

An Entrepreneurial Compass for Exploring Complex Challenges

Klaus Greve, Assistant Professor, VIA University College
Martin Storkholm Nielsen, Assistant Professor, VIA University College
VIA University College, Birk Centerpark 5, 7400 Herning
+45 61161393 & +45 20127977, klgt@via.dk & mstn@via.dk
www.via.dk

Introduction to the good practice

The educational initiative aims to inspire and support students in identifying potentials, mapping possible value-creation and making best next steps towards sustainable entrepreneurship explicit.

The co-creation-based process, facilitated by the tool, structures and supports the participants' creativity and generation of knowledge. This allows students to explore and qualify future scenarios.

Motivation

We believe that the ability to turn complex problems into opportunities is a fundamental competence for entrepreneurs, whether working directly on problems tied to sustainable development or not.

In entrepreneurship education, we are seeing students request methods and tools that can help them structure knowledge building and support their problem solving. In other words, they are seeking a tool that can help them chart a course into the unknown.

Our journey started with a hypothesis that student entrepreneurs—as well as startups—needed tools and practices that could help them grasp the intangibility of cutting-edge technology and products. Whenever digital technology and its potential for value creation was a focus in the collaborative work, it became apparent that their shared language on the topic was limited, thereby halting the creative flow and knowledge production.

Our approach

We have taken a playful approach to facilitating processes on working with complex problems. Our tool acts as a physical roadmap and combines game-like qualities with entrepreneurship didactics and co-creation theory. The design of the tool ensures that as knowledge is produced, it is recorded and visualized. This increases the “tangibility” of the knowledge produced, thereby supporting the creation of a shared language as well as becoming a logbook of the process.

The tool sets itself apart from other common entrepreneurship and business development tools, such as the Business Models Canvas, by providing a more rigorous process, having game-like qualities, and including a strategic focus. It has been designed intentionally to foster engagement and motivation through an immersive experience, where power structures and hierarchy among participants are flattened.

Actions

The tool has been used at the Entrepreneurship and Innovation program at VIA University College. In the course ‘Digital Technologies and Business Models’ 40 students have applied the tool, in order to come up with new approaches to how digital technology can serve as the fundament for the development of sustainable business models for the company SPOOR.

Further, it has been used by representatives from industry in the project 'Tekstilsymbiosen'. The aim of the project is to identify potentials for synergies between companies and next steps, especially in terms of circularity of materials and resources (i.e. circular economy).

Results and lessons learned

The application of the tool has produced important insights from students and industry. The former stated that the tool allowed them to structure their research, thinking and conversations in a novel way. However, the most prominent outcome for them was a significant increase in their engagement and motivation.

The students stated that the tool increased the tangibility of the somehow abstract and challenging process of understanding the existing problem. The sequence of embedded activities guided them through the process, thereby helping the students work towards a future solution. This meant that they were able to spend more time in analyzing and understanding the existing problem, before moving on to the development of a future solution.

Beyond an educational setting, the tool has been applied to facilitate companies in looking at grasping and actively creating tomorrow's sustainable business opportunities. The feedback from the companies has been that the tool supports and boosts conversations and innovative thinking between people from different departments. In short, it helps dissimilar minds connect.

Recently, the tool has been introduced to, tested and evaluated by faculty from VIA as well as representatives from industry. We have confirmed key assumptions and received actionable feedback for further development of the tool. We look forward to sharing and discussing this further development with colleagues from the field of entrepreneurship education.