

Chapter 20

Educational and Business Co-Operatives: The Channels for Collective Creativity and Entrepreneurial Teams

Rauno Rusko

University of Lapland, Finland

Lenita Hietanen

University of Lapland, Finland

Krista Kohtakangas

University of Lapland, Finland

Riitta Kemppainen-Koivisto

University of Lapland, Finland

Katta Siltavirta

University of Lapland, Finland

Taina Järvi

Lapland Vocational College, Finland

ABSTRACT

One tendency among co-operatives is to establish co-operatives not only for the purposes of business but also for the purposes to teach collaboration practices in business education. This study investigates and compares traditional business co-operatives and educational co-operatives as the environments of entrepreneurial learning communities. The data, which consist of interviews with members of both types of co-operatives, have been analyzed using the content analysis method. The main outcomes show that in both types of co-operatives sense of community and creativity are manifested as the parts of the entrepreneurial learning process. When considering if the learning processes were manifested as single- and double-loop learning – and the development of collective creativity – some differences were observed between educational co-operatives and business co-operatives.

INTRODUCTION

Even today, co-operative as a business entity meets criticism and doubt. In recent years, the attitudes about co-operatives have improved because of the tendency, where the importance of creativity and innovativeness have risen in every kind of enterprises - including co-operatives. (See Kemppainen-Koivisto et al.,

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2015). In contrast to before, nowadays a co-operative is not only based on agrarian production or a large retail trade chain owned by the customers. Instead, it may be based on an innovative and creative group of youthful members of an entrepreneurial team. This study presents the outcomes of the publicly funded KOVI-project, which aimed to develop knowledge about co-operatives among students and people who have graduated from the universities or the universities of applied sciences. During the project process also those co-operatives without the linkages to universities were studied.

The co-operative is the form of business, which often leans on ethical and environmental basis and purposes (Hagedorn, Arzt & Peters, 2002; Troberg, 2000). Therefore, the ways, which will increase the general popularity of co-operatives, will also rise the sense of environmentalism on the general level. The contemporary business environment and business education environment has a new tendency, which emphasizes the importance of start-ups, innovation events and business venturing. The general need to have the critical mass of new business ideas, creativity and innovations have risen the popularity of cooperation structures and networks (see, e.g. Podoynitsyna et al., 2013), such as entrepreneurial teams and co-operatives in business and education.

This study focuses on the themes of business and education in the context of co-operatives and especially on the features of two kinds of co-operatives: educational co-operatives and “traditional” business co-operatives. These two types of co-operatives are related to the sense of community, collective creativity and entrepreneurial learning processes. This study constructs practical criterions to distinguish these two types of co-operatives from each other: those co-operatives, which are established because of educational credits part of the education are here defined as educational co-operatives and those co-operatives without this kind of educations context are called here as business co-operatives.

At the Finnish universities of applied sciences co-operatives have been used as a tool for entrepreneurship education since 1993 (Troberg, Ruskovaara & Seikkula-Leino, 2011). Additionally, these days there is a booming interest in the different levels of business educations to establish co-operatives for the purposes of business and team learning (Kemppainen-Koivisto et al., 2015). However, the co-operatives, established under the umbrella of educational institution, are official firms, start-ups which are doing business in the markets by the students, that is, by the members of the co-operative. At the same time, the practitioners and actors of creative industries are establishing multidisciplinary start-ups in the forms of co-operatives. So far the division of small business co-operatives between business co-operatives and educational co-operatives has been underdeveloped. One aim of the chapter is to study the similarities and differences between these two types of co-operatives, traditional business co-operatives and educational co-operatives, based on a sense of community and an entrepreneurial learning process, especially on the view of creativity. The starting points are so different between these two types of co-operatives and interesting question is what kinds of reflections these underlying differences will cause in the creativity, sense of community and learning.

Creativity has been studied in the context of teams and learning. In this sense, we will introduce later on the concepts of single-loop learning and double-loop learning (Argyris and Schön, 1974), which we see essential tools to study different forms of team learning.

The empirical material consists of 10 interviews from members of co-operatives; all of the interviewees held either management or coordinating positions in the co-operatives. The outcomes of the content analysis of these interviews reveal differences in the characteristics and development of learning between educational co-operatives and business co-operatives in terms of collective creativity. Specifically, differences were found in the sense of community felt by the members of these two types of co-operatives and in the role that single-loop and double-loop learning played during the co-operatives' development.

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