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Contemporary Entrepreneurship Education, hampering challenges and golden opportunities.
- Can we take it from a Danish perspective to an international directive?

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Link to publication

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Questions we care about (Objectives)
Despite first rank conditions for setting up a company in relation to low bureaucracy and heavy governmental support initiatives Danish entrepreneurship educators at higher educational institutes are still facing challenges in relation to succeeding with their learning designs. Why is that? Are the same challenges experienced internationally and what can be done to overcome them?

Approach
Based on a focus group workshop, where 20 Danish entrepreneurship educators, from universities of applied science and business academies, were asked to identify challenges relating to entrepreneurship education, imagine other stakeholders perspectives on entrepreneurship education, dream of an ideal future and identify possible opportunities, the following paper depicts status quo of contemporary Danish entrepreneurship education from the perspective of the involved educators, plus in addition seeks to identify opportunities and next best steps in relation to entrepreneurship education.

Results
During the workshop 60 challenges were described, 53 negative perspectives from students, colleagues and educational management were set forth, but only 15 dreams were shared and 8 opportunities identified.
The result will be grouped in themes and presented in further detail in the paper with the purpose of starting a discussion, during the conference session, of whether the challenges are specific to the Danish educational system or can be categorized as international. Furthermore perspectives on opportunities and possible solutions are welcomed.

Implications
Based on the sheer numbers of challenges and negative perspectives relative to dreams and opportunities, one could, inspired by Jay Z, be tempted to state:
" I got 113 problems, maybe the entrepreneurship educators are one?"
Realizing this may be provocative, but it seems like a paradox that educators who are supposed to teach students how to spot opportunities in challenges and act upon them themselves are unable to do so.

Value/Originality
Based on the depicted status quo of entrepreneurship education at bachelor degree level at universities of applied science, this conference contribution is an invitation to all entrepreneurship educators to get involved in discovering the challenges of contemporary entrepreneurship education at higher educational institutes, enabling us to identify the opportunities and potential solutions that can take entrepreneurship education to the next level.
Maybe it is time we take our own medicine?

Key Words: Entrepreneurship education, Barriers and opportunities, the educator role.

Introduction

Over the past three decades there has been an evolution in the form, content and scope of entrepreneurship education (Hägg & Gabrielsson, 2014). Today entrepreneurship education span from focusing on business start-up to development of enterprising skills and competences for the use in everyday practice (Robinson & Blenker, 2014). Despite much societal attention, research and effort entrepreneurship education still presents as being challenging and problematic in many ways. Benjamin Franklin is quoted for saying

"Every problem is an opportunity in disguise."

This has become synonymous with an entrepreneurial attitude, but do we as entrepreneurship educators act as role models in dealing with the problems and challenges of our professional practice?

Theory

The following paper is based on an understanding of entrepreneurship as: Mean driven behavior related to opportunities that result in value creation for others. It is inspired by a number of researchers; the mean driven aspect comes from Saras Sarasvathys effectuation theory, more specifically the bird in hand principle (Read, Sarasvathy, Dew, & Ohlsson, 2011). Boiling down entrepreneurship to behavior, as Drabbe among others suggests (Drabbe, 2014), makes it more actionable in an education context. Shane et al has focused on the link between opportunities and entrepreneurship (Shane, 2003) (Eckhardt & Shane, 2003). Whether opportunities are created or found is a debate for another time, but what one believes to be the answer seems to affect ones approach to entrepreneurship to a large degree (Sarasvathy, 2001). Value creation for others is made explicit in this definition to underline that entrepreneurship is not just being enterprising and doing something but it is doing something constructive giving entrepreneurship a societal importance. Entrepreneurship is not limited to creating value through a business start-up but can also include social entrepreneurship and cultural entrepreneurship.

Given this understanding of entrepreneurship, the purpose of entrepreneurship education becomes developing student's knowledge, skills and competences that will enable them to act entrepreneurially and increase the likelihood of them doing so. The Progression Model suggests that entrepreneurial competences can be divided into four dimensions: creativity, action, environment and attitude (Rasmussen & Nybye, 2013). The action dimension and attitude dimension makes entrepreneurship education unconventional at higher educational institutes compared to other courses where the focus is on cognitive learning. Relating to entrepreneurship education studies has shown that learning through entrepreneurship is most effective in relation to positively affect the student's entrepreneurial intent (Moberg, 2013). Entrepreneurship education's focus on new dimensions of competence development and focus on experiential learning calls for new ways of teaching, learning and evaluating leaving educators with an interesting question of what challenges and opportunities rise in the wake of this?

Approach

In order to investigate what challenges and opportunities entrepreneurship education within curriculum bring about from an educator perspective data was collected at a gathering for educators involved in entrepreneurship education at Danish universities of applied science and business academies (Bachelor level).

A total of twenty respondents were divided into 6 focus groups and asked to answer 4 questions by brainstorming on post-its.

The questions asked were:

1: What challenges do I meet in relation to entrepreneurship education?

2: How do others experience the challenges (The perspectives of students, colleagues, head of departments)

3: If my challenges were solved tomorrow, how would I know?

4: What can I do to solve the challenges?

After brainstorming 10 minutes on each question the participants were asked to write a postcard to themselves listing their next best step and the reason why they should take it (the post cards were then send 30 days later). The post cards were treated as personal hence the data presented is constricted to the brainstorming sessions. A total of 136 statements were collected (60 related to challenges, 53 related to others perspectives, 15 related to future dream scenarios and 8 related to potential action points) and sorted by question, relation to process or framing and perspective.

Results

In the following a summary of the data analysis is presented.

Challenges

In general the lack of a clear unambiguous definition of entrepreneurship poses as a challenge in order to get buy in from students, colleagues and management. Often Entrepreneurship is understood in a narrow sense as business start-up, which for many students, colleagues and education management is considered irrelevant since students are educated for employment. Furthermore the association with "colorful hats" works counterproductively in order to gain respect for entrepreneurship education at higher educational institutions. Entrepreneurship education is not business as usual in an education context and it evokes resistance.

In relation to the framing of entrepreneurship education educators find it difficult to formally assess the learning outcome. It is difficult to integrate into the core education and there is not room for more content in the curriculum.

During the process of entrepreneurship education it is experienced that students lack motivation, oppose action, become frustrated in a non-constructive manner, make up obstacles, lack courage, have unrealistic expectations and lack ideas. In short a lot of students are disengaged if they show up at all. Some educators feel they lack courage, relevant experience and facilitation skills making them unable to be role models for the students. In addition finding a balance between theory and action proves difficult and often the students do not go beyond idea generation on a cognitive level detaching the learning process from reality.

In relation to the framing of entrepreneurship education it is experienced that it is difficult to make a formal evaluation (exam) which can accommodate the action orientation of entrepreneurship education and satisfy formal requirements. A lack of support and interest is experienced from both management and colleagues who do not understand the purpose and relevance of entrepreneurship education. Further hampering is inflexible schedules and support functions that cannot or will not handle people thinking and acting outside the box.

Others perspectives

The identified stakeholders were students, fellow educators and educational management. Commonly they were perceived to lack a "true" understanding of what entrepreneurship is and the purpose of entrepreneurship education is. As an extension entrepreneurship education was viewed as a costly nice to have but not a need to have and the notion "why fix something that isn't broken" was referred to. At the extreme entrepreneurship education was experienced as being viewed as hot air/ empty drums or a phase, which will, hopefully, soon pass.

Specifically in relation to fellow educators a reluctance to get involved with entrepreneurship education was experienced and explained by a fear of failing as a process facilitator or because of an already full assignment portfolio. Furthermore there is a perceived dogma that theory goes before action and takes precedence.

Education management was perceived to hold resistance to entrepreneurship education because it is costly, government imposed, difficult to control and understand, hence given a low priority.

From a student perspective, entrepreneurship educators believed that, it is difficult to go from planning to learning by doing (causation vs. effectuation). There is a focus on learning for exams rather than life and it is difficult to see and understand what the expected learning outcome/ exam requirements of an entrepreneurial process are.

Future aspirations

In terms of dream scenarios educators wished for entrepreneurship to be something we do not just talk about, but behavior that is integrated into the educations also cross disciplinary.

Aspects of are preferred topic for discussions with colleagues.

In these visions students are proactive, understand the value and relevance of entrepreneurship education and initiate educational activities. The learning environments are adapted to support entrepreneurial processes and the private sector is highly engaged in the processes. Last but not least an effect would be seen in the local community.

Opportunities

The identified opportunities were limited, but included getting out of the building and the question why can't you train entrepreneurship in your spare time like football? Others mentioned the opportunity of creating courses for educators to challenge the professional low status. A perspective was: There is a need to accept that entrepreneurship education is about behavioral change and start with the talent (assuming everyone has one). Moreover entrepreneurship education holds the opportunity of employment diversification.

Conclusion and implications

This paper does not intend to judge the level, quality or outcome of entrepreneurship education at universities of applied science and business academies in Denmark. It is solely attempting to depict the experienced challenges and potential opportunities of contemporary entrepreneurship education.

Never the less the list of hampering challenges is long but the identified golden opportunities seem to fit on a stamp and from a meta-perspective the biggest challenge may be that not all entrepreneurship educators are role models of entrepreneurs, why else is the focus on challenges rather than solutions? Another peculiarity is the fact that all the identified stakeholders are from within the educations, where are the external beneficiaries of entrepreneurship education and potential external partners?

Given all the challenges one could be tempted to ask the question: "Why bother?" which of cause from a societal point of view has been answered many times, but why bother from the educator's perspective?

Questions for further discussion

Are the presented challenges unique to Denmark or are they universal?

How do we envision entrepreneurship education in an ideal future?

What is our next best step to realize that vision?

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