Chapter 95

The E-Learning Cycle and Continuous Improvement for E-Entrepreneurs

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explore the integration of learning, continuous improvement and innovation theories as a basis for enhancing the education of e-entrepreneurs. Conceptual development of emerging interdisciplinary literature is combined with example analysis to develop the Circle of E-learning uniquely augmented by hermeneutics, action research and the creative destruction cycle of innovation using applied examples of e-entrepreneurship. Four R's are discussed in the Circle of E-learning; Review, Revise, Reconstruct, and Reveal. Observations for each of the 4R's are made regarding continuous improvement of the education of e-entrepreneurs. Findings are that the procedural pivot points indicated by the 4R's can be helpful for administrators and educators to improve operations and outcomes in management and professional development situations.

FROM LEARNING TO E-LEARNING IN E-ENTREPRENEURSHIP

For the purpose of this paper we have used the Zutshi, Zutshi, and Sohal (2006, p. 63) definition of e-entrepreneur as "a person or an organisation principally using the Internet to strategically and competitively achieve vision, business goals and objectives." E-entrepreneurship is a relatively new and dynamic discipline, established on a rich and diverse foundation of general entrepreneurship (Azmat & Zutshi, 2012a, 2012b). E-entrepreneurship generally uses cutting edge technological tools to exploit the creative energies of enterprising personalities in an effort to seek competitive advantages at the global level (Richards, Busch,

& Bilgin, 2010). While some e-entrepreneurs are chided for not learning from the mistakes of the past (Cardon, Stevens, & Potter, 2011), many are diligent, attentive and eager to learn new and better management techniques (Kisfalvi & Maguire, 2011). As an educator in the field of e-entrepreneurship it is imperative and pragmatic to understand the challenges and approaches that can assist in the establishment of good teaching and learning habits for this fast-growing category of learners, our business managers and even political leaders of tomorrow. The aim of this paper is to develop the 'Circle of E-learning' in the field of e-entrepreneurship.

In management education as with education more broadly, there is debate about how to appropriately define teaching and learning (Kuijpers, Meijers, & Gundy, 2011; Higgins & Elliott, 2011), how to address the needs of diverse learners and their learning styles, and how to translate teaching material and methods into learning for our (current and future) decision makers. This makes the definitive improvement of teaching and learning in any context challenging. Theoretically, teaching might be ineffective or impossible (Wheatley, 2002; Morrow, 2007), or it could be that teaching and learning happens ubiquitously through continuous feedback loops (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Heidegger, 1962). Where learning is presumed to occur, theorists differ in their definitions. Some say experience is central to learning (Dewey, 1916; Aristotle & Apostle, 1966), others conjecture that interpretation or cognition is the key (James, 1890; Festinger, 1957), some focus on behavioural changes (Pavlov, 1929; Skinner, 1974, 1984), and others still put the emphasis on the social environment (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1977). Recent management education research grapples with the complexity of teaching and learning definitional variables (Schechter & Asher, 2012; Uziak & Oladiran, 2012). Noting the full scope of the defining features and to fulfill our

aim in this paper, we adopt the broad definition by Creed (2011, p. 35) that learning is "identifiable changes in thinking, relating and behaving established by individuals or groups in response to internal or external stimuli." The three main variables in this definition are consistent with similar overviews of learning (Mezirow, 1981; Gibb, 1997) and provide a pragmatic basis for the concepts developed in this paper.

It is from within the management education field that a more specialised focus upon entrepreneurs emerges. The socio-economic significance of entrepreneurship, especially via the software applications now proliferating through e-commerce, is compelling a new perspective of e-entrepreneurship (Cassia & Minola, 2012). Driven by industry development and applied knowledge at the vocational level, learning in relation to e-entrepreneurship is about how to improve technological skills and processes. Accordingly, a blend of the different learning theories and methods can be called upon with respect to the situation. Using traditional vocations as examples, a person learning to be a plumber or an electrician needs to understand and grasp the nuances, for instance, of the theory of pipe connections, hydrology and physics, respectively. Furthermore, these individuals also need to observe and then implement the practical side of their jobs by, for example, installing a washing machine or a safety switchbox in a home. An e-entrepreneur, similarly, actively engages in technological knowledge of their tools to observe, learn, practise and develop skills in order to grow and sustain their business.

There are unique challenges involved in the teaching and learning for entrepreneurs who are predominantly working online. The impact of technology on learning needs to be considered and the connection of continuous improvement with the objectives of e-entrepreneurs play an integral role. It is proposed that by cross-referencing hermeneutics (Heidegger, 1999), action research

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