Chapter 10

Education and Training for the Entrepreneurial Employee:
Value of ICT-Enabled Learning

Cecilia Hegarty
University of Ulster, Northern Ireland

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, computer technology has become an integral part of any business strategy and operation, including non-ICT ventures. In fact technological innovations have very much driven business growth where the capability of companies to embrace, maintain or lead in developing new technologies has shaped contemporary practice. In preparation for entering this dynamic workplace environment, it is necessary to consider how best to educate the entrepreneurial employee and how to expose students and trainees to these newer technologies. A delivery approach that allows for a combination of information communication technologies (ICT) to be used in education and training is termed ICT-enabled learning. Since the modern learner is inclined to engage with a wide range of ICT-enabled technologies, techno-familiarity can create a comfortable learning zone. As a result, ICT-enabled learning can be provided in universities and within modern day firms. This chapter explores entrepreneurship education through the lens of ICT-enabled learning within university education. In the case study presented, learners extol the benefits of ICT-enabled learning on their entrepreneurship module. There are a number of implications for employers and educationalists. In this chapter, the value of entrepreneurship education via ICT-enabled learning is discussed. For the entrepreneurial firm, recommendations are made about providing training in entrepreneurship for employees.

INTRODUCTION

The subject of entrepreneurship education has received much attention over the last three decades. Educational establishments have sought to incorporate entrepreneurship within diverse and often non-business curricula. In doing so a variety of methods have been used but there has been a particular reliance on information communication technologies. There is some conflicting evidence

about the extent to which all students of further education will be exposed to entrepreneurship and enterprise education (Hannon, 2007; Smith, 2008). Yet, from the 1990s onwards demand for entrepreneurship education has been steadily increasing (Hegarty, & Jones, 2008). The entrepreneurship agenda within educational institutions has been somewhat driven by government policies. Increasing amounts of funding have been invested into programmes that are intended to increase levels of entrepreneurial activity in the local economy. In the UK for instance, government has supported university-based initiatives. These initiatives are targeted at raising understanding of enterprise among science, engineering and technology students and at enabling them to develop skills and competence suited to employment within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs)[1], large organizations or new ventures. There appears to be an acceptance that university-based entrepreneurship education can prepare graduates for nascent entrepreneurship but equally valuable is its potential to create entrepreneurial employees. Given the decline in traditional sectors, government has also paid increasing attention to developing new technology-based sectors and the role of SMEs in these emergent sectors (Dixon, Thompson, & McAllister 2002). Hence the overarching result has fuelled interest in entrepreneurship and Information Communications Technology (ICT) enabled learning.

In this chapter, we explore ICT-enabled learning as a means of delivering entrepreneurship education and as a means of training in the firm. The premise of this study is similar to Rae and Carswell's (2000). We assert that there is a growing need for entrepreneurship to be taught in schools and further and higher education establishments. A second premise of this study is that the impact of entrepreneurship education cannot be narrowly defined. Whilst entrepreneurship education is directly proportional to entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurship education is not directly proportional to new business creation. This means

entrepreneurship education has a wide-ranging impact on the local economy in terms of enterprising activity. As a result of entrepreneurship education, graduates may to a greater extent become an entrepreneurial employee and to a lesser extent become an entrepreneur.

The objectives of this chapter are two-fold. Firstly, we aim to investigate the role of entrepreneurship educators in preparing the graduate as an entrepreneurial employee. Secondly, this chapter specifically addresses ICT-enabled learning as a valuable means of supporting entrepreneurship education and of its potential to support training within the firm.

A case study from education will be presented to evaluate the different views towards ICT-enabled entrepreneurship education. The case study follows two lines of enquiry. Firstly, it is argued that ICT-enabled technologies can assist learning within higher education because it enables educators to go beyond the traditional classroom-based boundaries – often essential for entrepreneurial learning. Secondly, through ICT-enabled learning, educators can offer entrepreneurship to more and varied groupings of students. Not only does this serve to better infiltrate university culture for the educator but it can also create dynamism within the learning environment for the learner. Learners who are habituated to ICT-enabled learning may be more likely to successfully engage in further ICT-enabled training programmes as an employee. In summary, the case study seeks to identify the benefits of ICT-enabled learning for entrepreneurship educators and for firms.

BACKGROUND

In the followings sections we firstly explore the changing higher education landscape to show the evolving needs of educators, employers and students. Within a fast-paced society, there is an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurial skills. There is a need to be able to identify emergent

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