

Chapter 2

Games in Entrepreneurship Education to Support the Crafting of an Entrepreneurial Mindset

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of education institutions, including many universities and colleges, are offering entrepreneurship education. This development is driven by the hope that more entrepreneurs could be “created” through such efforts, and that these entrepreneurs through their newly founded ventures will contribute to economic growth and job creation. At higher education institutions, the majority of entrepreneurship courses rely on writing business plans as a main pedagogical tool for enhancing the students’ entrepreneurial capabilities. In this chapter, the authors argue instead for the need for a pedagogy that focuses on supporting students in crafting an entrepreneurial mindset as the basis for venturing activities. They discuss the potential role of games in such entrepreneurship education and present the example of an entrepreneurship game from the Swedish context, which was developed by a group of young female entrepreneurs. The authors describe the game and discuss their experiences of playing it with a group of novice entrepreneurship and management students at the master’s level, and they review the effectiveness of the game in terms of how it supports students in crafting an entrepreneurial mindset. The authors conclude the chapter by outlining how entrepreneurship games could be integrated into a university curriculum and suggest some directions for future research.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, many universities worldwide have initiated entrepreneurship education, which mainly aims at increasing the number of potential entrepreneurs (Kuratko, 2005). This development follows the commonly shared understanding that new ventures play a crucial role in achieving economic growth and value creation, as well as that young growth firms create the majority of new jobs (e.g. Kirchhoff & Phillips, 1988). As pointed out by Katz (2003), homogeneity as to what is considered to be appropriate content for entrepreneurship education has increased over the past years, and today there exists a widely shared agreement that such education should:

1. Increase the understanding of what entrepreneurship is about (leading to a concern for economic wealth creation);
2. Focus on the entrepreneurship process, which entails learning to become entrepreneurial; and
3. Prepare individuals for careers as entrepreneurs.

Here, business plan assignments are typically used to imitate ‘action learning’—although the ‘action’ is largely restricted to the linguistic exercise of developing a business plan document without much ‘real’ action related to it.

Our point of departure is the need for a pedagogical approach that centres on the crafting of an entrepreneurial mindset, and enforces this process through different types of pedagogical tools. Following the American Heritage Dictionary definition, we associate mindset with “[a] fixed mental attitude that determines one’s responses to and interpretations of situations”. An entrepreneurial mindset is not only relevant when taking on a narrow definition of entrepreneurship as a new venture creation, but is equally (if not more) important when recognizing the potential of entrepreneurial activities for all types of creative organizing in public as

well as in private life. Nevertheless, we argue that having an entrepreneurial mindset does not mean that the individual immerses into an entrepreneurial identity that directs all existential choices. Rather, students can craft their entrepreneurial mindsets without directly becoming entrepreneurially active in venture creation, i.e. without enacting their entrepreneurial identities at this point in time. We argue that such a mindset is the prerequisite for the later crafting of an entrepreneurial identity which takes place when immersing ‘in’ entrepreneuring (rather than learning ‘about’ or training ‘for’ entrepreneurship). For the context of formal educational settings, such as university, we think that influencing attitudes towards crafting an entrepreneurial mindset, supported by tools such as games, is a realistic ambition.

In many entrepreneurship courses, students are asked to write business plans for real, rudimentary or fictitious venture ideas, hoping that this exercise would simulate the real world of entrepreneurship as a practice. The predominance of this approach was confirmed by Honig (2004), who found that 78 out of the top 100 US universities offered courses that specifically referred to business plan education. The proposed experiential learning is assumed to inspire students to start their own (business) ventures after the program. There are, though, some fundamental flaws in the underlying assumptions of such a programme design when it comes to helping students to (re-)discover their talents as entrepreneurs.

First, it is taken for granted that all students are already interested in entrepreneurship as a career choice, since they are already equipped with an entrepreneurial mindset. However, this is typically not the case. Through socialization and formal education they have most probably ‘unlearned’ their entrepreneurial mindset and the playfulness that they once had as children (Johannisson, 2010). Thus, for this (usually large) group of students, entrepreneurship education needs to provide an arena which supports students in crafting (or rediscovering) their entrepreneurial mindsets.

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