Leading the entrepreneurial curriculum: Paradoxes, tensions and entrepreneurial action (0315)

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Part 1:
Abstract

Despite emerging policy and guidance within UK HEIs to develop an entrepreneurial curriculum (Wilson, 2012; QAA, 2012; Witty, 2013; Young, 2014), it is recognised that enterprise and entrepreneurship education has patchy leadership within these institutions (Rae, Martin, Antcliff, Hannon, 2012) and empirical study of leadership of the entrepreneurial curriculum is under explored.

This paper discusses findings of an action based participative research project -'Leadership Development for an Entrepreneurial Education: Building Futures' funded by the Leadership Foundation in Higher Education (LFHE). This was a collaborative project involving thirty five curriculum leaders from two participating case study universities, in five exploratory and developmental leadership workshops. It explores barriers, enablers, paradox and tensions present in the academic leadership of current and emergent Entrepreneurship Education leaders and offers a model of competencies of leadership, that aim to address the contradictory perspectives and build capability of entrepreneurship curriculum leaders.

Part 2:

1.0 Purpose

This work focuses on barriers, enablers and resulting tensions of academic leadership in developing an entrepreneurship education and models leadership competencies that can support sustained staff development of these staff to reach their entrepreneurial visions.

2.0 Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK are tasked with demonstrating impact (Wilson, 2012; Witty, 2013; Young, 2014) to service an entrepreneurship agenda and create and deliver a curriculum that supports development of enterprising and entrepreneurial graduates. This requires leadership in all academic disciplines at all levels, yet reach within institutions is limited (Rae, Martin, Antcliff, Hannon, 2012) and scant attention has been given to those who are leading and enabling this agenda.

This paper addresses these concerns through sharing findings of the collaborative research programme 'Leadership Development for Entrepreneurship Education: Building Futures' (LDEE), a yearlong project funded by the Leadership Foundation in Higher Education.

3.0 Entrepreneurship education,

Entrepreneurship education courses and research have grown globally (Katz, 2003; Kuratko, 2005) recently broadening across university disciplines. Within the UK it is regarded as a mechanism through which HEIs can develop employability of its student body (Gibbs, 2002; Rae, 2004) and contributing to regional socio-economic development and economic renewal.

Whilst its importance receives little challenge, 'entrepreneurship' as a construct is contested (Gartner, 1990; Bruyat and Julien, 2001) and so too is enterprise and entrepreneurship education and both heralded as in their relative infancy.   Rather than limiting entrepreneurship to a narrow field of business start-up in a private business context, this paper positions entrepreneurship education as: *Immersive acquisition of context specific entrepreneurship knowledge and behaviours through theory and practice that enables value generation through novel means.*

4.0 Leading and leadership of the Entrepreneurship Curriculum

Very few UK institutions demonstrate leadership of entrepreneurship education in holistic ways and there is significantly a lack of institutional commitment, resources, leadership and ability to connect enterprise and entrepreneurship across institutions (Hannon, 2007; Rae, Martin, Antcliff, Hannon, 2012).

Our complementary perspective is that leadership recognises it as distributed activity (Spillane and Diamond, 2007) involving actors over the organisation at all levels who develop, support and deliver the curriculum including contributors beyond designated management roles. For the later Spillane and Diamond use the term 'leader-plus'.

Whilst Leadership differs from command and control aspects 'management' with its focus on existing tasks and efficiency rather than on developing new processes, directions and effectiveness (Osse-Assare, Longbottom and Murphy, 2005) the leaders themselves both manage and lead processes (Middlehurst & Elton, 1992; Ramsden, 1998). This requires a range of competencies i.e. behaviours instrumental in the delivery of desired results or outcomes (Bartram, 2005). Competency can be distributed amongst academic actors. We suggest that a range of knowledge and meta skills are need to be developed among individuals and teams and believe that translation of amateur academic leaders to effective professionals relies on the infrastructure and support which is integrated into the university setting.

5.0 Methodology

LDEE involved the application of an action-based participatory research method based around five workshop events using the full participation of the research team and a trajectory of widening collaboration in terms of partners, as the project progressed (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

The target sample of 'Curriculum leaders' we define as: Departmental Head or Subject Group and course leaders with responsibility for curriculum delivery and change; an academic responsible for subject-level delivery with an interest in entrepreneurship; Enterprise Champions without line management or direct responsibility for curriculum change; Emergent talent, an academic identified as a leader who may or may not be aware of entrepreneurship education.

Representation was provided from across cognate disciplines - arts, humanities, sciences, technology. Data was gathered via video recording and artefacts (papers, flip charts etc.), thematic analysis applied and results referred back to participants for verification.

6.0 Findings

These focus on four key areas - enablers, barriers, tensions of leading an entrepreneurial curriculum and a tentative model of leadership competencies.

Enablers were expressed as structural and included the drawing down of resources through sponsors and networks; and behavioural in the use of entrepreneurial behaviours such as 'bricolage' (Fisher, 2012), creativity and 'intrapreneurship' (Pinchot, 1985). For example, leaders engaged in 'under-the-radar activity' to deploy 'unapproved' entrepreneurial learning activity to further entrepreneurial outcomes of their students;

Barriers were largely institutional and structural including inflexible curricula that fail to allow students to develop self-belief, entrepreneurial skills, mindsets and behaviour; an inconsistent understanding of 'entrepreneurship' and a lack of legitimacy of the discipline amongst academic colleagues (Gibb, 2002).

Tensions arose out of demands to perform as academic/practitioners and with theory/practice. In addition, there was common citation of the paradox of 'command-and-control' structures of universities and a need for staff to act entrepreneurially to navigate the structural barriers cited above when they present new forms of entrepreneurial learning to new audiences.

Competencies model for leading entrepreneurship education considers institutional knowledge (of resources and power base), the adoption of paradoxical thinking, the recognition of abundance and the adoption of entrepreneurial behaviour. This builds on Smith's (2012) model of paradoxical leadership which accepts and creates understanding of the contradictory position and tension within the leadership role.

7.0 Implications and Further Research

The implications for practice for HEIs are based on considering the competency model as a framework for inclusion in development of those leading an entrepreneurship curriculum. In its current form, the model requires further verification beyond the case study institutions.

The pedagogies used to develop leadership competencies are worthy of further exploration - the methods used and impacts achieved. The action based research employed 5 workshops that may now be used across any HEI and not only to achieve new capabilities but to sustain individual growth through the establishment Communities of Practice (CoP) and enquiry and supported by LFHE materials from this project.

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