Triggering entrepreneurial action through a "whole-cycle" strategic task method: A task design workshop for people in leadership roles, such as teachers, managers or business coaches

Martin Lackéus, Chalmers University of Technology

Mats Westerberg, Luleå University of Technology

The problem

Defining and allocating tasks for a group of people is a key function that any kind of leadership needs to take responsibility for and diligently perform (Braun et al., 2012, Adair, 1973). While simple and routine tasks are often relatively easy to articulate and distribute, explorative and more strategic entrepreneurial tasks are more difficult to frame and phrase. Research shows that it is difficult to define and prescribe what people need to do when performing an entrepreneurial job (Mansoori, 2018). This is a vexing challenge for entrepreneurship educators, for entrepreneurial corporate managers and for entrepreneurial business coaches.

The opportunity

Through experimental research and by drawing on Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle, we have developed a "whole-cycle" method for designing strategic entrepreneurial tasks. This method has shown to be capable of triggering emotionally charged entrepreneurial action-taking, deep learning, deep reflection and/or organizational change. By ensuring that all four steps in Kolb's experiential learning cycle are included in a task description, entrepreneurial jobs can become more "SMART", i.e. specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time-related (Doran, 1981) and thus easier to follow up and evaluate. This can facilitate entrepreneurial teaching as well as entrepreneurial value creation.

The "whole-cycle" task design method was developed through experiments conducted over a seven-year period with an innovative IT-based research and teaching tool called LoopMe (Lackéus, 2017, 2016). LoopMe is a "scientific social media" (SSM) platform, i.e. a social media platform optimized for social science and used primarily for data collection and analysis. It was originally developed for scientific purposes at Chalmers University of Technology in Sweden, but is also increasingly being used by teachers, managers and coaches for more practice-oriented purposes, such as formative assessment, action-based leadership and organizational change management.

While the main opportunity for participants is related to improving their ability to design entrepreneurial tasks, some participants could be interested in getting to know LoopMe as a novel and natively digital kind of data collection tool for scholarly purposes.

The workshop

In this workshop, participants will get hands-on advice on how to phrase and frame entrepreneurial action-taking that leads to desired behaviors among large groups of people, preferably more than 15 people at a time. The workshop lets participants apply the newly developed "whole-cycle" task design method to craft strategic action-oriented entrepreneurial tasks in a context of their choosing. Participants can choose to design entrepreneurial tasks for entrepreneurship students, for corporate employees, for entrepreneurs they currently are coaching, or for other situations where people would

potentially receive collective prescriptive entrepreneurial advice or assignments. The person prescribing what to do could be an entrepreneurship teacher, an entrepreneurship coach, an entrepreneurial corporate manager or any other kind of legitimate prescriber of entrepreneurial action. The desired outcomes for those completing the tasks could be improved student learning, more efficient organizational change, increased organizational performance or any other outcome that can be the result of many people taking entrepreneurial action in a coordinated way.

The workshop starts with a brief background on prescriptive entrepreneurship (Mansoori, 2018), on action-centered leadership (Adair, 1973), on the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) and on the SSM platform LoopMe (Lackéus, 2017). Then the "whole-cycle" task design method is introduced and explained in considerable detail, with some examples given from practice. After these introductions, participants will get 45 minutes to craft their own entrepreneurial task descriptions, by using a form that is distributed to all participants. In this process, participants will coach each other in pairs by asking probing questions about the task. However, as experience has shown that expert coaching sometimes is required, this will be provided by the workshop organizers. Towards the end of the workshop, participants will get an opportunity to briefly present their crafted tasks, followed by some comments and feedback from the workshop organizers. In the last part of the workshop, participants are shown how the crafted tasks could be inserted into the LoopMe platform for further distribution to a relevant group of people.

After the workshop, those participants that are interested can use the LoopMe platform for free (see www.loopme.io), to distribute their crafted tasks to a group of people that would benefit from completing the tasks. Use of the platform LoopMe is, however, not a requirement for task distribution. Any digital or analog method could be used to distribute the crafted tasks to a relevant group of people.

The main intended outcomes

The primary outcome of the workshop is to develop participants' ability to design effective entrepreneurial tasks for people they exert leadership over. It could be in any given context of relevance to the participant, such as education, business, leisure or in other parts of public or private sectors. Another possible outcome is also to give those scholars interested in using LoopMe for data collection purposes a brief introduction to the configuration process preceding a launch of LoopMe on a group of respondents.

References

Adair, J. E. 1973. *Action-centred leadership*, McGraw-Hill New York, NY.

Braun, F. C., Avital, M. & Martz, B. 2012. Action-centered team leadership influences more than performance. *Team Performance Management: An International Journal,* 18(3/4)**,** 176-195.

Doran, G. T. 1981. There'sa SMART way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management review,* 70(11)**,** 35-36.

Kolb, D. A. 1984. *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development,* Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice Hall.

Lackéus, M. 2016. *Value creation as educational practice - towards a new educational philosophy grounded in entrepreneurship?* Doctoral thesis, Chalmers University of Technology.

Lackéus, M. 2017. Can Scientific Social Media Disrupt Entrepreneurship Research? . *Internal working paper* Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden.

Mansoori, Y. 2018. *Entrepreneurial Methods as Vehicles of Entrepreneurial Action.* Thesis for Doctoral Degree, Chalmers University of Technology.