

ICSB Gazette

The Global Leader Supporting Micro-, Small and Medium Enterprises

Monday, December 30, 2019. Issue 48

The Role of Entrepreneurship Educators and Researchers in Addressing the UN's Sustainability and Development Goals

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Last year I had the privilege of participating in the International Council for Small Business' annual conference at the United Nations in celebration of the UN's Micro, Small and Medium Size Enterprise Day (MSME). The topic of my talk focused on the role of entrepreneurship educators and researchers in working with the UN to address its 17 Sustainability and Development Goals. I talked about the well-known linkage between the level of entrepreneurial activity in any given region and its effect on economic development. I also talked about the idea of recognizing entrepreneurs as problem solvers, especially in the context of addressing social issues. Closely linked to

this talk at last year's conference, past ICSB President Ki-Chan Kim emphasized the importance of adopting a philosophy and practice of "humane entrepreneurship". In fact, at the close of last year's conference, all attending delegates engaged in a signing ceremony to endorse ICSB's support for promoting and adopting a humane and empathetic approach to the formation and management of growth-oriented ventures.

For purposes of this discussion, I think it is important to clarify what I mean by levels of entrepreneurial activity. As Acs (2006) points out in his work in connection with the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project, it is first important to define how we measure entrepreneurial activity. Measurement issues can significantly influence how we make inferences regarding regional economic development. The GEM Project differentiates between "necessity based" entrepreneurship and "opportunity based" entrepreneurship. Necessity based entrepreneurship implies that individuals resort to a simple form of self-employment because there exists very little to no other options at established organizations. Thus, for regions characterized by high levels of necessity-based entrepreneurs, we may infer that economic development is suppressed due to the lack of higher paying alternative employment opportunities. Alternatively, opportunity-based entrepreneurship implies that individuals proactively choose an entrepreneurial path because they have recognized an opportunity and endeavor to exploit it through creative or innovative means. Accordingly, there seems to be a greater chance of improved regional economic development in areas where opportunity-based entrepreneurs can flourish. From this perspective, opportunity-based entrepreneurs may be more prone to undertake the challenges of building growth-oriented organizations and thus contributing to the viability of a region.



It is also important for our further discussion, to expand on the notion of entrepreneurs as problem solvers. Fernald, Solomon and Tarabishy (2005) in describing the characteristics of an entrepreneurial leader, point to the importance of problem-solving capabilities. Entrepreneurs will inevitably face problems in the process of company formation, and they must develop the skill sets and competencies to confidently confront them. However, we need to expand upon this internal oriented dimension of problem solving to include the external context of problem recognition as an important element of opportunity identification. Clearly, in this sense, if entrepreneurs are going to play a key role in addressing the UN's sustainability and development goals, we need to focus on developing the kinds of individuals who are willing to take on wicked problems, convert them to unique opportunities and then by using their skill sets and competencies, adopt leadership roles in their process of building sustainable organizations. Thus, a key element of opportunity-based entrepreneurship is the notion of addressing problems worth solving (Maurya 2012). In this case, problems have to be extensive enough, and there must exist a large enough potential customer base in search of solutions. Then, by elevating this notion of problem-solving capabilities to the societal level, we can truly speak to the types of global issues the UN seeks to take on.

However, while both dimensions of problem-solving capabilities are important for the development of opportunity-based entrepreneurs, we must also consider the critical role entrepreneurs can play, who have adopted mindsets oriented towards social and humane entrepreneurship. While there still remain many competing views and definitions of the term social entrepreneurship, I refer here to Bornstein and Davis' (2010) perspective that social entrepreneurship represents a process whereby individuals build or transform organizations in ways that advance solutions to social problems (i.e. such as those enumerated by the UN's



17 Sustainability and Development Goals). Complementing this view, Kim, El Tarabishy and Bae (2018) explain that social consciousness in organization building is important, but not enough. Humane entrepreneurship expands this view by espousing the importance of investing in and cultivating an organization's human capital along with the sustainable use of natural resources.

Clearly, what these above points imply is that opportunity-based entrepreneurs who recognize and are willing to act on addressing critical social issues in a humane and resource sustaining way can be value added players. Given the UN's endeavor to address its sustainability and development goals over the next decade, it then becomes critical for entrepreneurship educators and researchers to actively engage in the process of training and developing the talent pool of individuals willing to engage and make a difference.

The Role of the Entrepreneurship Educator and Researcher

Given the lofty vision of the UN to achieve its sustainability and development goals by 2030, they are going to require a concerted effort on the part of people with a wide range of talents and skill sets who are willing to engage in meaningful ways. As I mentioned in my talk last year, we are going to need an eclectic collection of skilled individuals such as doctors, scientists, engineers, lawyers, teachers, artists and musicians who can apply their unique perspectives and talents in shining a light on and tackling vexing societal issues. Additionally, we are going to need entrepreneurs who can creatively pull together this critical talent along with resources in order to build the organizations that can make change happen.

Entrepreneurship education has come a long way over the last several decades in the development of competency enhancing pedagogies for developing the next generation of entrepreneurs. Traditionally, during the 1970's, 80's and 90's, entrepreneurship had been taught using a basic business planning framework where a student would be encouraged to conceive of an idea and then to write a business plan as to how he or she would propose to implement it. Basically, what we learned from more deeply examining this approach is that we were doing more to train talented business plan writers as opposed to practicing entrepreneurs. However, in recent years, several trends have profoundly influenced how entrepreneurship is taught and introduced to students of all ages and backgrounds. These trends include 1) the lean startup movement; 2) an emphasis on competency and network building, 3) a heightened awareness towards social entrepreneurship and more recently 4) a focus on Humane Entrepreneurship.

The lean startup movement emerged from the seminal work of people such as McGrath and MacMillan (2000), Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), Reis (2011), Blank and Dorf (2012), and Maurya (2012). The approach has caused a shift in emphasis in entrepreneurship education from a business planning framework to more of an experimental approach based on initial business model conception and design, assumption identification and testing through market feedback and subsequent iteration and refinement in order to achieve stronger product - market fit. Clearly the lean startup methodology constitutes an “action oriented” approach to learning how to build sustainable organizations based on market needs and product attributes.



The competency and networking approach to entrepreneurship education recognizes that company building activities require a wide range of skill sets that an entrepreneur must acquire in order to manage the changing needs of a growing firm. Early work in this area drew upon the social cognitive work of Albert Bandura (1977) in developing the construct of self-efficacy, or the belief in one's own abilities to accomplish

challenging tasks and projects. In developing this construct, Bandura strongly recommended that researchers should begin to develop domain specific (unique to a particular context) measures of self-efficacy. This prescription influenced a number of entrepreneurship researchers (i.e. Chen, Greene and Crick, 1998; DeNoble, Jung and Ehrlich, 1999) to develop unique domain specific measures of entrepreneurial self-efficacy. More recently, researchers began to focus on the unique competencies associated with entrepreneurship and new venture creation (Morris, Webb, Fu and Singhal, 2013). Thus, by understanding the competency and skill sets required to pursue venture initiation and growth activities, entrepreneurship educators began to focus on more experiential based pedagogical designs. In the entrepreneurship education field, we focus, for example, on helping our students to develop competencies around such areas as opportunity recognition and analysis, business model design, leveraging resources, risk management and creative problem solving. These skill sets represent important attributes of the types of entrepreneurial leaders who can affect meaningful and impactful change.

The third trend influencing entrepreneurship education today is a direct result of the heightened awareness of current generations of students around social issues and challenges. For the better part of the 21st century to date, today's generation of students are much more well informed of the state of world affairs than any previous generations. Clearly, advances in internet and mobile device technologies along with the development and proliferation of social media platforms has brought an amazing amount of current information available instantaneously to an individual anywhere and anytime. As a result, more and more students are aware of societal challenges impacting them locally, regionally, nationally and globally. Accordingly, these students are demanding that educators provide more thought provoking and engaging pedagogies that allow them to experience entrepreneurship through more meaningful field-based activities.

Finally, a more recent enhancement to the concept of Social Entrepreneurship is the emerging construct of Humane Entrepreneurship. As mentioned earlier in this discussion, this approach developed and championed by past ICSB President Ki- Chan Kim, advocates that company builders and managers become more aware of the impact of their business model designs, strategic decisions, and resource allocations on people both inside and outside of the organization. Additionally, Humane Entrepreneurship recognizes that such business decision making should also reflect an organization's impact on the natural environment. Already, conferences devoted to this idea and papers focused on enhancing, measuring and further developing this concept are beginning to emerge. Eventually, a Humane Entrepreneurship methodology will become a standard and expected part of an entrepreneur's educational process. Accordingly, I believe that continued developments in entrepreneurship pedagogy will emerge and adapt to humane requirements in future business model designs.

Addressing the So What Question

So, what do these trends in entrepreneurship education and research mean to those involved in formulating practical ways to implement meaningful and impactful change in global society along these seventeen dimensions of sustainability and development? I contend that it is entrepreneurs who can play leading roles in taking initiatives and building organizations to mobilize resources for addressing these issues. Accordingly, the importance of entrepreneurship research and education must be recognized and supported. For it is incumbent upon this community to focus their efforts on training and developing competent opportunity-based entrepreneurs who will be the difference makers. In this regard, the International Council for Small Business represents the leading global organization dedicated to this effort. ICSB, its affiliate organizations, and members worldwide represent the collective human and social capital of talent capable of influencing and affecting such change worldwide.

At the global level, ICSB has been developing and innovating new programs to enhance the capabilities of both entrepreneurship educators and hopeful future entrepreneurs. The ICSB certificate programs in Social Entrepreneurship and Creativity and Innovation are prime examples of such initiatives. Both of these programs are designed to help educators to enhance their teaching impact through exposure to new pedagogical designs and educational resources. Additionally, the ICSB Academy brings together a diverse group of talented students from member institutions around the world to learn and experiment with new business designs and to build cross cultural relationships.

The U.S. affiliate of ICSB, the United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE) has reformulated its strategic mission to focus more on learning and education initiatives. Their annual conferences typically feature unique workshops devoted to experiential learning and cutting-edge curriculum design.

Additionally, educators and researchers can engage in learning activities at smaller boutique conferences such as the Experiential Classroom hosted by the University of Tampa, the Babson Symposium for Entrepreneurship Educators (SEE), the Research Workshop hosted by CETYS University in Ensenada Mexico and the California Entrepreneurship Educators Conference (CEEC) hosted by the Lavin Entrepreneurship Center at San Diego State University. These conferences bring together leading researchers and educators in smaller more intimate settings to engage in discussions with a broad range of conference participants (usually new professionals in the entrepreneurship education field).

The purpose of all of these initiatives is to enable our educational institutions and communities of educators and scholars to offer the types of programming that will engage and motivate talented students to develop the confidence in their entrepreneurial skill sets and competences. The United Nations needs future generations of leaders who can not only recognize and empathize with the vast societal challenges confronting all regions but can also have the confidence to act on their beliefs so that collectively we can make progress towards achieving these lofty goals.





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The ICSB Gazette is a weekly edition of a key topic that ICSB will showcase. The content is varied from research, practice, policy, and education. The editor of the ICSB Gazette is Mr. Kyle Lyon, ICSB Junior Project Manager. He will be soliciting ideas and articles from ICSB members world-wide.



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