

Entrepreneurship Education – a Handful of Experiences

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The article presents the experience of entrepreneurship education among the students of Warsaw School of Economics. It has been reflected in the results of the impact of applying heuristic techniques and teamwork on the quality of the business ideas of students and their motivation for trying to implement them in life. The use of heuristic techniques according to the respondents had a positive effect on the quality of their business idea. After reviewing them in practice significantly increased assessment of the suitability of their application. Similarly, team cooperation has positively influenced the quality of business ideas and motivation of the participants who try to implement them. Total properly conducted entrepreneurship training is able to raise the motivation of students to start a business. Working out an effective program helps to make constant evaluation and feedback from the participants.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship education, pre-incubation of entrepreneurship, business idea, creativity

Introduction

Teaching entrepreneurship is not simple, since what is entrepreneurship? It is neither a science, nor an art, it is just praxis as referred to by Peter F. Drucker (Drucker, 1992, p. 8), a scholar in this field. Asking students about qualities of an entrepreneurial individual, they almost always mentioned creativity. Enquiring further whether and what methods of creative thinking they have ever used, I recorded a low percentage of positive responses and among the students there were some who returned the question asking what exactly creative thinking methods are. Thus, if entrepreneurship is an area of applied knowledge, is it possible to teach it in school?

I would like the article to be perceived as an opinion in the discussion concerning the methods of teaching entrepreneurship in Polish schools and universities. For about 15 year I have been running classes in developing entrepreneurship at the Warsaw School of Economics. And it is not an easy task to be done since majority of the WSE students want to find a job with corporations after their graduation.

What is the entrepreneurship I would like to teach? I often discuss the issue with students, we occasionally have disputes. I have studied the understanding of the concept of entrepreneurship from Smith, Cantillon, Schumpeter, Kirzner to Druckner, Hisrich, Pinchot, Stevenson, Kuratko, Morris, Burns, and in writings of Polish scholars: Gruszecki, Klimek, Piasecki, Antoszkiewicz, Bratnicki, Targalski. In majority of definitions there is room for entrepreneurial opportunity, uncertainty connected with the action taken, profit orientation as well as an entrepreneur own initiative. However, I could conclude that entrepreneurship is a human being's own undertakings aimed at reaching benefits and since the benefits are connected with the future, the undertaking bear an element of uncertainty. Thus, how to teach such an activity in a classroom situation?

Now I would like to share my observations derived from two training courses I conduct, i.e. "Training in Entrepreneurship" for bachelor's students and "Entrepreneurship Incubator" for master's students.

Training syllabus

The syllabus was created together with Prof. J.D. Antoszkiewicz over 15 years ago and since that time it has been still improved through systematic evaluation of classes (Antoszkiewicz, Laszuk, Paciorkiewicz, 2005). The objective of the training is to present to students an alternative career plan in form of developing their own entrepreneurship plan, enhancing their entrepreneurship which could be useful in future managerial job. The training also attempts to indicate how important understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship is, since it is often the case that knowledge from secondary school sometimes distorts the phenomenon focusing too much on microeconomics, the necessity of finding a job or reversly – on the functioning of charity institutions. The reality is that hardly anybody associates entrepreneurship with their future, and the entrepreneurship phenomenon itself is of little interest to students.

Apparently, students of the Warsaw School of Economics have armful of opportunities to train their own entrepreneurship. They only have to rightly set and formulate their objective, and what benefits they want to gain. At the

University there are a lot of scientific associations and students' organisations that develop and pursue numerous projects. The projects provide an excellent opportunity for the students to train their entrepreneurship. A better chance could only be starting up their own business, discussed further in the article. However, with the objective clearly set and formulated, students can win a lot for their entrepreneurship development during their studies. Therefore, following the training one of its conclusions and the task delegated to be dealt with at home is to address a question of what I can do right now to enhance a possibility and likelihood of my successful start in business or professional life.

The impediment to the training is the fact that it does not trigger and entrepreneurial spirit. The structure of classes is, however, based on a phenomenon observed in physics. The accumulated energy potential is – at some point in time – converted into kinetic energy. The training course is programmed in such a way so as to enhance the potential of attendees in five areas: analytical ability, application of heuristic techniques and anticipation, abilities to work in teams and team leadership. Additionally – as it is the case of training courses – there is a phase of defreezing, change and freezing, and to finish with there occurs a phenomenon of enhanced motivation. If the phenomenon is made use of by a student, there is a chance for the student to create their entrepreneurship. A research was conducted in early 2016 to diagnose the effect of training conducted in such a way. Three groups of trainees, including 61 students, participated in the training. They responded to a survey prior to and following the training. The responses were paired with an appropriate marker. The results of the survey are presented below.

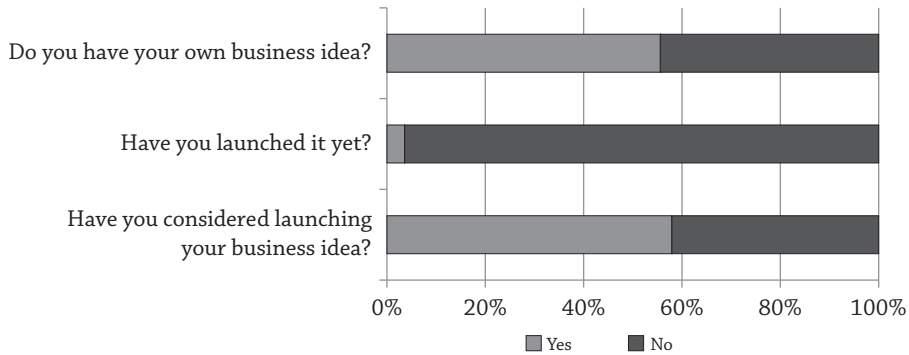
Business idea

Over a half of the respondents already had their business idea. Similar number were thinking about the launch of their idea of business in majority of cases answers to both questions were the same, although it is worth noting that 15% (5 out of 34 respondents) having their business idea had not considered its launch and reversely 19% (5 out of 27) of having no business idea had been considering its launch.

As it can be seen in Figure 1 majority of students have not launched their business idea yet. Among the respondents the business launch has been declared by 2 people only.

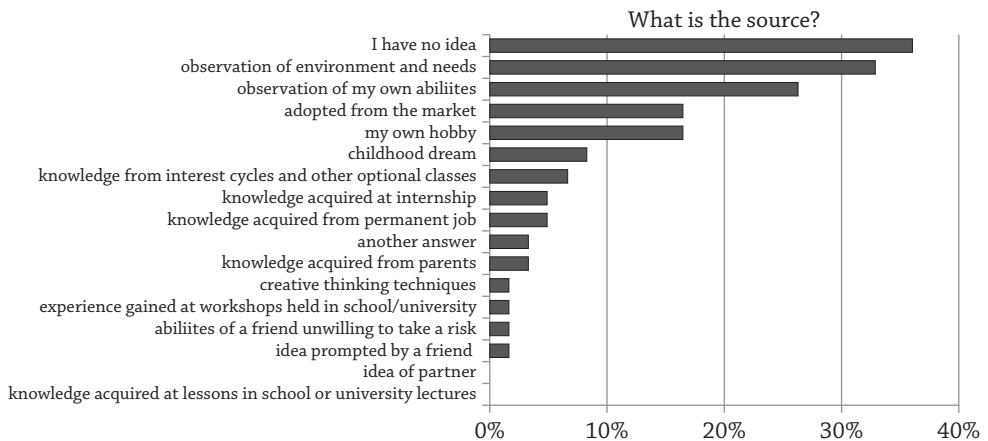
It results from the researches conducted in 2015 that majority of start-up founders based its first business concept on what used to be their hobby. The next barchart presents sources of business ideas of the currently surveyed students.

Figure 1. Business idea versus its launch



Source: the author's own work

Figure 2. Source of business idea

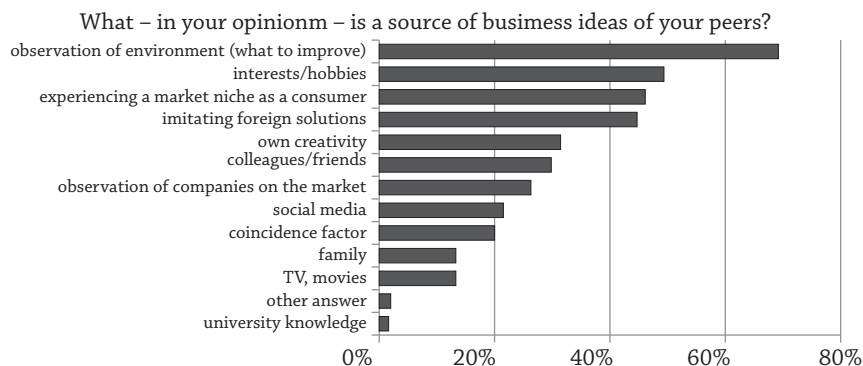


Source: the author's own work.

The surveyed own hobby proved to be the fourth ranked business idea (10 people). The first three ranked are identified within the environment (20), classified as the respondent's own abilities (16) and factors identified with other entities on the market (10). 5 to 10% of respondents (3–5 people) indicated the knowledge acquired at school classes or in workplace as well as their childhood dreams. The remaining sources were identified by less than 5% of the surveyed (one person, two people or nobody). Amongst them there are creative thinking techniques (1.6% – 1 surveyed).

As it has already been mentioned over 40% (27) students had no idea for their own business. Therefore, they were asked for their opinions concerning their peers. Their responses are presented in the figure below:

Figure 3. Source of business idea among peers/friends



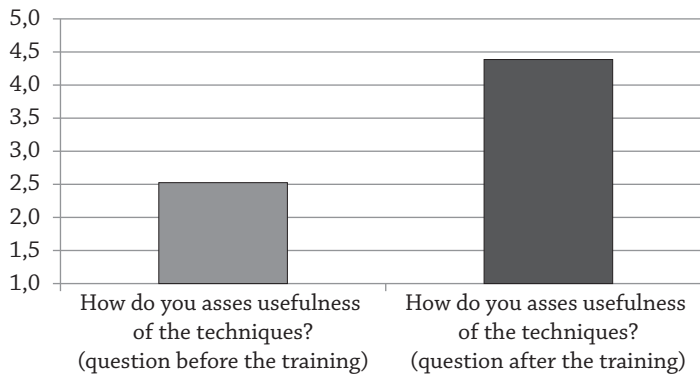
Source: the author's own work.

The research findings presented above prove that it is the needs identified while observing the environment that are ranked the most popular source of business idea (42 respondents). The percentage might have been significantly higher if students having no business idea responded to the survey. Over 40% claimed that the sources of their business idea is their own hobby (30), their own experience concerning the shortage of necessary services to be provided on the market (28) and overseas solutions that might be imitated (27). The third group of sources, of minor importance (20 – 40%) were: their own creativity (19) or the ideas of friends/colleagues (18) as well as observation of companies existing on the market (16) and social media (13).

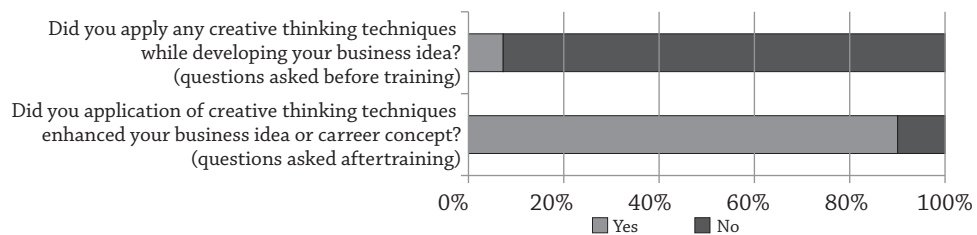
Application of creative thinking techniques

It should be stated, however, that the importance of creativity in an entrepreneurial process was both valued and appreciated contrary to conscious application of creative thinking techniques. As the responses to already discussed questioned proved, 31% (19) respondents indicated that their colleagues/friends focus on their won creativity and one person (1.6%) only admitted that the business idea resulted from the application of creating thinking techniques. Usefulness of these techniques was the subject of the survey done among students prior to and following their training. The findings are presented in the Figure below.

Within the scale from 1 (useless at all) to 5 (very useful) the average assessment grade amounted to 2.53 prior to the training, whereas following the training the grade increased up to 4.39. The increase might prove lack of knowledge in the area of creative thinking techniques, as presented in the Figure below:

Figure 4. Evaluation of usefulness of creative technique application

Source: the author's own work.

Figure 5. Application of creative techniques while developing your business idea

Source: the author's own work.

While developing their own business idea only 7.4% (four) students applied creative thinking techniques. After the training 90% (53 respondents) claimed that the application of the techniques enhanced the business or future career path concept.

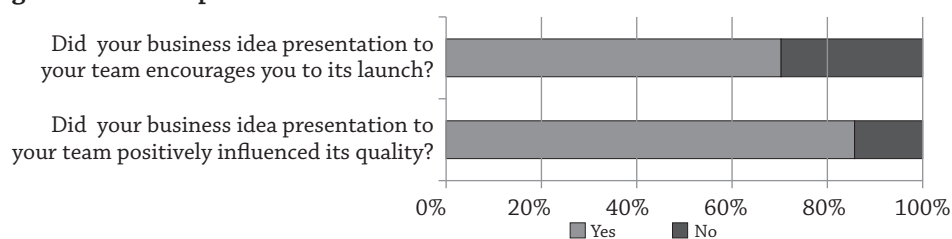
Team impact

Apart from having a business idea itself, in order to launch it it is necessary to be able to work in a team. One of the modules of the training analyses team work ability in-depth, however, team work importance is discussed within the whole training course. The impact of team work upon a business concept and motivation to launch it is presented in the Figure below.

Almost 86% (48 out of 56) students admitted that team involvement positively influenced their business idea. During the training the trainees were expanding their ideas swapping with each other previously mastered creative techniques,

since the application of a different method at each stage of the training facilitates the student's attitude, turning it from reactive into pro-active. And then even criticism seems to be more creative than evaluating. Team work and joint effort are also perfect motivators. 70% (40 out of 57) trainees stated that discussing and expanding on their own idea within their team encouraged them to launching the concept. Some respondents claimed that it was team members who made them aware of risk-factor in their business concept which results in the difference in answers to the two questions.

Figure 6. Team impact



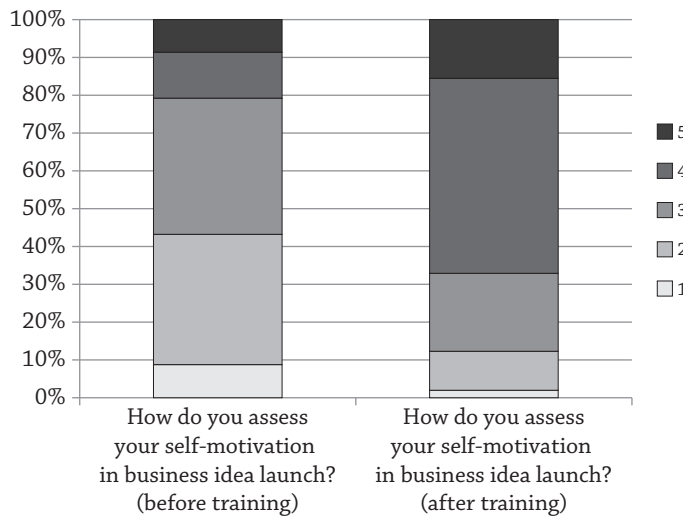
Source: the author's own work.

Impact of training on entrepreneurship

From among the trio of an idea, team and action-taking, the latter one is the most difficult while teaching entrepreneurship. It is next to impossible to arrange such classroom situation when a student could act making use of their entrepreneurial abilities (i.e. taking a risk to gain future benefits). Yes, students could be incentivized to take up such activity outside their school life. Therefore, to assess the impact of school and university classes on the motivation to launch the business idea, two questions were asked prior to and after the training. The average assessment grade of the student's own motivation rose within the training process from 2.8 to 3.6 (with 1 assessed as very poor up to 5 standing for very strong). Self-assessment findings are presented in the Figure below:

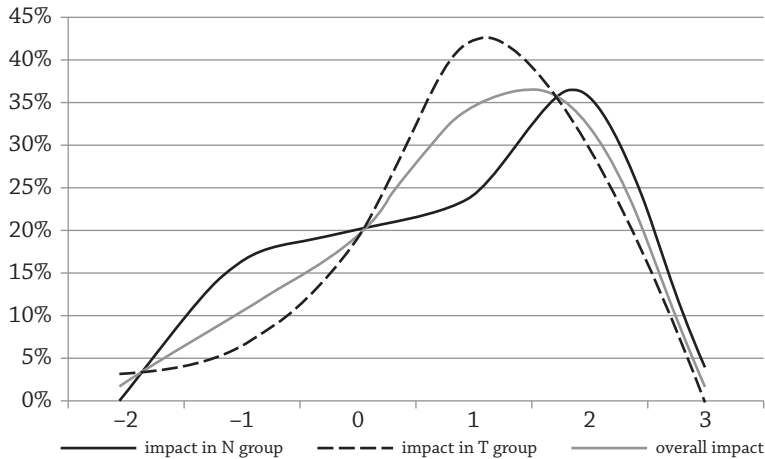
Before the training 21% of students assessed their motivation as high (7 respondents) and very high (5). At the same time the percentage of the least motivated declined from 43% (25) to 12% (7). Furthermore, the impact on individual trainees was analysed. The graph below presents the data gathered In the surveyed group (58% of respondents addressed the question) and among students already having their business idea (T group) as well as those having no business idea (N group).

Figure 7. Assessment of self-motivation in business idea launch



Source: the author's own work.

Figure 8. Impact of training on rise in motivation to launch business idea



Source: the author's own work.

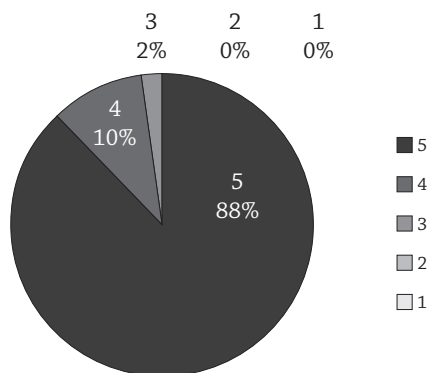
In majority of cases the training positively impacted motivations of trainees, raising it most often by 1 and 2 points in a four-point scale among trainees in this group 9% of trainees (5) assessed their motivation as very high at the beginning of the training. Among students having a business idea the largest percentage 42% (14 out of 33) assessed their motivation higher by 1 point after the training and 30% (10 out of 33) by as many as 2 points. On the other hand, within the group

of respondents with no business idea before the training, among 36% (9 out of 25) trainees motivation increased by 2 points and among 24% (6 out of 25) by 1 point. However, among 12% of trainees their motivation dropped by 1 (6 people) or 2 points (1).

Evaluation of classes

The key element in efficient entrepreneurship teaching is recognizing student's needs and considering their own self-evaluation. Thus, it is worth asking them a question during the training concerning the factors the most influenced their entrepreneurship as well as what items in the school syllabus should be either elaborated on or limited. Having obtained such information, the training might be tailored to the expectations of the students and this way it could influence their entrepreneurship more effectively. The evaluation grades of the training provided by the surveyed group are presented in the chart below (1 – very bad, 5 – very good).

Figure 9. Student's evaluation of the training



Source: the author's own work.

Such evaluation is also a motivational tool for a trainer to enhance their efforts and without it, it could be difficult to run the training efficiently. However, this conclusion is only based on students' feedback concerning three days of their training course. The practical result of the training could be discussed when the students themselves take an opportunity of their enhanced motivation and use it to their own benefit. Such a message conveyed to students is followed by the homework assigned to them in a form of an essay to be written and entitled:

“What can I do now to make my successful start in business more likely?” It is apparent that the answer to the question would be of worthwhile teaching effect if a trainee analysed their objectives in detail. However what is optimistic nowadays is that increasingly many students are taking answers to such questions seriously and some of them not only write about their plans and objectives but also about activities taken after the training.

Entrepreneurship incubator

Regretfully, it should be stated that among majority of students the enhanced motivation comes to an end in view of forthcoming examination session. Therefore, hoping for their more active involvement in classes, I suggested to my master’s students the kind of classes focusing on taking up entrepreneurial activities (practical approach to be presented during the classes). The task for the students is to develop their business idea, work out its model which is to be tested within the contact with business environment. Negotiations with a potential customer help verify primary assumptions of the business idea, while agreements with suppliers allow technical evaluation of the feasibility of the project. The task like this being completed in line with *customer development* model (Blank, Dorf, 2013, pp. 73–98) is very much realistic, notably within the framework of legal and organisational environment included in the syllabus of Academic Entrepreneurship classes. Available entity and accounting support allow to conclude an agreement and to legally realize profits in case of a business idea being successful. Such classes have been in the university curriculum not until recently, therefore both their evaluation and statistics are not available yet. However, worth considering is the fact that during the classes some students have already managed to issue their first invoice ever (which is example of pure entrepreneurship).

Conclusions

There are several conclusions to be drawn from the research conducted. Apart from the fact that students identify entrepreneurship with creativity, in their search for a business idea they rarely rely on the very creativity, which might results from the students’ lacking the knowledge of creative thinking techniques. More than a half of the students surveyed admitted that they had considered the launch of their business idea, yet, with no practical application. And it was observation

of environment as well as students' experience and abilities that were the major sources of their business concept.

In the opinion of the surveyed the application of heuristic techniques positively influenced their business idea quality. Having been trained how to apply the techniques, the students found them even more useful. Similarly, the idea of team work favourably impacted students' business ideas and their motivation to attempt to launch them. Therefore, it can be concluded that the correctly run training in entrepreneurship is likely to enhance the motivation of trainees to start up their own business. And thanks to permanent evaluation of the training done by the students as well as feedback provided by them it is possible to work out an effective training syllabus tailored to the needs of the trainees.

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