

How to educate for sustainable entrepreneurship

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Workshop summary

Sustainable entrepreneurship theorists view market imperfections that contribute to environmental and societal degradations as entrepreneurial opportunities whose exploitation promise profit and social and environmental welfare. Despite this promising view of sustainable entrepreneurship, less is known about how entrepreneurship education may encourage skills that ensure that these opportunities are identified and explored. In this PDW, we focus on the challenge of developing entrepreneurship education to encourage and enable entrepreneurs to discover and exploit these entrepreneurial opportunities inherent in environmental and societal challenges. All the participants of the workshop will join forces to find solutions to this challenge using a wayfaring method. Hence, this PDW seeks to provide the participants with new insight that may develop the field of entrepreneurship education and enable further exploration and testing of the proposed learning methods, as well as an introduction to the method of wayfaring.

About the challenge: educating for sustainable entrepreneurship

An emergent discourse portrays environmental and societal challenges attributed to market failures as entrepreneurial opportunities, which, if exploited, can improve global conditions, reduce market imperfections, and generate entrepreneurial rent (Cohen and Winn, 2007; Dean and McMullen, 2007, Hall et al., 2010). Knowledge of these market imperfections can lead to entrepreneurial innovations and entrepreneurial rent, as well as alleviate harmful environmental or societal impacts (Cohen and Winn, 2007). Specifically, market imperfections related to efficiencies, externalities, pricing, and information generate numerous entrepreneurial opportunities (Dean and McMullen, 2007). For instance, inefficient production processes can lead to significant waste and pollution in the economic system. Innovative entrepreneurs focusing upon resource efficiency, waste minimization, and technology development may reduce harmful environmental impacts whilst at the same time reducing production costs. Changes occurring in the natural environment, and the growing attention to, and understanding of these changes can redefine firms markets. These changes can generate additional opportunities in the marketplace. The mobilization of informational advantages can lead to the creation and development of new and existing markets. Notably, entrepreneurs that discover and exploit opportunities that are present in existing market imperfections may garner entrepreneurial rents, while reducing environmental degradation and promoting national and regional development and competitiveness. However, the continuing trend towards greater environmental resource scarcity and dynamism in many industries (i.e., competitive pressures, high costs of technology, scarcity of information etc.) adds challenges for these opportunities to be developed, or even explored. Many view sustainability - the balancing of economic health, social equity and environmental resilience (Cohen and Winn, 2007), as a constraint (e.g. due to increased bureaucracy and costs of imposed standards), rather as an opportunity that may generate entrepreneurial rent.

Entrepreneurship education encourage the development of skills that enable entrepreneurs to discover and exploit economic opportunities in rapidly changing and unpredictable industry environments. The benefit of entrepreneurship education has been widely recognized. However, impact studies have predominantly focused on short-term and subjective outcome measures of entrepreneurship education like entrepreneurial attitude, skills and intentions to start a business (Nabi et al., 2017). The promising

view of entrepreneurship as a potential panacea for some environmental and societal challenges has often been overlooked in the entrepreneurship education literature, however with some noteworthy exceptions. Lans et al. (2014) link the world of education for entrepreneurship and for sustainability to identify key competences of sustainable entrepreneurs like opportunity recognition skills, system-thinking, interpersonal skills including the ability to embrace diversity and interdisciplinary, foresighted thinking and proactivity. This is one-step forward to develop education in the intersection between entrepreneurship and sustainability, yet the need for knowledge regarding how to educate to enable the discovering and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities inherent in environmental and societal challenges is still evident.

In this PDW, the participants will explore the underlying problems of developing entrepreneurship education in a manner that encourage and enable the discovering and exploitation of entrepreneurial opportunities inherent in environmental and societal challenges that, if exploited, improve environmental and social welfare. We argue that the challenge of developing entrepreneurship education in this context becomes particularly complex since entrepreneurs will not only be in need for diverse skills, but because entrepreneurial thought and action is needed on the society and industry levels as well as for individual companies and entrepreneurs. The levels are often interrelated but no coordinated. Notably, this workshop seeks to find answers to questions such as: What do the students need to learn? What should the students do in order to learn? How should learning be facilitated? Using wayfaring as a method, participants will be encouraged to reflect upon, and discuss, the effectiveness of diverse learning methods, and hopefully this will enable and encourage further exploration and development of learning methods.

Wayfaring as a format for solving the challenge during the session

Wayfaring has its origin from design thinking, and can be described as a development journey where rapid learning cycles and probing ideas drives the development process and continuously shapes the outcome (Steinert and Leifer, 2012). The wayfaring path is continuously explored through probing ideas, where the best ideas are selected, evaluated and the new understanding of the process is taken to the next level. The wayfaring model has its most potential when it is applied to challenges with a high level of uncertainty in the development process, a high degree of intended innovation and freedom in the solution space and a limited amount of time (Gerstenberg et al., 2015).

In short, the wayfaring process consists of three phases. In the first phase the group prototype and test towards their initial target in order to explore and learn more about the actual problem. Learning about the actual problem enables the participants to shift their target coordinates and “overcome path dependencies and model blindness and to get a shot at ‘the really big idea’” (Steinert and Leifer, 2012: 252) in the second phase. In the third phase, ‘the really big idea’ becomes tangible through the identification of requirements and making plans for how to access resources and put the idea to life. Even though the process is originally developed for product development, it includes important elements such as involvement of diverse stakeholders and interdisciplinary collaboration for solving complex challenges. Hence, the method may be advantageous to facilitate discussion regarding how to develop students’ skills in discovering and exploiting entrepreneurial opportunities that simultaneously generate social equity and environmental resilience.

Plan for the session

Mins 0-15: The participants are placed in groups and we introduce the challenge. We will also introduce wayfaring by explaining the process and showing examples from previous workshops using wayfaring.

Mins 15-35: The Problem phase
Mins 40-60: The Solution phase
Mins 60-80: The embodiment phase
Mins 85-120: The groups present the solution they created to each other.

Participant preparation

This PDW aim toward a thorough discussion regarding appropriate learning methods for developing skills needed to discover and exploit opportunities inherent in environmental and societal challenges. We suggest that participant have made some thoughts about possible learning methods in advance.

Expected participant outcomes and take-ways

This PDW will provide the participants with new insight to the challenge of developing entrepreneurship education to encourage and enable entrepreneurs to discover and exploit the entrepreneurial opportunities inherent in environmental and societal challenges. The workshop will collect 'shared practice' empirics and the participants will have the opportunity to apply and develop these insights at a later stage. Furthermore, the participants have been introduced to the adapted method of wayfaring. The facilitators of this workshop have used this method several times. The intention is to build upon previous experience to provide participants with a thorough understanding of the method, hence enable participants to facilitate workshops for solving complex challenges at other settings.

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