

Chapter 30

Virtual Center for Entrepreneurship Development

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ABSTRACT

This chapter shows a preliminary approach for building a virtual center for entrepreneurship development that will be implemented in a university research network in Romania. The authors argue the most relevant aspects that conduct us to an organizational information system design, implementation and management with double role: education/training (entrepreneurial skills development for students) and research (about the entrepreneurship phenomena at regional and national level but in relation of the global economy). The following items are presented: (1) the training needs for business creation - based on a preliminary market research developed with subjects with technical and economical background and that allow the identification of the entrepreneurial knowledge; (2) the university entrepreneurial education as a process of knowledge transfer; (3) preliminary design and architecture of the virtual center for entrepreneurship. Finally, some relevant conclusions and the future researches directions are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Europe needs to foster the entrepreneurial drive more effectively, even in this crisis period. It needs more new and thriving firms willing to embark on creative or innovative ventures. Encouraging the enterprise spirit is a key to achieving these objectives. Education can contribute to encouraging

entrepreneurship, by fostering the right mindset, by raising awareness of career opportunities as an entrepreneur or a self-employed person, and by providing the relevant business skills (European Commission reports, 2008).

The conclusion of the European Commission report in 2008, regarding entrepreneurship teaching was that it is not yet sufficiently integrated in higher education institutions' curricula. Available data show that the majority of entrepreneurship

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courses are offered in business and economic studies. The diffusion of entrepreneurship is particularly weak in some of the Member States that joined the European Union (EU) in and after 2004.

However, it is questionable whether business schools are the most appropriate place to teach entrepreneurship: innovative and viable business ideas are more likely to arise from technical, scientific and creative studies. In this context, the challenge is to build inter-disciplinary approaches, making entrepreneurship education accessible to all students specialization curricula, creating teams for the development and exploitation of business ideas, mixing students from economic and business studies with students from other faculties and with different backgrounds (by interdisciplinary training modules or courses).

Entrepreneurial skills and attitudes provide benefits to society, even beyond their application to business activity. In fact, personal qualities that are relevant to entrepreneurship, such as creativity and a spirit of initiative, can be useful to everyone, in their working activity and in their daily life. “The European Commission found that there is today in most European Union Member States — although in varying degrees — a policy commitment at governmental/ministerial level to promote the teaching of entrepreneurship in the education system” (European Commission reports, 2008).

In the context of this paper, human resources training regarding their entrepreneurship competencies development have to be amplifying in the high education period and it has to continue with training during all professional life (as vocational training) with the support of the dedicated lifelong learning programs.

Encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit and behavior are key elements to create jobs and improving competitiveness and economic growth (Draghici & Draghici, 2006), (European Commission reports, 2008). If it is to make a success of the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment,

universities needs to stimulate the entrepreneurial mindsets of young people, encourage innovative business start-ups, and foster a culture or an environment that is friendlier to entrepreneurship and to the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). However, the benefits of entrepreneurship education are not limited to start-ups, innovative ventures and new jobs. The Bologna process can have a positive effect on the way entrepreneurial knowledge are spread. So, in the knowledge based society universities have to play an enhanced role in innovation as entrepreneurs. This paper presents some important aspects of knowledge transfer processes developed by universities to become entrepreneurial and to increase their implication and contributions to human resources development at the local/regional economic level. These mechanisms are expected to contribute to economic development through universities roles: education, research and knowledge transfer to society (Izvercianu & Draghici, 2008).

Entrepreneurship refers to an individual’s ability to turn ideas into action and is therefore a key competence for all, helping young people to be more creative and self-confident in whatever they undertake (Tornatzky et al., 2002). At higher education level, the primary purpose of entrepreneurship education should be to develop entrepreneurial capacities and mindsets. In this context, entrepreneurship education programs can have different objectives, such as: developing entrepreneurial drive among students (raising awareness and motivation); training students in the skills they need to set-up a business and manage its growth; developing the entrepreneurial ability to identify and exploit opportunities (Draghici & Draghici, 2006), (Tornatzky et al., 2002).

The paper will debate the following items: (1) the university entrepreneurial education as a process of knowledge transfer based on the knowledge map competencies for the engineer graduate student profile (engineering and man-

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