



ROTTERDAM SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT, ERASMUS UNIVERSITY

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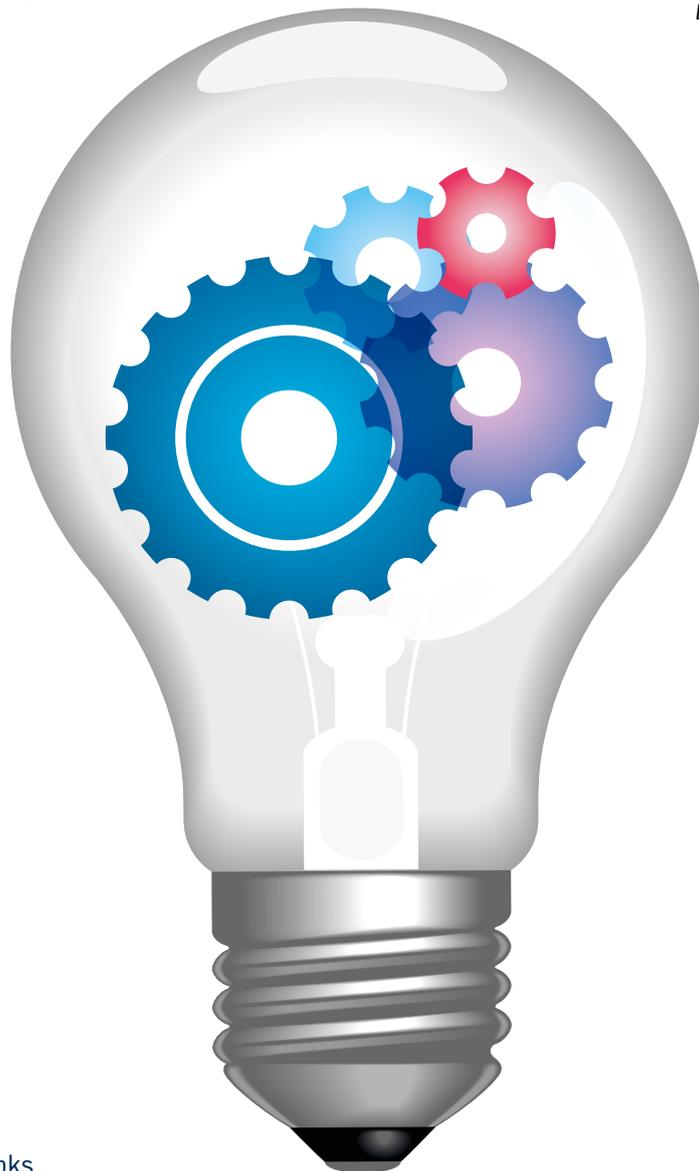
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The business school that thinks and lives in the future

Learning to take the entrepreneurial plunge

By *Willem Hulsink and Andreas Rauch*

Recent research findings illustrate that by integrating entrepreneurship into management education programmes the seeds for business creation can be sown into the minds of future entrepreneurs and change the overall misperception of becoming self-employed as an exclusively perilous career move.

Whilst post-business creation studies in the field of entrepreneurship are on the rise, it is still taking Master graduates around 10 years to go through with their intentions, as evidenced by the current 36/37 average age of first-time entrepreneurs. The figure may go down in years to come, as entrepreneurship becomes an increasingly present component in the curricula of business schools and universities.

However, the trend has been a long time coming. It was not until the 1970s that the transatlantic teaching of entrepreneurship started to feature on a wider basis, with Harvard the main exception, having launched its first such course in the late 1930s.

Europe has been playing catch-up with the United States and Canada for the past couple of decades but the signs are that entrepreneurship is no longer considered something one simply learns upon launching a business. However, the question remains – why the need to teach entrepreneurship in

the first place? The answer lies as much in the perception of the activity as in the potential dangers it poses.

Perception, intention, action

Recent investigation of business creation and the reasons why the “gestation period” for some entrepreneurs is sometimes a long one points to attitudes as much as concrete risks. Launching a venture is often viewed as fraught with danger, and so it is no coincidence that a large proportion of entrepreneurs are often inspired by reassuring success stories within their own family. Going outside the bosom of the family, biographies and autobiographies of high-achievers such as Richard Branson and James Dyson are used more and more within entrepreneurship education programmes in order to try to inspire budding business creators to translate their curiosity into action.

The chain of thought from the perception of entrepreneurship, to the intention to set up a business, and on to the final act of actually doing so, is illustrated by what is known in psychology circles as “Theory of Planned Behaviour”, where behaviour can be traced back to the original intention, which is then shaped by attitude and finally the perceived difficulty or ease of the final act (in this case, setting up one’s own business).

It is the last link in the psychological chain (ie, perception) that could be positively impacted by giving up-and-coming entrepreneurs more than just a feel for creating a business before they have completed their studies... ▶



“...the signs are that entrepreneurship is no longer considered something one simply learns upon launching a business.”

Education for entrepreneurship

One thing the best examples of teaching entrepreneurship do not do is simply espouse theory. There must be education about, for and through entrepreneurship, with the lattermost stage being carried through into the actual creation and running of an organisation. The ideal programme should seek to embrace all three, by enabling tomorrow's business creators to acquire relevant knowledge but also adopt the necessary tools and techniques and to learn by doing so as to ensure that entrepreneurial drive and talent are nurtured through actual business practice.

A recent cross-analysis of the intention-perception-action chain within two separate populations at Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) sought to establish the impact this teaching approach had upon students of the school's MSc in Entrepreneurship and MSc in Supply Chain Management. Based upon data analysis encompassing business creation perception, intention and action and also age, gender and the existence of entrepreneurs within the family of the participants in the study, a clear 18-month gestation period emerged, after which many students of the specialised entrepreneurship programme were more willing to translate their desire to create their

own business into concrete entrepreneurial behaviour.

Above all, it was the students' initial attitude towards going into business for themselves that impacted their eventual decision, with those having gone through a wide-ranging education about, for and through entrepreneurship the most likely to take the business creation plunge, due to a more positive mind-set nurtured through studies.

One of the key triggers at RSM has proven to be the Titans of Venturing course component, which draws precisely on the aforementioned biographical approach to inspire students not only to think about entrepreneurship but then to follow up with action, once duly stimulated by the success stories of Branson, Dyson, et al.

The wider debate

The quasi-psychological debate surrounding entrepreneurial drive and the ability to translate it into actual business creation is just one part of the overall equation. Of more practical and economic significance is the positive effect that this rising trend can have, through job creation in the case of larger-scale ventures requiring new hires and expansion. Timing is also open to further exploration – establishing when

the right time is to apply learnings from an entrepreneurship education remains open to question. However, the aforementioned study establishes that typically an 18-month lag between graduation and business launch is the least to be expected.

Above all, a clear case has been made for not just sharing theory, passing on vital tools and techniques and getting budding entrepreneurs to dip their toe in the water during their studies. At least as vital is the need to shift the perception of entrepreneurship from that of a potentially perilous career move to one that can be both a personal success and also a driver of economic performance on a broader level. ■

This article draws inspiration from the paper *Putting Entrepreneurship Education Where the Intention to Act Lies: An Investigation Into the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education on Entrepreneurial Behavior*, written by Andreas Rauch and Willem Hulsink and published in *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, vol. 14 no. 2, 1-18 (2015). DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5465/aml.2012.0293>

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