



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

The International Journal of Management Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijme



A holistic person perspective in measuring entrepreneurship education impact – Social entrepreneurship education at the Humanities



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 January 2014

Received in revised form 27 June 2014

Accepted 7 July 2014

Available online 2 August 2014

Keywords:

Entrepreneurship education impact

Assessment

Social entrepreneurship education

Holistic person perspective

The Humanities

ABSTRACT

This article discusses existing research on impact of entrepreneurship education and questions the consistency between underlying understandings of entrepreneurship, formal purposes of entrepreneurship education and present evaluation methods in the field. From literature about assessment and impact of entrepreneurship education and social entrepreneurship education, a number of interrelated factors are identified that are important to address in assessment and measurement of impact. In addition to these factors, a supplementary dimension is suggested – the holistic person perspective – in order to offer a measurement approach beyond the borders of a single course or program. From a case study of social entrepreneurship at the Humanities in Denmark, it is described how students develop entrepreneurial experiences both in courses, between courses and in their daily life. The argument of the article is that it can be fruitful to understand entrepreneurial activities in a dynamic and holistic manner with attention to extended time and space dimensions in order to fully capture assessment and impact of entrepreneurship education.

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1. Introduction

As a relatively new phenomenon, the field of entrepreneurship education faces the challenge to develop exhaustive ways of measuring impact of entrepreneurship education in order to demonstrate the effects that it has on students, the educational system and society (Fayolle, Gailly, & Lassas-Clerc, 2006; Graevenitz, Harhoff, & Weber, 2009; Honig, 2004; Hytti, Stenholm, & Heinonen, 2010; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Pittaway & Edwards, 2012).

But what are the appropriate ways to measure entrepreneurship education impact? And are there any established factors to measure on in the field yet? Should we evaluate the number of new student ventures, should we assess entrepreneurial competencies developed, should we measure the students' knowledge of entrepreneurship or the amount of economic and social value their ideas and initiatives offer to society? Depending on the goals of entrepreneurship education, there could be a dozen ways to evaluate and measure impact (Fayolle & Gailly, 2013).

Impact of entrepreneurship education appears to be a broad concept that includes assessment of learning outcomes of students, but also involves potential (positive) effects on social and economic aspects of society as a result of the massive attention and investment that has been made politically in the last decades (Charney & Libecap, 2000; EU Commission, 2006;

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Fayolle et al., 2006). Assessment concerns learning outcomes specifically related to teaching and education (Pittaway, Hannon, Gibb, & Thompson, 2009), and does not necessarily include measurement of societal and economic impact. Nevertheless, existing research intertwine impact and assessment because of their natural link, but also despite the different foci of the concepts in terms of what precisely to evaluate.

In addition to that, the amount of research on impact and assessment of entrepreneurship education is still quite limited and evaluation criteria seem to spread in many directions depending on the purpose of a given entrepreneurship course (Fayolle, 2008; Pittaway & Edwards, 2012; Pittaway et al., 2009).

An objective of this article is to look at research literature about impact and assessment of entrepreneurship education to obtain an overview of relevant factors that play a part in relation to the subjects and discuss if these factors can be applied in future research.

The second objective of the article is to challenge the tendency at the universities to practice evaluation of impact and assessment almost exclusively in relation to the specific module, course or program that entrepreneurship students are participating in. A few studies measure impact by following students some years after graduating (Block & Stumpf, 1992), others argue that impact might occur years later (Hytti et al., 2010), but the point of departure is still primarily a single entrepreneurship course or program. The article takes the perspective that entrepreneurship education can affect student learning outcomes in different ways in different contexts and often disconnected from course time and space. Apart from practicing assessment and measurement of impact in a single entrepreneurship course, it is valuable to examine how students take use of entrepreneurship education in between courses and in their daily life. A so-called holistic person perspective is introduced to address the potential in examining the value of entrepreneurship education in a broader perspective.

The third objective of the article is to bring forward knowledge about assessment and impact from a discipline outside the business school context – the Humanities – with specific focus on the sub-area social entrepreneurship. Social entrepreneurship is believed to appeal especially to students at the Humanities because of the attention to social value and non-profit dimensions (Bager, 2006; EU Commission, 2006; Winfield, 2005). In the case of entrepreneurship education, there has been taken a lot of effort to integrate and legitimize the phenomenon at the universities to ensure that it becomes integrated at the different faculties (Gibb, 2002; Katz, 2003; Kuratko, 2005; Shinnar, Pruett, & Toney, 2010). At the Humanities in Denmark, entrepreneurship education is growing in number of courses as well as in number of new ventures created by humanistic students. At the same time, it is still considered to be a challenge to proof entrepreneurship relevant to humanistic students (Jensen, 2011; Lynfort, 2011). Furthermore, most research in entrepreneurship education focuses on business and management students supplemented by research on students from technical and economic disciplines (Alberti & Poli, 2005; Carey & Matlay, 2010; Penaluna & Penaluna, 2009; Pittaway et al., 2009; Segal, Bordia, & Shoenfeld, 2005). The holistic person perspective is integrating in the study of social entrepreneurship education at the Humanities as an extended method to analyze how assessment and impact can be conducted.

2. Methodology

The article starts out with an analysis of literature about impact and assessment of entrepreneurship education. The aim is to describe how the field understands and evaluates student learning outcomes in general. A number of interrelated factors concerning impact and assessment in relation to entrepreneurship education are identified as important to address. These factors are used to inform the subfield of social entrepreneurship and the Humanities with directions for future measurement of impact and assessment.

Secondly, the article examines the field of social entrepreneurship education and presents analytical points from a literature review of articles about social entrepreneurship education published from 2000 to 2013. The primary purpose is to describe central lines of thought in the work on this rather new variant of entrepreneurship education and compare them to the literature about impact and assessment of entrepreneurship education in order to identify relevant ways to evaluate social entrepreneurship education.

Thirdly, the approach 'holistic person perspective' is introduced as a further development of the identified factors from the literature on entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship education. The holistic person perspective is elaborated in a following case study. The case study consists of an embedded, contextual case study and three single cases (Baxter & Jack, 2008) and takes inspiration from Yin's combined deductive and inductive approach to case studies (Yin, 2009).

In the next section, the article presents data from an elective course in social entrepreneurship at the Humanities in Denmark at graduate level. The results are compared to the extracted factors from the literature. The study includes primary data generated from quantitative evaluations, qualitative interviews and observations and represents a mixed methods approach (Greene, 2007; Stake, 2000). The first part of the analysis focuses on general results derived from the whole group of students participating by comparing them to the identified factors from the research on assessment and impact and the holistic person perspective. The second part presents three student cases, where the students' entrepreneurial learning process can be seen through the holistic person perspective in multiple ways.

The concept 'Humanities' can mean different things in different contexts. At the University of Southern Denmark, where the data has been collected, the formal structure of the Humanities covers education within the disciplines of Language, Communication, Culture, Psychology, Organization, History, Philosophy and other related subfields. The data applied in this article involve students enrolled in the education 'International Business Communication' that includes teaching in most of

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