

Designing and Assessing Learning in Venture Creation Programs

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Overview and Key Questions

Workshop Summary

In Venture Creation Programs the venture acts as a ‘learning vessel’, enabling what students need to learn - and more - given a greater or lesser extent of guidance. But how do we ensure that the students are engaging in ‘doing what they need to do’ in order to ‘learn what they need to learn’? In this workshop, participants will benchmark and crowdsource to identify and develop teaching tool prototypes for venture creation programs. Each ‘teaching tool’ consist of a learning objective, a combination of learning activities and an assessment suggestion. The workshop consists of two steps: the first is to capture learning activities from the entire group; then we divide into smaller groups where we develop them further into teaching tools. The teaching tools can later be used by the participants in their home university in order to package integrated venture activities so that the activities become aligned to the learning objectives.

The venture as the main ‘learning vessel’ is really about placing the student in an authentic entrepreneurial process (Lundqvist and Williams Middleton, 2008). This process includes emotional highs and lows, the mundane ‘daily must do’ activities, and, most critically, the condition of uncertainty (Lackéus, 2014; Williams Middleton, 2010). Educating individuals for the practice of entrepreneurship builds upon underlying knowledge and theories, but if the practice is to be engrained and routinized (learned from), then there is need for a strong emphasis on action (Kyrö, 2008). Students need to practice doing what they are expected to do as practicing entrepreneurs. However, if these activities become detached from the rest of the education we do not know whether the students have actually practiced these skills, if they have learned to master them, and if they are aware why they have done them in a certain way. Furthermore, we do not know if the actions are trial and error or if they are using curriculum to become informed about how to do and to reflect upon what they have done and what they need to do next to move the venture forward. In this setting, a key question is: to what extent are our learning objectives regarding entrepreneurial mindsets and skillsets actually fulfilled? In this PDW, all participants will join forces in order to develop teaching tools that enable us all to assess the learning outcome of VCPs.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Underpinnings

Venture creation programs are “entrepreneurship education programs which utilize the on-going creation of a real-life venture as the primary learning vessel (thus involving venture creation as part of the formal curriculum), including intention to incorporate.” (Lackéus and Williams Middleton (2015, pg. 50). Programs emphasizing engaged venture creation belongs to the stream of research on entrepreneurial education intended to prepare individuals for the practice of entrepreneurship/entrepreneurial activity emphasizing the importance of experiential learning (Cope, 2005). A challenge in this literature regards how the venture activities should be assessed and evaluated as well as how the activities should become a measurable part of the education, particularly as the teaching has outpaced research to understand how education should be designed with effective assessment of what we intend students to learn (Neck and Corbett, 2018). However, there is a marked shift towards development of entrepreneurial competence, recognizing not just

development of knowledge, but also skills and attitude/mindset, thus including the importance of emotional development to mitigate setbacks and support learning through failure (Cope, 2011; Fang He et al., 2017; Gartner and Ingram, 2013).

Details of existing evidence

We facilitate learning on a daily basis in two VCPs: Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship and NTNU School of Entrepreneurship. These two VCPs have been presented, evaluated and analyzed in entrepreneurship education literature (Johannisson, 2016; Nabi et al., 2017; Warhuus and Basaiawmoit, 2013) and evaluated by students in course evaluations as well as national program evaluations (Bakken et al., 2018) and are regarded as successful. Alumni interviews have been conducted to better understand how the students have learned what they have learned in our programs. Alumni validate that the venture is critical for learning as it made explicit what they needed to learn, and required them to apply and reflect upon knowledge and action to master real entrepreneurship situations. However, the co-location of the new ventures was an even more important learning arena since it was seeing how the other students worked with their ventures, and to ask everyday questions that made them understand ‘how to be an entrepreneur’ (Sæter et al., 2018). In this PDW, we aim to preserve the student-to-student learning in and between ventures while finding synergies with activities facilitated in order to improve learning and assessment.

Activities and Outcomes

Session breakdown

Mins 0-10: The participants gather around a two-by-two matrix with mindset and skillset on the x-axis and classroom and venture on the y-axis. We introduce VCPs and the workshop.

Mins 10-15: The participants note a learning activity (see participant preparation) each in the matrix.

Mins 15-30: The participants work in groups focusing on developing a learning activity into a tool by combining it with activities from the other side of the y-axis and suggest how the assessment should be made in order to capture the learning objective.

Mins 30-40: The groups present their tools.

Interactive aspects of session

The objective of the session is development of interactive tools and methods. The workshop itself is focused on peer discussions around key questions/topics. This requires that all participants come with contributions of desired learning objectives and engage in their working groups to help develop tools. We will ensure that most of the generated insights around the workshop are collected and redistributed to all participants.

Participant preparation

We suggest that all participants have made some notes of a learning activity that they consider to be successful at their university. What is it about this learning activity that makes it successful according to you and how is the learning activity assessed? The purpose of this preparation is for the participants to start thinking about learning activities. It will also equip them with some examples to share with their group during discussion to facilitate interaction. The preparation instructions will be visible during the introduction of the PDW to enable unprepared participants to catch up.

Expected participant outcomes and takeaways

The workshop will collect ‘shared practice’ empirics and generate new tools that connect intended learning with learner’s actions within a venture creation process. Bringing these tools back to their universities will enable the participants to evaluate assignments where the students need to use their own start-up as part of the work given that the start-ups are different. Moreover, it will enable the participants to design activities where the learning achievement from the venture, which is currently difficult to measure, becomes more explicit.

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