The International Journal of Management Education 12 (2014) 490–499

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

The International Journal of Management Education

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

Constructing entrepreneurial identity in entrepreneurship education

Anne Donnellon [a], Susanne Ollila [b], Karen Williams Middleton [b, *]

[a] Management Division, Babson College, Babson Park, MA 02457-0310, USA
[b] Department of Technology Management and Economics, Chalmers University of Technology, 41296 Gothenburg, Sweden

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 29 January 2014
Received in revised form 8 April 2014
Accepted 13 May 2014
Available online 10 June 2014

Keywords:
Entrepreneurial identity
Entrepreneurship education
Venture creation
Entrepreneurial learning

ABSTRACT

While increasing demand for entrepreneurial competence has led to constant growth in entrepreneurship education, few programs provide robust outcomes such as actual new ventures or entrepreneurial behavior in real contexts. This is due to a gap in our theoretical understanding of what it takes to become entrepreneurial. Research suggests that beyond acquiring knowledge and skill to act entrepreneurially, entrepreneurial learning also involves the development of an entrepreneurial identity. Yet most accounts of entrepreneurship education do not include this concept. We explore entrepreneurial identity and how it is constructed within an entrepreneurship education.

Connecting entrepreneurial learning theory with literature on identity, we developed a set of categories addressing the construction of an entrepreneurial identity. In a case study at a European technical university, we used these categories to sample and analyze narrative data developed as students created new ventures. The results support our supposition that, in the context of a new venture creation program, students experience challenges that lead to the development of entrepreneurial identity. Based on these findings, we argue that, if the educational objective is learning for the practice of entrepreneurship, then identity construction needs to be seen as important a goal as the development of knowledge and skill.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship has long been identified as a factor in economic prosperity (see for example Baumol, 1986; Baumol, Litan, & Schramm, 2007), and as a result policy makers and practitioners increasingly call upon the need for entrepreneurial competence to drive growth in their regions (OECD, 2011; World Economic Forum, 2011). Emphasis on developing new entrepreneurs that can deliver this competency is marked by the continued growth of entrepreneurial education programs (Finkle & Deeds, 2001; Katz, 2003; McMullan & Long, 1987; Solomon, 2007). However, not all lead to the development of entrepreneurially acting individuals or the creation of new firms (Gruber, 2007; Honig & Samuelsson, 2012; Karlsson & Honig, 2007). While it is widely acknowledged that higher entrepreneurial education should include experiential pedagogy in order to enhance learning and innovative capacity (Barrett & Peterson, 2000; Collins, Smith, & Hannon, 2006; Honig,

* Corresponding author. Department of Technology Management and Economics, Div. Management of Organizational Renewal and Entrepreneurship, Chalmers University of Technology, 41296 Gothenburg, Sweden. Tel.: +46 (0)31772 1913.
E-mail addresses: donnellon@babson.edu (A. Donnellon), karen.williams@chalmers.se (K. Williams Middleton).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2014.05.004
1472-8117/© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

2004; Johannisson, Landström, & Rosenberg, 1998; Lundström & Stevenson, 2002; Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Vinton & Alcock, 2004; Yballe & O'Connor 2000), there are still various ways to deliver entrepreneurship education.

Varying pedagogical approaches distinguish between education conducted *about*, *in*, *for* or *through* entrepreneurship (Chang & Rieple, 2013; Co & Mitchell, 2006; Heinonen & Poikkijoki, 2006; Hytti & O'Gorman 2004; Kirby, 2004; Mwasalwiba, 2010; Pittaway & Edwards, 2012). Ollila and Williams Middleton (2011) argue that the 'about' and 'in' approaches to entrepreneurship education are insufficient when attempting to stimulate entrepreneurial behavior and develop new ventures. They argue that students need to do the real work of creating a new venture in order to develop entrepreneurial competency. Of the four main types of entrepreneurship education described above, only the latter ('through') incorporates engagement in actual venture creation.

Among the first to describe approaches to learning *through* entrepreneurship, Gibb (1996) identified an enterprising teaching approach as essential for connecting conceptual knowledge to a range of entrepreneurial behaviors. Following Gibb, specialized approaches have been developed to facilitate learning *through* engagement in the practice of entrepreneurship (see for example Heinonen, 2007; Heinonen & Poikkijoki, 2006). Ollila and Williams Middleton (2011) introduce a venture creation approach which integrates incubation of viable ideas into the educational process. The approach allows students to "test the water" by involving them in real entrepreneurial and business activities as the leading actors (the entrepreneurial team). This facilitates a number of key learning aspects identified by others: learning by doing, reflection upon actions taken (Cope, 2003; Cope & Watts, 2000), development of decision-making logics (Chandler, DeTienne, McKelvie, & Mumford, 2011; Sarasvathy, 2001) and prioritization of activities, all with the intent of successfully creating new ventures. Scholars even argue that in order to *stimulate* entrepreneurial behavior, education must go beyond *simulating* it by including actual venture creation as part of the formal curriculum (Ollila & Williams Middleton, 2011; Williams Middleton & Donnellon, 2014). When students act as entrepreneurs in the course of their education – doing the tasks of creating a new venture – it is inevitable that they take on this new identity to some extent. Entrepreneurial learning scholars have discussed the importance of the self in learning and some have discussed identity.

Researchers studying those who learn to be entrepreneurial by starting and managing a venture suggest that this competency is far broader than skills and knowledge (see for example, Breslin & Jones, 2012; Harrison & Leitch, 2011; Karataş-Özkan, 2011; Morris, Kuratko, Schindehutte, & Spivack, 2012; Pittaway & Thorpe, 2012; Rae, 2004, 2005, 2006). As Obrecht (2004) argues, in order to act entrepreneurially, individuals need a set of capabilities which are personal, organizational and societal. Thus, components influencing entrepreneurial capability include identity and knowledge as well as networks, legitimacy and locality (Obrecht, 2011). Entrepreneurial learning scholars (Hytti, 2003; Pittaway & Thorpe, 2012; Rae, 2006) find that learning in this context leads to consideration of 'who I want to be' and construction of an identity that enacts this aspiration.

In his work, David Rae argues that entrepreneurial learning is not only retrospective, but also incorporates current experience and future thinking and claims that, "in entrepreneurial learning, knowing, acting and making sense are interconnected" (Rae, 2000, pg. 151). Others have elaborated on this argument, finding that work to develop entrepreneurial identity involves not only internal self-reflection, but also social engagement – through talk and action (Radu Lefebvre & Redien-Collot, 2013; Rigg & O'Dwyer, 2012; Watson, 2009). But when engaging socially, particularly with established social groups, individuals endeavoring to take on the identity of entrepreneur are often challenged with how this new identity fits with existing identities and roles (Williams Middleton, 2013).

These accounts of the entrepreneurial learning process are an almost identical match with the emergent theory of identity construction in the literature on work role transitions, in which case individuals are found to create, test, and integrate provisional-selves relative to a role they have or seek (Ibarra, 1999). Organizational theory too provides a strong case for the importance of identity at both the individual and organizational levels (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; DeRue, Scott & Ashford, 2010; Gioia, Price, Hamilton & Thomas, 2010; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Navis & Glynn, 2011). For example, at the individual level, Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) emphasize that identity is central to meaning, motivation, decision-making, and other activities that can be seen as critical for entrepreneurial action. At the firm level, Glynn and her associates have done a number of studies of the process and effects of identity work vis a vis its external stakeholders.

Theories of individual and organizational transformations, along with those regarding entrepreneurial learning, thus recognize that identity construction is an important part of creating entrepreneurs (Wigren, 2003). However, neither the literature on entrepreneurial theory nor on entrepreneurship education has significantly addressed the process of identity construction over the course of an education nor how entrepreneurial identity 'work' may be integrated with individual skill and knowledge development. We aim here to fill this gap by addressing the following questions: how is an entrepreneurial identity constructed through the process of new venture creation; and how can entrepreneurship education foster identity development.

Our article comprises a theoretical framework developed from the literature on entrepreneurial identity construction as well as an empirical application of this framework to narrative data collected from an entrepreneurship education that utilizes the "learning 'through' approach." Our Methodology Section describes the context, method and findings of our case study, and is then followed by a discussion and conclusions section.

The main theoretical contribution of this article is to the field of entrepreneurship education. We build on theories about entrepreneurial identity to explore what an action-based education can do to facilitate not only venture creation but also entrepreneurial identity construction. In so doing, the article connects the separate fields of entrepreneurial learning and

Download English Version:

https://daneshyari.com/en/article/357402

Download Persian Version:

https://daneshyari.com/article/357402

Daneshyari.com