



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Business Research



Reducing the distance between thinkers and doers in the entrepreneurial discovery process: An exploratory study☆☆☆☆☆☆

Cristina Santini^a, Elisabetta Marinelli^{b,*}, Mark Boden^b, Alessio Cavicchi^c, Karel Haegeman^b

^a Università San Raffaele, Italy

^b Institute of Prospective Technological Studies IPTS-JRC, European Commission, Spain

^c University of Macerata, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 February 2015

Received in revised form 1 August 2015

Accepted 1 September 2015

Available online xxxxx

Keywords:

Participatory research methods

Action research

Smart Specialisation

Entrepreneurial discovery process

Thinkers–doers gap

ABSTRACT

The existing gap between thinkers and doers is one of the main reasons behind the failure of the modern research system in the field of management, as many scholars suggest. Participatory, action research and experience-based methods are now attracting scholars as well as institutions who actively participate in improving the efficacy of policy-making. This study presents the work conducted by the JRC-IPTS of the European Commission in the Greek region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace for supporting the implementation of the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3). The study presents the methodology based on participatory and experience-based methods and offers reflections on how to reduce the thinkers–doers gap.

© 2015 Published by Elsevier Inc.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, a revolution in research methods and educational models (Cavicchi, Santini, & Baillelli, 2014; Huff & Huff, 2001; Santini, 2013) aims to reduce the existing distance between *thinkers* (scholars or researchers) and *doers* (practitioners and entrepreneurs). This gap is at the base of the failure of the modern research system in the field of management (Bartunek, 2007); therefore, scholars are now exploring new approaches to tackle this gap. As a consequence, participatory, action-research, and experience-based methods are capturing a great deal of attention. Interestingly, participatory approaches are

also receiving support of institutions whose aim is to improve policy effectiveness by reducing the distance between thinkers and doers. This study examines one such case, to highlight the potential that these methodologies hold. Following the definition of the problem under study, the research describes the work that the JRC-IPTS of the European Commission conducts in the Greek region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and the European Parliament Preparatory Action; a formal collaboration agreement between DG Regional Policy (REGIO) and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) of the European Commission that has promoted its implementation.

This activity centers on the provision of support to the refinement and implementation of the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3), supporting, among other things, its Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP). The latter, one of the pillars of the Smart Specialisation approach, is as an inclusive and interactive mainly bottom-up process in which participants from policy, business, academia, as well as other sectors, engage with each other to identify potential new activities and opportunities. Methodologically, the project applies participatory and experience-based methods to bring researchers, entrepreneurs, and the public sectors closer to each other. As such, the project offers important reflections on how to reduce the thinkers–doers gap.

The structure of the study is the following: in Section 2, a literature review introduces the problem of thinkers–doers gap, describing how the gap originates and why this gap is of interest to academics and public bodies. Section 3 reviews the importance and role of participatory method in the debate on the thinkers and doers gap. The following section describes the JRC case in Greece; although the approach followed

* The organization and implementation of the events described in this publication was possible only through the close cooperation of the Special Managing Authority of the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Council of the region, and the independent experts that supported the authors throughout the process. The authors thank Yiannis Kessanlis, Panayotis Koudoumakis, Vasileios Pitsinikgos, Petros Soukoulis, Michalis Metaxas, Yannis Toliass, Effie Amanatidou, and Christos Emmanouilidis. The authors also thank the advisory board of the project and the international and national experts that contributed to our activities, as well as all the stakeholders in the region that have participated in the events. Finally, the authors thank the reviewers for their useful suggestions and inputs.

☆☆ The views expressed are purely those of the authors and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

☆☆☆ The work described in this paper has been financed under an Administrative Agreement between DG JRC and DG REGIO of the European Commission (JRC N° 33653-2014-09 REGIO N° 2014CE160AT056), following a decision of the European Parliament.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Elisabetta.MARINELLI@ec.europa.eu (E. Marinelli).

by the JRC can fit under the definition of action-research adopted in this study, the JRC-IPTS itself has not employed this term in this context. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. The thinkers and doers gap: boundaries and motivations

A wide debate exists on the growing distance between thinkers and doers in entrepreneurial settings (Cavicchi et al., 2014). Such a gap between theory and practice has several causes (November, 2004); many authors point to a lack in communication between academics and practitioners (Bartunek, 2007; Thomas, 2007; Van Aken, 2004; Whitley, 1988), which can affect management practice (Mowday, 1997). Others highlight the struggle of thinkers to understand the real needs of doers (Hills & LaForge, 1992). Thinkers' compelling need of meeting the requirements of the scientific community creates a separation between what is "read" by theorists and by practitioners (Van Aken, 2004), effectively hindering the creation of a "common language" (Whitley, 1988).

As a solution, Bartunek (2007) stresses the importance of building productive relationships for both scholars and practitioners, whereas Thomas (2007) and Whitley (1988) focus on the improvement of communication flows, or on conveying research insights in terms that can be familiar to practitioners (Wilkerson, 1999).

Pressure to reduce this gap is increasingly arising from academia (Ellson, 2009), the private sector, and policy makers. For instance, most universities and research institutes promote cooperation between theory and practice, going over and beyond the concept of the third mission (Trencher, Yarime, McCormick, Doll, & Kraines, 2014). Some educational programs in various fields are undergoing a re-design process to reduce business students' perceived distance between what they learn and what the "real world" demands (Morgan, Rudd, & Kaufman, 2004; Roberts, 2006; Simon et al., 2004). Furthermore, academics are increasingly aware that reducing the gap by focusing on the research needs of professionals (rather than addressing insights to other researcher) is critical to ensure that research is itself useful, thereby increasing trust between the two communities (November, 2004). At the policy level, the communication and cooperation between research and industry is of primary importance for the effectiveness of some funding programs (for instance, the EC Erasmus + program). Communication and cooperation is also a prominent feature of the current multi-annual programming period for the EU regional policy (2014–2020). Indeed, the concept of EDP, described below, posits that the interaction between thinkers and doers needs to result in the shared identification, among stakeholders, of priorities for regional development.

Exploring ways to reduce the separation between theory and practice is clearly necessary, and this research is an attempt to clarify these aspects.

3. New participatory-based methods and modes

The urgency of understanding the gap between thinkers and doers goes hand in hand with the need to identify the most appropriate research method (Amabile et al., 2001). Background research shows that traditional teaching and research approaches have a limited efficacy for entrepreneurial education (Munoz & Huser, 2008), pointing to the importance of physical proximity, or full immersion, between researchers and practitioners as a means to fill the "gap" (Carson et al., 2002; Gilmore & Carson, 1996, 2007). Learning for entrepreneurs requires a type of interaction that is uncommon in traditional research and teaching methods because this learning is a social construction (Cook & Brown, 1999; Higgins & Elliott, 2011).

Researchers are thus reconsidering their methodological approach to investigation, placing emphasis on the positive role that participatory approaches could have in this scenario. Broadly, participatory processes' design aims to ensure that stakeholders participate actively in a given exercise based on various rationales that the designers of the approach

define. Within a policy context, such as the one described below, participatory approaches pursue an alternative to purely "top-down" decision-making, emphasizing engagement, the development of a shared understanding, and action within a community. Participatory-Action-Research (PAR) adds an investigative dimension and goal to these issues in that PAR seeks to understand the world by trying to change the world collaboratively and following reflection (Susman & Evered, 1978). Contrary to other research methods, the reproducibility of findings is not a concern for PAR.

The circular approach (Fig. 1) identifies the four key steps in PAR, which, as Santini (2013) points out, are critical in promoting a reflexing criticism.

PAR has social implications. Since PAR's initial employment in the field of minority problems, one of the aims of the methodology was to contribute to social wellbeing and to improve the living conditions of the people involved in the research (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). Background research shows that PAR can renew standard research process (Crockett, Downey, Firat, Ozanne, & Pettigrew, 2013).

As this research aims to demonstrate, PAR approaches—appropriately adapted to the specific research needs (Bohman, 2004) by following the experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984)—can successfully reduce the academics-practitioners gap (Cavicchi et al., 2014). Indeed, evidence suggests that methods that promote the active involvement of researchers and stakeholders can be successful in entrepreneurial education in the field of marketing management (Cavicchi et al., 2014; Santini, 2013), as well as in social science and entrepreneurship (Eden & Huxham, 1996).

4. The case study: JRC-IPTS and Smart Specialisation in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace

The Institute of Prospective Technological studies (IPTS) is part of the Joint Research Centre (JRC), the European Commission's in-house science (<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en>).

Among a range of dedicated policy support activities, the IPTS hosts the Smart Specialisation Platform (<http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu>), which supports regions in the development and implementation of their Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3). Of primary importance in the implementation of EU Regional and Cohesion Policy 2014–2020, the existence of such strategies represents an ex-ante conditionality for interventions on research, innovation, and ICT access (Martínez-

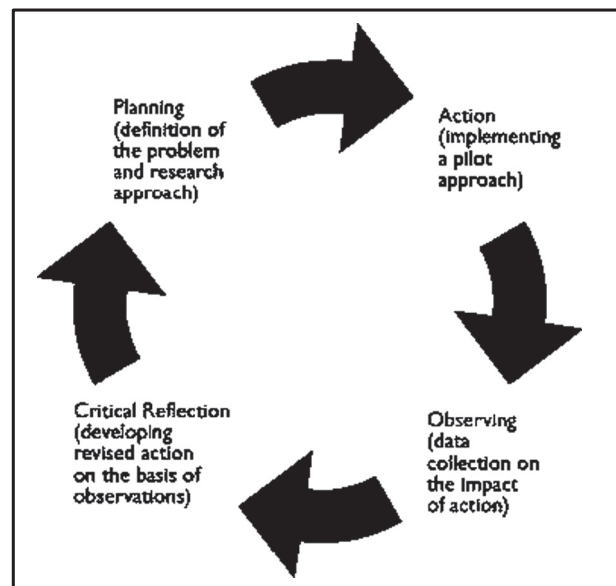


Fig. 1. The cycle of participatory action research.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/10492789>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/10492789>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)