

Entrepreneurship education in ELT

Daniel Xerri describes ways of developing entrepreneurial skills within schools.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is recognised as a significant motor of economic development. It has been defined as 'the discovery, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities to create future goods and services ... through the creation of a new organization' (Weber, 2012: 12). Nonetheless, entrepreneurship education is not only geared towards enabling people to set up their own ventures; its value primarily lies in developing entrepreneurial attitudes, skills and personal qualities that are useful both to individuals and the organisations they work for (Fayolle & Klandt, 2006).

Entrepreneurship education can help to create an entrepreneurial culture within an organisation through the development of certain values, beliefs and behaviours (Fayolle & Klandt, 2006). This form of professional development is crucial given that entrepreneurial organisations are flexible, adaptable and resourceful, which makes them capable of clinching emerging opportunities, providing their clients with innovative services at reasonable prices, and sustaining a competitive advantage (Westhead & Wright, 2013). Given the continuing growth of the global private ELT sector, it is sensible to foster the entrepreneurial competences of managers, teachers and other professionals working or wishing to work in private language schools or other kinds of businesses in this industry.

Intrapreneurship

In *Start with Why*, Sinek (2009) challenges the idea that visionary entrepreneurs



are single-handedly responsible for the success of their innovative products or services. He claims that the individuals who formulate a company's vision and define its goals are the ones who establish the destination towards which the rest of the organisation charts the route. Sinek (2009: 99) affirms that 'The role of a leader is not to come up with all the great ideas. The role of a leader is to create an environment in which great ideas can happen. It is the people inside the company, those on the front lines, who are best qualified to find new ways of doing things.' They do so because they share the entrepreneur's vision, and work for an organisation that has a creative climate, promotes innovation, and has implemented structures and processes that facilitate idea generation. These are pivotal ideas for anyone wishing to develop the entrepreneurial competences of the people working within a for-profit ELT organisation.

Understood as the entrepreneurial capacity of an organisation's employees, intrapreneurship is deemed vital for the purpose of accelerating innovation (Deloitte, 2015). Since the term's coinage in the late 1970s, there seems to be little doubt that intrapreneurship is beneficial for both individuals and the businesses that employ them. In fact, research indicates that employees' intrapreneurial activities have a positive impact on a firm's outcomes, and that these same activities build employees' personal resources and enhance their work engagement (Gawke *et al*, 2017).

In spite of all the advantages associated with intrapreneurs, the discourse used to talk about them is somewhat problematic because it tends to depict them as some kind of magical solution. Consider this recent example from *Forbes*: 'Intrapreneurs have a fire within them, and they work passionately on

their ideas. They have skin in the game. This helps them succeed in the company by giving more value, but it also helps them feel more satisfied and happy at work. These people are able to use their talents doing work they love. Nothing's better than that' (Carlson, 2018). This kind of description places the onus for a company's innovation on special employees that – to borrow the language of the inventor of the term 'intrapreneur' – act as 'dreamers who do. Those who take hands-on responsibility for creating innovation of any kind within an organization' (Pinchot, 1985: ix).

However, Corbett (2018) affirms that the idea of the successful intrapreneur is a myth partly because 'no single individual, no matter how brilliant, can take a game-changing innovation all the way from idea to reality'. He argues that it is difficult for innovation to flourish unless it is a collective endeavour, cultivated throughout the entire company hierarchy by systems, structures and a culture that nourishes innovative ideas. Intrapreneurs who feel isolated because they do not work at a company that has institutionalised innovation find it very challenging to innovate. What is needed is a corporate strategy that professionalises and institutionalises innovation throughout the entire organisation. It seems that in order to foster internal innovation within an ELT business, it is far better to unleash the potential of all the people within the organisation and then develop that potential in an integrated fashion.

Qualities to develop

Since intrapreneurship is a process that is ideally engaged in by individuals working in groups, it is important to consider which qualities to develop in those people who occupy different kinds of positions in ELT businesses. A significant amount of research has sought to determine which characteristics do successful entrepreneurs have. For example, a systematic review by Hofmuth (2014) identifies the knowledge, skills and abilities of such entrepreneurs. He found that entrepreneurs' capacity to recognise and pursue business opportunities seems to depend on their work styles,

high achievement and interpersonal orientation, extensive conscientiousness, a moderate risk-taking propensity, mental balance, and need for independence (Hofmuth, 2014).

Entrepreneurs' ability to engage in productive decision-making and to control their ventures depends on social and system skills, while goal attainment relies on skilled management of resources (Hofmuth, 2014). Knowledge about entrepreneurial, management and business administration issues is evident in successful entrepreneurs, and management and industry experience are also part of their profile (Hofmuth, 2014). Most of the above qualities would be significant foci of entrepreneurship education initiatives aimed at professionals within ELT organisations, especially since certain characteristics have an effect on the growth and success of a business venture.

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For instance, a study of 65,000 entrepreneurs from 88 countries shows that risk tolerance, entrepreneurial alertness and confidence in one's abilities are some of the most significant variables

for successful ventures (Fuentelsaz & Montero, 2015). Similarly, a qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with American and Canadian entrepreneurs demonstrates that venture success is associated with an entrepreneur's determination and commitment, work ethic, optimism, energy and fearlessness (Crane & Sohl, 2004). Other research indicates that grit is vital for entrepreneurial success (Mooradian *et al*, 2016), and it has a positive relationship with company performance (Mueller *et al*, 2017). In fact, nascent entrepreneurs' self-efficacy aids in the development of formal business plans, and their perseverance helps them to engage in business planning activities (Brinckmann & Kim, 2015). Moreover, a study on the factors that impact new entrepreneurs shows that they value the development of creative approaches and critical thinking as part of their journey to success (Grima, 2018).

Addressing the above qualities via entrepreneurship education can help to boost the growth of an ELT business; however, a lot depends on whether its founding entrepreneur sets an example for the people in the organisation through his or her own continuing professional development. Research indicates that a high level of personal initiative and the associated competencies of an organisation's founding entrepreneur lead to increased growth (Sambasivan *et al*, 2010). In fact, 'The founding entrepreneurs must continuously learn and acquire new entrepreneurship skills, and also understand that competencies are changeable and learnable' (Sambasivan *et al*, 2010: 328). The idea that entrepreneurs need to be open to new learning is also confirmed by a study on serial entrepreneurs; it shows that they make substantial changes to their strategy thanks to the learning that emerges as a result of experiencing failure (Lin *et al*, 2018).

Culture and gender

Despite the burgeoning interest of policy makers in nurturing entrepreneurship – especially due to the belief that it leads to economic growth – convergence in the levels of entrepreneurship has

not been registered across countries (Freytag & Thurik, 2010). This is because of economic, demographic, cultural and institutional differences. As an example of the influential nature of culture on the cultivation of entrepreneurship, we can consider how the latter is related to gender roles and responsibilities in society. This is particularly relevant when one considers the huge proportion of women working in the ELT industry worldwide. For instance, in the private language teaching sector in Malta, female employees (i.e. those in teaching and non-teaching positions) amount to 64% of the total (NSO, 2019).

Research seems to indicate that entrepreneurship is a gender biased activity, so much so that there seems to be an 'existing equation between entrepreneurship and masculinity' (Bruni *et al*, 2004: 425). In many countries, the number of female entrepreneurs is lower than that of their male counterparts (Guiso & Rustichini, 2011). Participation rates are influenced by the intersection of gender and context, especially in terms of how the cultural understanding of entrepreneurship as a masculine concept acts as a barrier for women (Wheadon & Duval-Couetil, 2018). Clearly, entrepreneurship education for people working within the ELT industry can play a key role in challenging gender stereotypes by helping individuals to understand how the gender associations of entrepreneurial activities influence the way certain men and women behave with respect to entrepreneurship.

Conclusion

Cultivating an entrepreneurial culture within private language schools and other forms of ELT businesses is desirable given entrepreneurship's close relationship with innovation and value creation. Entrepreneurship education can help to boost the success and growth of an organisation by equipping its people with the capacity to question the status quo, identify new opportunities, enhance the quality and range of its services, and seek more effective and efficient ways of addressing the needs and wants of its clients. In order to achieve these goals, it is important to target the knowledge,

skills, dispositions and beliefs that enable employees to orientate themselves as intrapreneurs who are fully capable of innovating collaboratively.

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