

Beyond the Sentence:

Reimagining the Path from Inmate to Entrepreneur

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Contents

1. Background	1
1.1 Background and Educational Competence.....	1
1.2 The Practical Problem and Research Focus	1
1.3 Location within Research in Innovation and Design	1
2. Theoretical Framework	2
2.1 Theoretical Frameworks in the I&D Field	2
2.2 Motivation and Argumentation.....	2
3. Research Methods	4
3.1 Methodological Choices in the Field	4
3.2 Motivation and Methodological Reasoning	4
3.3 Ontological Perspective - Pragmatism.....	5
3.4 Reflection on Ethics.....	5
4. Discussion.....	6
4.1 Synthesizing Theory and Practice.....	6
4.2 The Swedish Context: A Situated Design Challenge.....	6
4.3 The Psychological Foundation of Innovation	6
4.4 Conclusion: Designing for Agency.....	7
References	8

1. Background

1.1 Background and Educational Competence

My academic background consists of a variety of different subjects. This gives me an opportunity to approach systemic problem solving via a multidisciplinary perspective. My previous academic career consists of a bachelor's in information architecture. This has given me competence in structuring complex information and designing user-centered systems. To this I have studies specific Courses in digital accessibility, giving me an inclusive communication perspective. Furthermore, previous studies in political science have given me a macro-perspective on institutional policies and how they shape societal structures.

My professional background consists of many years in operations and business management. I have applied skills accumulated from this vocation to design internal processes as well as working with strategic digital Communication. In the context of Innovation and Design (I&D) I try to utilize these Tools in analyzing the user journey. In the case of this study, it is focused on the individual transitioning from incarceration to design accessible pathways for social reintegration.

1.2 The Practical Problem and Research Focus

Recidivism remains a systemic failure where the more traditional reintegration policies often fail due to, for example, social stigma as well as a lack of individual Agency. While the Swedish correctional system has a great focus on traditional employment, it lacks an entrepreneurial mindset. The central research question in this study is:

"To what extent can international models of prison entrepreneurship be adapted to the Swedish correctional system to improve post-release reintegration and long-term desistance from crime?"

The main problem is the lack of adapted innovation frameworks within the system. By exploring and studying different international models, such as the Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP), the study aims to see if it can adapt into the Swedish context. This would potentially enable a more resilient and sustainable path for inmates toward a long-term desistance from a Life of crime.

1.3 Location within Research in Innovation and Design

The research produced with this paper is situated within social innovation and situated design. Simonsen et al. (2014) argues that design is defined as a process which SHAPes and Changes society. Furthermore, it is intentional, situated and emerging. Viewing the Swedish system, it is situated as in it does not work with a one-size-fits-all approach.

In other Words, it requires a design that considers the specific constraints which are Active in this legal framework and system.

Also, the focus on participatory design is vital. This is due to reintegration paths needing Mutual Learning. This Mutual concept regards inmates, correctional officers as well as the business Community (Simonsen & Robertson, 2012). By looking at the concept of reintegration as a designed system, we may move the research away from typical administrative management processes to a more transformative innovation that in turn may create Agency for those involved.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Theoretical Frameworks in the I&D Field

The following table aims to summarize the different theoretical frameworks that have been identified in the literature study relevant to the topic of innovation, entrepreneurship and recidivism.

Research Source	Theoretical Framework	Key Innovation & Design Perspective
Wright (2022)	Social Entrepreneurship & Cost-Benefit Model	This views the concept of reduction in recidivism as a societal Product with an economical value.
Murniawaty (2026)	Resilience & Social Support Theory	Here the focus is on the internal and external catalysts for entrepreneurial intention.
Omorede (2024)	Entrepreneurial Passion Theory	This explores the emotional part that sustains the innovative behavior of affected clientele.
Berglund et al. (2024)	Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC)	Focuses on the organizational climate which is needed for innovation to be able to emerge.
McDaniel et al. (2021)	Positive Social Spillover	This examines the possibilities of individual entrepreneurship on creating a systemic social value.
Simonsen et al. (2014)	Situated Design & Participatory Design	Argues for design as a socially embedded Mutual process for Learning.

2.2 Motivation and Argumentation

In looking at adapting an international prison entrepreneurship model in the Swedish system context, this research takes on a dual layered theoretical framework. It consists of social entrepreneurship as a systemic goal as well as the psychosocial safety and passion as internal catalysts. This all is encapsulated in situated design.

The Systemic Goal: Social Entrepreneurship and Spillover

This studies Foundation lies on the theories of social entrepreneurship (Wright, 2022) and Positive Social Spillover (McDaniel et al., 2021). These two theories help frame the Swedish correctional system not merely as a correctional facility and institution, but also as a possible incubator for social innovation. The cost-benefit model argues for why the state should invest in designing beneficial pathways and the social value created by desistance should outweigh the cost of incarceration.

This goes hand in hand with the definition by Mair and Marti (2006), who means that social entrepreneurship is a process of creating social value when combining Resources in new ways. This may lead to meeting pressing social needs, fitting well with the narrative of the prison as a potential incubator.

The Internal Engine: Psychosocial Safety and Passion

In this case, international models provide a structure while MDU-based research provide an "Engine", of sorts. Omoredé's (2024) work on Entrepreneurial Passion is vital in this case as through the lens of her research, a genuine passion for the innovative process, reintegration program remains just an administrative exercise. Passion cannot exist in a vacuum.

By looking at Berglund et al.'s (2024) framework on Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC), one may argue that for an inmate to be innovative, the organization (in this case the prison) must first be experienced as a psychologically safe Place. This is a significant addition as a theory to the study because adapting a model to the Swedish system requires designing a PSC in a certain way. This way needs to include vulnerability and creativity within the limits of the correctional system.

The Design Lens: Situated Action

Lastly, the choice for situated design (Simonsen et al., 2014) is motivated by a need of contextual adaptation. A model that works abroad, for instance in the US (PEP) is well situated in their legal and cultural setting. In accordance with I&D principles that design is an emerging process we need to see the path from inmate to entrepreneur. In doing so we need to design with the constraints of the Swedish system, not against them. These Three different theories help this process by acting upon systemic value, internal passion as well as situated design. This creates the possibility to go deeper into the "what" and "how" regarding the transition process.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Methodological Choices in the Field

Author(s)	Research Approach	Data Collection Method	Benefits/Limitations in this context
Wright (2022)	Case Study & Conceptual	Analysis of existing programs (e.g., PEP).	Aids in providing logical models albeit lacks empirical data in the Swedish context.
Murniawaty (2026)	Quantitative	Surveys and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).	An effective measuring tool for intentions but lack depth in explaining how adaptation work.
Omoredede (2024)	Systematic Review	Database analysis of 30 relevant studies.	MDU Research: Provides a foundation for how passion may drive innovative behavior.
Johnsson (2023)	Mixed Methods	Systematic Review + Interviews & Questionnaires.	MDU Research: A method for validating innovation in different complex Environments.
Berglund et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Statistical analysis of Psychosocial Safety Climate.	MDU Research: Aids in highlighting different measurable factors in environments, critical for enabling innovation.

3.2 Motivation and Methodological Reasoning

I argue for using qualitative research grounded in situated design as a way of investigating models of prison entrepreneurs adaptability in the Swedish system. Creswell (2014) argues that a qualitative approach is best suited when researchers are looking at exploring phenomena in its natural Environment and understanding its underlying processes.

Further, the choice of qualitative case studies is motivated by a need for a deeper understanding of certain constraints within the Swedish correctional system. In using Simonsen's (2014) concept of "Situated Action", the methodology focuses on actual interactions between inmates and the institutional environment. As Johnsson (2023) emphasizes in his research on high-performing innovation teams, creating functional models in complex organizations needs a certain combination of theoretical Foundations as well as empirical validation. This needs to happen within the boundaries of dialogue with said stakeholders.

This may also be seen as aligning with my own background in IA. The analyzing of the system for designing a better user experience for reintegration into society.

3.3 Ontological Perspective - Pragmatism

In conducting this study, I took a stance in the pragmatic worldview. As Creswell (2014) notes, pragmatism as an ontological stance is not committed to any one system of philosophy. Instead, it focuses on research problems and uses different approaches in trying to understand them. In this specific study, the so-called truth of entrepreneurship model can be found in the practical application and its ability to reduce recidivism.

The pragmatic view justifies using situated design methods (Simonsen et al., 2014) which emphasizes design as an intentional, situated and emerging process. Instead of seeking a more universal truth about entrepreneurship, the research aims for a situated truth. In other Words, one that may work well with the specific Swedish context. When focusing on what works, the pragmatic core, the study may bridge the gap between the theories of passion for innovation (Omoredede, 2024) and the need of institutional psychological safety (Berglund et al., 2024).

3.4 Reflection on Ethics

When researching incarcerated individuals in, for example a qualitative study, it is vital to use the highest level of ethical rigor. Following Creswell's (2014) framework on the research role, studying must for once take into consideration the Power imbalance:

1. **Informed Consent:** It is very important that participants are well understood that their involvement is strictly voluntary and that it has no impact on their current sentence or treatment within the correction institution.
2. **Confidentiality:** As the stigma om criminal records is very high, a high level of anonymization is vital and required to protect the participants' rights and future reintegration possibilities.
3. **Psychosocial Well-Being:** In using the perspective of Berglund et al. (2024) on Psychosocial Safety, the process of the research itself must be designed in a way that it empowers (fosters Agency) rather than being too extractive. It must ensure a safe climate for the participants when sharing their innovative potential.

4. Discussion

4.1 Synthesizing Theory and Practice

The very core of this research resides in the tension between the rigid institutional Environment (the prison setting) and the creative nature of innovation. In viewing the transition from inmate to entrepreneur via the lens of social entrepreneurship (Wright, 2022) we can shift the narrative from a more risk management focused one to instead a value creation aspect. In this case, the practical problem of high recidivism can be seen not just as a social failure, but also a design failure.

If the very system is designed only for the aspect of control, it cannot at the same time foster the self-autonomy needed for entrepreneurship to take place.

4.2 The Swedish Context: A Situated Design Challenge

Korsgaard et al. (2015) argues that the success of entrepreneurial initiatives is very dependent on the context, both spatially and institutionally. This reinforces the need to look beyond a one size fits all approach when adapting the PEP model to Sweden.

When adapting international modes like the PEP into a Swedish context, it requires what Simonsen et al. (2014) describe as situated design. A one-kind-fits-all perspective does not work as it ignores the socio-political variations of the Swedish correctional institution. This study argues that for the innovation model to be sustainable it must be as previously mentioned, intentional, situated and emerging.

This means that one needs to design a framework which takes the Swedish legal constraints into consideration while also utilizing the high-trust social safety net that is a part of the region. In accordance with my background within information architecture, IA suggest that the interface between the inmate and the entrepreneurship program must be intuitive and accessible for full effectiveness.

4.3 The Psychological Foundation of Innovation

One of the most significant findings in the literature synthesis is that for recidivism to be prevented in the lens of entrepreneurship models is that of the internal drivers. Passion and safety are the true catalysts.

The MDU Perspective: Passion and Climate

Entrepreneurial Passion: In accordance with Omorede (2024), passion is the emotional Engine that creates sustainable innovation behavior. In a correctional Environment this passion may often remain untapped due to the focus on compliance.

Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC): The work of Berglund et al. (2024) becomes a vital part of the aspect of passion and climate.

As entrepreneurship is inherently risky and requires vulnerability, the climate needs to be able to provide psychological safety. When that occurs, the passion identified by Omorede may be translated into action.

My argument is that the missing link in Swedens current correctional reintegration efforts is the lack of a designed PSC. If there is no climate that supports inmate driven innovation, all entrepreneurial programs will only remain a shallow intervention rather than a fully transformative journey.

4.4 Conclusion: Designing for Agency

Focus on the individual's perspective is supported by LeBel et. al. (2008), who argues that a subjective shift in mindset, or in this case Agency, is critical for successful resettlement and long term resistance to desistence in crime.

In summary, this research positions the concept of entrepreneurship as a form of social spillover (McDaniel et al., 2021). When we manage to create a successful path for the individuals the benefits spill over into the Community at large. This is through reduced crime and increased economic contribution. When we combine the systemic view of political science with the user-centric design principles of innovation and design we can move "Beyond the sentence". The goal is to design a system where the user (the inmate) is empowered to become the architect of their own future.

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