya Papaya started in 2007 by exporting two containers of fruit to the United States per week; after the first quarter of the year this amount increased to an average of 10 containers per week and this amount is expected to increase to 25 containers per week by the end of the year. 'The business is growing much faster than we expected, if this growth continues, then we will manage to reach the goal as described in the business plan. I never thought we would make it that far!' (Mr Dyck, interview 17 April 2007).

In March 2007 about nine fields were planted with papaya trees, but more land is being prepared for planting trees. Mr Dyck explained that Maya Papaya does not own all the surrounding acres; other farmers also decided to grow papayas and bought land in this area. One respondent from Blue Creek explained that he decided to quit his rice business because after five years of hard work he only managed to reach breakeven, which was not enough. With the help of others who had bought land in Hillbank he changed to the papaya business and prepared his fields for papayas. The profit will be shared between the owners of the fields and himself.

Maya Papaya organized by supporting farmers to grow papayas. The farmers can sell their fruit to the company that will take care of the transportation and export of the papayas. Although Maya Papaya has only existed for over a year, already 100 farmers from Indian Creek and Blue Creek have committed themselves to growing papayas for Maya Papaya. This shows how much trust the farmers have in the company and the papaya business itself. Mrs Dyck explained that the people from Indian Creek were desperate to start up something to earn money with and were happy to seize the opportunity that Maya Papaya offers. The company pays for first expenses so the farmers can start growing papayas and pay back their debts by delivering papayas that meet the company's standards (regarding size and shape).

Within this same period of time the company employed 100 workers, most members of the Indian Creek community. Due to the fact that the company is expanding faster than expected, Mr Dyck had to go to San Felipe to ask locals to work for them. He explained: 'There are no more employees available in Indian Creek, almost everyone is working for us, but we need more workers and we have received phone calls from San Felipe almost every day for the last few months, asking if they can work for us' (interview 28 March 2007).

Two weeks later the production process changed from one shift a day to two 12-hour shifts a day and 30 people from San Felipe started working for Maya Papaya. The shareholders expect they will need more employees soon, because a new packing machine will soon arrive. This machine was invented at Mr Thiessen's asparagus company in Canada and should make it possible to pack five or six containers a day (instead of two, as is the case at the moment). In order to keep the machine running, the company will need the double amount of employees in the future. A respondent made clear that it is difficult to find skilled employees:

Finding a new manager is very hard because no one is well-skilled. We should train someone, but we don't have the time for that, besides no one is available right now. I have once tried to train somebody from San Felipe, but it never worked out, because they don't pick up the game as easily. It costs me too much time. (Interview 4 May 2007)

Employees at Maya Papaya earn on average 30 Belizean dollars (15 USD) a day, managers make 75 Belizean dollars (37 USD) per day. Mr Dyck admits that he would like to pay more to some of his employees, but that this is not possible because it would not be in accordance with the salaries paid in the rest of the country. An entrepreneur from Blue Creek admitted that he sometimes feels guilty for paying his employees just 30 BZD a day, but 'if you pay them more they will see all the money, decide to quit, spend all the money and come back a couple of months later because all the money is gone' (interview 5 April 2007). This respondent assumes that local employees are not reliable when they earn a higher salary. Given that it is not part of their culture, employees do not receive a contract when they start working for Maya Papaya. 'It is very Mennonite to trust each other. My word is what I will do, so if I promise to do something, you can trust me on my word for it' (Mr Dyck, interview 17 April 2007). Although trust and reliability are very important in the Mennonite culture, at the higher levels the company formulates contracts, for example in business deals like they have with a company in the United States that has committed to sell exclusively for Maya Papaya.

In addition to the papaya business Maya Papaya has started with an onion project. The main reasons for this project are investment, protection of the papaya fields and the social aspect. The social aspect is based on the farmers who do not have the skills or the patience to grow papayas. The papaya growing process takes 10 months before a farmer can sell his first fruits and according to Mr Dyck farmers easily give up on this. The onion process is shorter and therefore more interesting for farmers who have the knowledge to cultivate onions. As the farmers have the skills, they will do the work while Maya Papaya will pay for

the expenses and put the unions on the market. The company has also initiated this project in order to protect the papaya fields. Besides the fact that onions are a good crop for rotation on a papaya field, Maya Papaya wants to hinder its competitors. A Belizean papaya company is trying to rent property in surrounding villages to farm papayas. Since the competitors only rent the land, they will not protect it from viruses and insects that could also harm closely situated papaya fields from Maya Papaya. Instead, Maya Papaya will buy the land from its owners, and guarantees the farmers that they will be able to work on it for at least 10 years. With this project the company is protecting its papaya fields from destruction by competitors.

Maya Papaya is expanding with respect to projects as well as employees. Whereas the company first only hired people from Indian Creek, currently more and more non-Mennonites are hired. Mrs Dyck elaborated that the shareholders experience difficulties in working with the Mennonites from Indian Creek. She stated that although they share the same background, the EMMC Mennonites are brought up differently, in a fashion that the Old Colony Mennonites would label 'more worldly'. The owners respect the Old Colony religion by, for example, arranging two buses to drive the employees from Indian Creek to Hillbank, one for the men and one for the women. At the shop floor though, everyone is expected to work together. Mr Dyck explained that within the Old Colony, class differences are very important and that this has caused friction between managers before. Class difference is based on family name and has resulted in tension within the work force. For example when two managers had a discussion about an issue, it appeared that one manager found it hard to respect the older, but 'lower class' other manager and therefore did not want to admit that he was wrong. Mr Dyck stated that these issues are based on cultural differences: 'It is human to think that you are better than anyone else, but we have been thought to look beyond that, they [Old Colony Mennonites] haven't' (interview 17 April 2007).

In the beginning Indian Creek Mennonites refused to work with non-Mennonites as well. Maya Papaya does not accept this distinction and has been teaching the employees to cooperate with everyone, regardless of their class or background. Blue Creek Mennonites or English-speaking Mennonites from Indian Creek hold the managerial positions within Maya Papaya. Indian Creek Mennonites and native Belizeans fill lower positions such as picking, cleaning and packing the fruit. Respondents mentioned that in their opinion natives can only perform one task at the time, do not have the skills to take responsibilities or the mindset to work as hard as a Mennonite. Every manager recruits new employees on demand of Mr Dyck. He explains that he asks the managers to hire some

more people and whether the new employees should be Mennonites or local Belizeans. This distinction is based on knowledge and liability; the Indian Creek Mennonites have received less schooling than the native Belizeans but the Mennonites are still entrusted with more responsibilities. Mennonites learn faster and want to work harder, in his experience: 'Mennonites are workaholics, natives have a different attitude. They rather work from 9 to 5 and take no responsibilities' (interview 28 March 2007). Another respondent from Blue Creek emphasized that 'On local workers you always have to keep an eye. . . . You have to be on top of them all the time' (interview 20 April 2007).

In the packaging area some young boys who appear to be no more than 12 years old assist by unfolding carton boxes. Mr Dyck clarified that the company hired a family for this task and the parents took along their kids to help out. Maya Papaya has set the rule not to hire people under the age of 14, but after a talk with the Minister of Education they decided that the Old Colony culture can be taken in consideration regarding this law. 'If they bring their older children to do this job, then these younger ones have to work on the field. I guess this job is less physical than working on the fields' (Mr Dyck, interview 8 May 2007).

Mrs Dyck could tell that the Indian Creek Mennonites have a better life than before they worked for the company. 'I can see the packaging manager growing. Do you see the buttons on his blouse? They fit tight the last few weeks' (informal conversation, 28 March 2007). Due to the fact that the Old Colony Mennonites have a steady income, Mr Dyck noted that their identity is slowly changing towards a worldlier character. Although this is not visible for the outside world yet, he sees the differences in the homes of Indian Creek inhabitants. Mrs Dyck compares the changes with Blue Creek:

When you look at Blue Creek you don't see any of the girls wearing a head cover these days, things will go the same way in Indian Creek. It just takes time. I hope they don't lose their identity and start to think that they can be someone else, because they can't. (Interview 17 April 2007).

Maya Papaya has had a big impact on the Old Colony Mennonites in Indian Creek. It has been a positive development so far, since they have work opportunities and a solid income. Respondents agreed when we asked about the Mennonite mindset to work from sunrise to sunset and consent on the need to work for themselves. Answers were always related to the way Mennonites have been raised. Some respondents even said that Mennonites are life-long entrepreneurs because it is impossible to take the entrepreneurial frame of mind out of a person.

‘I RATHER WORK WITH BROTHERS THAN WITH OTHERS’: A CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter has been to elaborate on the extent to which social capital has an influence on self-employment in relation to entrepreneurship. After a theoretical review we described the context of our research among the Mennonites in Belize and illustrated a case to support the research results. As discussed we have taken into account a different interpretation of the concept of self-employment. Whereas business studies focus on the decision to become an entrepreneur we have expanded the concept by focusing at the recruitment process of entrepreneurs. Exploiting the first definition, Mennonite respondents answered that they want to be self-employed in order to invest money and to be able to do things their own way. As a respondent said in an informal conversation: ‘Mennonites want to be free! See, if I want a day off, what the heck, then I take my day off. If I have the chance to do what I want whenever I want, then I rather run my own business and let other people do the work’ (interview 9 May 2007). This response is more closely related to Filion’s (2004) business perspective on self-employment, who advocates an individual approach. His definition of the concept concentrates on the decision to become an entrepreneur that can be involuntary or voluntary. The Mennonites in this case started Maya Papaya on a voluntary basis. However, this does not imply that they are free in their choice of employees.

Mennonites are involved in a network based on their religion and ethnic background. As part of this network the entrepreneurial Mennonites of Blue Creek are connected to aspects such as loyalty and trust towards the Mennonites of Indian Creek. In our view this is based on what Bourdieu (1977) calls social capital. In this chapter, we take a more collective approach of the concept self-employment. We do not concentrate on the entrepreneur and his decision to start an enterprise, but more on his choice of employees. An essential part of this is the entrepreneur’s preference for employees who are part of the same social network, share the same background, values, attitude and interest. Mennonite recruitment is mainly focused on hiring people who share the same basic assumptions. With the case of Maya Papaya we showed how the labor recruitment process is implemented within a Mennonite enterprise in Belize. The first selection of employees centered on people from Indian Creek. Due to the growth of the company the labor pool of Indian Creek appeared not sufficient for Maya Papaya, therefore the entrepreneurs recruited employees beyond their ethnic group; the Mestizo from San Felipe. This is an interesting development because it was not intended in the first place. For the people from Indian Creek, Maya Papaya plays an important role in their

social-economic position. The initiative from the Blue Creek Mennonite entrepreneurs gave the Mennonites from Indian Creek the opportunity to invest in their own community. Since the inhabitants gain a stable income they are not as poor as they used to be.

Another aspect of this case is a more general view: whereas the world is in progress and chances on the market become more and more important, this does not immediately reflect on Mennonite communities. Small companies that produce only for their own community do not take part in the world's economic integration. Big companies that extend their products beyond the community on the other hand, do compete on the world market. Maya Papaya is a good example of the latter. The company is expanding and, as a consequence, it is necessary to seek labor and expertise external to the Mennonite society. Nevertheless, the case of Maya Papaya demonstrates that recruitment is first of all based on ethnic background and shared beliefs. Entrepreneurs prefer to have employees from the same 'suit' rather than natives. Trust and loyalty are the main bases for recruitment within Mennonite enterprises.

Departing from a group rather than individual perspective recruitment plays an important role in the realization of self-employment in the case of the Mennonites of the Maya Papaya company, in the sense that recruitment serves as the basis to benefit and strengthen their own religious ethnic group.

Or, as a respondent revealed: 'I rather work with brothers than with others' (informal conversation, 18 April 2007).

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