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# **COEUR: DEVELOPING BUSINESS CREATIVITY AND EUROPRENEURSHIP IN EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY NETWORKS**

**Matthias Eickhoff**

**Mainz University of Applied Sciences, Germany**  
matthias.eickhoff@fh-mainz.de

**Virginia Trigo**

**ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon, Portugal**  
virginia.trigo@iscte.pt

**Andrew Turnbull**

**Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland**  
a.turnbull@rgu.ac.uk

**Tomasz Dyczkowski**

**Wroclaw University of Economics, Poland**  
tomasz.dyczkowski@ue.wroc.pl

## ***Abstract***

*This paper analyses the operating process and participants' feedback of a network of European universities that was set up in 2004, initially to organise annual week-long conferences for the development of students' entrepreneurial competences within a European context and in intercultural teams. Named COEUR – Competence in EuroPreneurship – the project builds on three assumptions: (1) open change and process-orientation require entrepreneurial competences rather than managerial qualifications; (2) business planning builds on a frequently neglected prerequisite: business creativity; and (3) entrepreneurial culture may exist on an intermediate level: EuroPreneurship.*

*Soon the concept was extended to be integrated into regular university curricula as a full semester course – the Business Creativity Module (BCM) – which was developed and implemented with the support of the European Union between 2006 and 2008.*

*Until now around 1,000 European students have participated in various COEUR/BCM programmes. A recent survey among former participants confirmed that not only was their immediate impression genuinely positive, but also, with the benefit of hindsight*

*and after the first experiences in their professional lives, students judged the core values of the concept positively and believed that they had profited from it substantially. By exposing the process and results of the programme, this paper aims to contribute to the awareness of what higher-education institutions can do to enhance the creative and entrepreneurial potential of their students, and possibly serve as an inspiration too.*

### **Keywords**

Business creativity, Business Creativity Module (BCM), Competence in EuroPreneurship (COEUR) project, EuroPreneurship, entrepreneurship

### **Biographies**

**Matthias Eickhoff** is Professor of Marketing, Innovation Management and Entrepreneurship at the Fachhochschule (University of Applied Sciences) Mainz. His research interests include marketing/management strategy, business creativity, business development and entrepreneurship.

**Virginia Trigo** is Professor of Entrepreneurship and Head of the Asian Studies Centre at ISCTE, Lisbon. Her research covers the Chinese economy and culture. She has published several articles and a book on this subject. She has taught at the University of Macau and lectured at various Chinese universities.

**Andrew Turnbull** is Senior Lecturer in Retail Marketing at the Robert Gordon University's Aberdeen Business School. His research interests lie in the areas of marketing and entrepreneurship education, retail and tourism marketing.

**Tomasz Dyczkowski** is a doctor of economics and Assistant Professor in the Department of Controlling at Wroclaw University of Economics, Poland. His research covers: control in non-governmental organisations, internal communication and reporting, as well as fostering creativity and innovation in multicultural environments.

### **Introduction**

European history has been influenced in many ways by entrepreneurial success and failure. However, with the exception of Schumpeter's theory of economic development (Schumpeter, 1997, first published 1911), which was based on the action of the pioneering entrepreneur, modern entrepreneurship theory and educational methodology has largely been developed in the United States (US).

Many of the concepts developed by American universities and institutions since the early 1970s have been generally considered global standards or at least global ‘best-practices’. This does not mean however, that the American models are universally applicable or flexible enough to address the problems of any economy in the world. Business initiatives and activities are, in fact, strongly conditioned by local factors; therefore, it seems justifiable to question whether entrepreneurship can be treated as a homogeneous phenomenon on a global scale.

In February 2002, Romano Prodi, former President of the European Commission, stated in a speech entitled ‘For a New European Entrepreneurship’ at the Instituto de Empresa in Madrid:

*During the post-World War II period, the role of entrepreneurship seemed to be fading away. Today, what is going on in business points to a major reversal: the rebirth of the entrepreneur. [...] There is every reason to believe that this new age of enterprise will not fade away again in the near future. (Prodi, 2002)*

Despite being recognised, the problems that Europe faces in terms of entrepreneurship have not yet been sufficiently addressed. For example, a survey conducted by the European Foundation for Entrepreneurship Research (EFER) among 240 entrepreneurship teachers in Europe in summer 2004 showed that although there had been a noticeable development in a teaching methodology of entrepreneurship since the year 2000, much still needed to be improved. In particular, hands-on, action-oriented and interdisciplinary approaches were scarce ([Wilson, 2004](#)). Ten years later, the economic landscape of Europe is evidence that there has not been a satisfactory change in this situation.

Considering the foregoing circumstances and that Europe today needs new entrepreneurs and has the opportunity to develop a new European culture of entrepreneurship, the two founding fathers of COEUR – an acronym for Competence in EuroPreneurship – Matthias Eickhoff and Andrew Turnbull, both marketing and entrepreneurship professors at their universities, created a programme for students and academic staff that would offer new opportunities and could contribute to the development of new didactic formats for innovative entrepreneurship education.

This paper considers the implementation process of the COEUR concept and summarises its activities and reach over a 10-year period. It presents the results of participants’ feedback and aims to inspire other higher-education institutions to unleash the creative and entrepreneurial potential of their students through programmes that go beyond traditional class teaching.

First, the theoretical background that assists the development of the COEUR concept is addressed. Next, the paper introduces the main COEUR programmes and their reach, followed by results from participants’ feedback. Finally, the sustainability of the project will be discussed.

## **2. Challenges of the future – selected contexts**

The future is complex and it certainly is impossible to prepare for the challenges it might pose in a comprehensive sense. The COEUR concept is nevertheless built on a common understanding that entrepreneurial behaviour and the opportunities to develop it will be significantly influenced in the following three contexts: (1) change, (2) creativity, and (3) Europe.

It is a common understanding that ‘change’ has become more important, as it has become much more rapid in the last few decades. What might be even more important is the fact that there are several categories of change, and a shift towards the most challenging type can be recognised in many aspects of modern societies and economies. The table below summarises this idea.

Table 1. The context of change.

<b>Change</b>	<b>System dynamics</b>	<b>Type of adaptation</b>	<b>Knowledge category</b>
Deterministic	Rigid	Reaction, execution	Factual knowledge = <b>information</b>
Stochastic	Dynamic	Proactive adaptation	Behavioural knowledge = <b>qualification</b>
Open	Chaotic	Creative leadership	Structural knowledge = <b>competence</b>

Source: Eickhoff and Turnbull, 2012.

In an environment of deterministic change, it is easy to predict what is going to happen if the individual acts in a certain way: use the brake and the car will slow down. Factual knowledge is needed to be successful in such a world under perfect control: the world of machines.

In an environment of stochastic change, decision-making builds on probability-based judgement and assumptions. This is the world of marketing, grounded on

behavioural knowledge from experience, external expertise or research and qualifying for proactive adaptation.

Both types of change – deterministic and stochastic – have in common that strategies to deal with them are embodied in ‘if-then’ paradigms.

With open change, the problem is that because the ‘if’ cannot be determined, there is no way to work out the ‘then’; therefore, open change frequently appears to be chaotic. Finding a meaningful decision in a situation in which one has never been involved before requires structural knowledge and creative leadership, which are closely linked to the understanding of entrepreneurship as appears to be suggested by futurologist John Naisbitt, who notes that we are changing from a managerial to an entrepreneurial society (Naisbitt, 2013).

Entrepreneurship and leadership are not identical phenomena. Still, the assumption can be made that they are strongly correlated. The idea that managers do things right, while leaders do the right things ([Bennis and Nanus, 1997](#)), which at first sight might appear to be an academic distinction, turns out to be one of the core challenges of the future. In a world that focuses on processes it becomes much more important:

- to recognise opportunities for entrepreneurial action;
- to accept that not everything will be manageable and mistakes are a normal consequence; and
- that individuals are allowed to learn from their mistakes and failure is not seen as a stigma.

The entrepreneur is results-oriented, rather than rule-oriented, and follows a vision, rather than fulfils a task. The emphasis should be on learning from mistakes, experimenting and moving forward, rather than dwelling on the past, focusing on efficiency and administration and standing still.

Secondly, business planning has always been in the focus of entrepreneurship education and still remains one of the most frequently used tools. The significance of business planning is globally accepted, as its efficiency has been proved by theoretical studies and in practical applications; consequently, many successful activities and events have been established in this area. Nevertheless, opinions have been expressed that successful entrepreneurial development is a far more complex phenomenon and a shift of focus is considered necessary. ‘If we accept the necessity to place more importance on opportunity recognition and development by the student then we should provide more room for creativity development’ (Carrier, 2005).

From the very beginning, COEUR was developed under the theoretical concept of the business evolution process, which is understood as a cycle comprising three phases: business creativity, business planning and business development.

Business creativity involves the definition of a problem for which creative solutions need to be invented and developed. The challenge before the creative phase is to find an actual problem – and this is by no means simple. Entrepreneurs looking for easy paths have many followers and will be unlikely to establish extraordinary successful businesses. And worse: entrepreneurs who are solving ‘problems’ that nobody in the market really has will most likely fail to realise their business soon after their attempts to build a market.

The second stage of the business evolution process is business planning, which helps to evaluate and implement ideas invented at the first stage. The major challenge is to assess the economic viability of an idea. The potential resistance of a market to innovation has to be thoroughly analysed.

The business planning stage is ultimately followed by the business development process, which consists of monitoring and further developing the business model to use its potential to the full. The assumption is that entrepreneurs who regularly think about the further development of their business, reinventing the business model when and where necessary, will be significantly more successful than those who just continue with their initial business.

The link between the contexts of change and creativity is obvious: while many contemporary companies are well prepared to react to deterministic changes or to adapt to predictable change proactively, there seems to be little competency of creative problem-solving in a chaotic surrounding (Eickhoff and Jakob, 2005). The development of innovation processes from the Schumpeterian to actual status also sheds light on the change-creativity complex, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Innovation processes have become more decentralised and interactive. Open innovation today is frequently built on cumulative and cooperative creativity, rather than on individual inspiration (Leadbeater, 2005). It is an increasing challenge to find potential partners ‘outside the enterprise’ and ‘cloud venturing’ might become a core competency of a ‘cloud captain’ in the future.

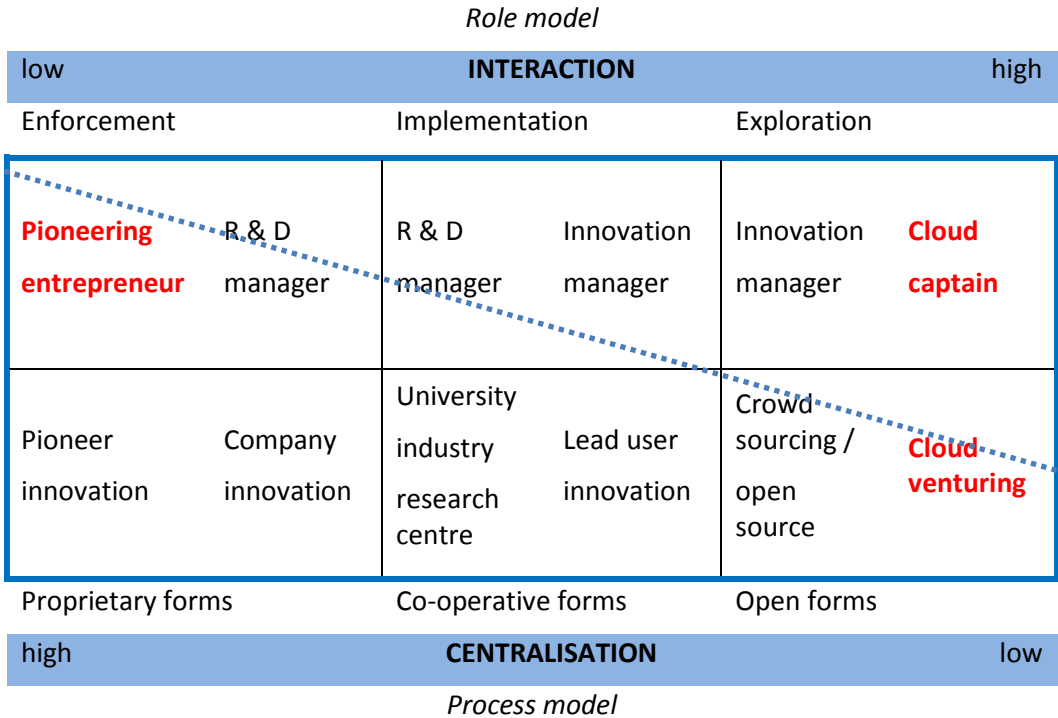


Figure 1. From governing to navigation: changes in innovation management from the ‘pioneering entrepreneur’ (schumpeter) to the ‘cloud captain’ (source: Eickhoff, 2013).

Finally, there is the concept of Europe. Whilst entrepreneurship research and education are undoubtedly well developed in the US and there is good reason to learn from these experiences, it also makes sense to consider entrepreneurship as a global, uniform phenomenon, taking a closer look at its determining factors on a lower aggregate level.

A new perspective may arise from two influences. First, a study of the future orientation of the discipline shows that, besides traditional interests focusing on the entrepreneur, the availability of profitable business opportunities and the presence of entrepreneurial people are two vital factors for entrepreneurial societies (Shane and Venkatarman, 2000). The entrepreneur has already been characterised as results-oriented, rather than rule-oriented, and is following a vision, rather than fulfilling a task. The attitude to learn from mistakes and failure instead of seeing them as a stigma is one important factor within that. Until now, this has been one of the big differences between Europe and the US (Reid, 2004).



Furthermore, the idea of the 'transnational enterprise' nourishes the concept of 'glocalpreneurship' putting emphasis on local adaptation of the entrepreneurial mindset (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1998). Despite legal fragmentation, cultural differences and historic roles, a new type of entrepreneur could and should emerge in Europe, facilitated by a common market that is Europe's strongest asset to compete in the globalised world. As early as 1999, a study at the Centre for European Reform suggested that 'a new business generation is emerging in Europe, with shared aspirations, values and outlooks. The common features among Europe's 20 and 30-something entrepreneurs are far more striking than the differences' (Leadbeater and Ussher, 1999). Several years later the actions of this new type of entrepreneur are still to be felt on a sufficiently large scale.

Following these ideas, the COEUR concept assumes that, between global and local entrepreneurship, a third, intermediate layer of entrepreneurship culture exists, which, in the case of the specific context, is identified as 'EuroPreneurship' (Eickhoff and Jakob, 2005). This fuses global standardisation tendencies with local entrepreneurial behaviour, and might appear in a different context as AfroPreneurship or SinoPreneurship (Eickhoff and Turnbull, 2012).

### **3. Designing the COEUR project**

After the first official and unsuccessful attempts to establish a new teaching offer at their universities, the founders of COEUR decided to try to take the idea forward as a 'bootlegging innovation' (innovation in conspiracy). The eighth European Conference on Creativity and Innovation (ECCI) was taking place in September 2003 in Mainz, focusing on cross-cultural innovation, and provided the ground for such fertilisation. The initiators informed colleagues from the ERASMUS partner universities of their home institutions about the conference, inviting them to participate and discuss the project proposal in a parallel meeting. The first COEUR conference was then agreed. In this section, the circumstances of the conference are summarised and the development of the network is considered.

#### **3.1. The COEUR Conference 2004**

The discussion at this original meeting put forward the idea of a student conference. Enough conferences already took place for university faculty members, so this 'market' appeared to be saturated. But little or nothing existed that catered particularly for students and exposed them to the need for an entrepreneurial talent to drive new business creation. It was agreed that a conference would provide a

forum for students to come together, to meet, to discuss and to replicate the all important first steps in the creative process.

As the idea fitted well into the programme of the newly established Institute for Entrepreneurial Behaviour (IUH) at the University of Applied Sciences, it was decided to launch the pilot in Mainz in 2004.

The objective of the workshop was to build competence within European entrepreneurship by developing innovative business concepts with visionary strength and European scope. At the stage of formulating the COEUR concept, it was regarded as essential not to add another business-plan-related activity to existing entrepreneurship education offers. Therefore, COEUR focused on the business creativity phase and attempted to structure it. The task in this respect is to formulate a value proposition for a business, a social innovation or a bridge 'from here to there'.

Designing the first workshop was very much an intuitive process, which was executed in a humble way compared to our workshops today. Nevertheless, from the first moment it built on a number of convictions and assumptions, which were later worked out as follows (Eickhoff and Müller, 2006; [Turnbull and Eickhoff, 2011](#)).

- Despite economic, legal and cultural differences, a set of interdisciplinary and pan-European behavioural traits encourage entrepreneurial thinking, which can be taught and should support the learning processes in all disciplines of study.
- Young Europeans share values, aspirations and outlooks, and these common features are much more important than any differences.
- The essential elements of a European entrepreneurship education include creative problem defining and solving, self-responsible work and intercultural and team competencies.
- The basic concept of COEUR workshops is to develop entrepreneurial ideas in intercultural teams in an inspiring educational environment.

The COEUR annual events aim to bring together students and faculties from different European countries to enable an understanding of the scope and power of the European market from various perspectives.

The COEUR workshops contribute to the employability of students by providing them with key entrepreneurial and intrapreneurial competencies and intercultural experiences that are required by today's European business community.

The COEUR concept also applies a blended learning approach, which integrates diverse learning methods. This is actioned through multicultural teamwork, experimental learning, team coaching, shared experiences with entrepreneurs and professionals, presentation and feedback cycles and inspiring supplementary – often outdoor – activities, including cultural, social and sporting events.

In 2004, a network of four universities from Germany (University of Applied Sciences, Mainz), Poland (Wroclaw University of Economics), Portugal (ISCTE Lisbon University Institute) and Scotland (The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen) initiated the first idea-generation workshop on EuroPreneurship in Mainz. It started with an entrepreneurship day, organised in cooperation with the Ministry of Economics, Transportation and Viniculture of the Federal State of Rhineland Palatinate, which had also taken over patronage of the first workshop. At the end of the workshop week the students presented their results at the annual meeting of the Business Angels Network Germany, which was hosted that year in Mainz.

The event turned out to be very successful in several ways. The value propositions of the students were evaluated by an internal jury. The students also had the chance to show their ideas to the participants of the annual meeting of Business Angels Network Germany (BAND), who voted for their favourite idea. The winning team achieved 540 of 800 possible points and no team scored under 450 points, which was regarded as a great success for a pilot run. The students, being asked for their opinions, lessons learned and the potential benefits of the workshop were almost universally very enthusiastic about the experience.

### **3.2. Developing the network**

Inspired by the success of the pilot run and the strong support of the participants, the initiators decided to repeat the workshop in the following year – still not integrated into the university curricula, but in their spare time and at their own risk, with only some selective support. Nevertheless, since 2004, the COEUR workshop has become a regular feature and has been offered on an annual basis for approximately 30 – 50 European students, plus accompanying faculty.

The COEUR workshops were successfully repeated at partner institutions in Scotland (2005), Poland (2006), Portugal (2007), France (2008/9), Germany (2011) and Poland (2012).

Over these years the network also grew and integrated new partners – Burgundy Business School ESC Dijon (France), the Institute of Finance and Administration, Prague (Czech Republic), Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen

(Netherlands) and HAAGA-HELIA, Helsinki (Finland) – who also sent students and staff to participate in the workshop or even offered themselves as the host institution.

The interest in the concept has also grown beyond European borders, but with the focus on EuroPreneurship culture consistently maintained. In 2009 and 2010, COEUR workshops were held at the Nanfang College of Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou (China) and the University of Santa Catarina UNISUL, Florianopolis (Brazil) to experience EuroPreneurship from a global perspective: otherwise termed COEUR-Mundus.

#### **4. Extending the programme**

Once the COEUR workshop had become successful, the partners thought about possible options to offer it on a broader scale. The positive experience triggered a discussion on possibilities of integrating more students into the educational project. It was also clear that a mere extension of the number of participants would not benefit the programme, as the set number of 50 participants proved to be a size that was working well under the methodology of building on active participation and direct personal interaction and exchange. An increase to, for example, 100 students, would be counterproductive for group dynamics.

It was also regarded as a question of qualitative growth to fully incorporate the concept into university curricula, including the option to grant ECTS credits. Hence, an initiative to develop an academic course on business creativity using the COEUR concept emerged. This course should be designed as a transferable full-service product, which would allow the concept to grow, not internally, but by the multiplication of individual networks of different European universities under the coordination of an open central network.

##### **4.1. The business creativity module (BCM)**

The discussion of the project identified the transformation of five-day workshops into academic curricula, without losing the benefits of teamwork, interaction and a multicultural dimension as the core challenges, not only on the pedagogic side, but also from an administrative perspective. The course should be fully integrated at all participating universities in terms of content, marking, organisation and timing.

The whole project was developed with the support of a European Commission grant within the framework of the Erasmus curriculum development programme. Starting in 2006, the university partners in Mainz, Aberdeen, Lisbon, Wroclaw and Prague developed the concept of an elective course, offered in a semi-virtual environment. The business creativity module (BCM) was defined in terms of content and pedagogic concepts within a syllabus, including single steps of evaluation and marking procedures. The concept development also included comprehensive teaching material, an introduction to problem-solving creativity and different presentations covering the essential subjects of the course.

The BCM classes were initiated in the winter term of the academic year 2007/2008. The subsequent editions were provided in the form of elective courses targeted mainly at Erasmus students. They involved up to 30 hours of in-class activities and another 30 hours of online teamwork, and equipped their participants with five ECTS credits, although variations with respect to particular partner universities are common and accepted.

The BCM is provided in four instruction forms. Firstly, students are lectured on such topics as business creativity and innovation; critical thinking; dynamics and leadership of (virtual) teams; the economic and cultural environment of the European market; marketing research and strategies; and commercialisation of innovative concepts. Secondly, hands-on workshops and training stimulating creative and entrepreneurial behaviour and intercultural team working are organised. They cover areas such as: communication within multinational (virtual) teams; open thinking; generating innovative concepts; developing value propositions; and presentation skills.

Thirdly, teamwork sessions with the support of online communication platforms are offered. They involve accomplishing certain assignments, including developing a 'competence map' for a team; preparing a value proposition; and writing a group report, including a business model and a reflection on idea generation and development processes. The last activity – a climax to the whole work – is the idea contest, where all business concepts are presented to independent jury panels, and to an audience, at every partner institution, in the form of an elevator pitch.

Another important element of the BCM methodology is the common model of evaluating team and individual performance. It should be emphasised that the BCM methodology differs from a typical model of academic instruction, where a teacher provides knowledge, evaluates students and grades them. Presentation aids and team reports are assessed by two teachers instructing BCM at different partner universities. Both assessments need to be substantiated with arguments that help to reconcile opinions. In the case of final presentations of business ideas the marks are

awarded, as already mentioned, by an independent jury. In this way, the efforts of students are not determined by the preferences of individual teachers, but represent the combined opinions of at least two.

#### **4.2. The COEUR portfolio**

In the years 2013 and 2014, COEUR is celebrating the tenth year of its existence – 2013 for the initiative to develop the concept, 2014 for the first COEUR workshop. Within this period, the network of cooperating universities has remained stable in its nucleus, but also flexible enough to integrate new university partners whilst letting others exit for their own strategic reasons. Most of the partners are fully integrated in the delivery of all COEUR products, although some are only participating in certain offers; for example, Nanfang College, Guangzhou (China) or UNISUL, Florianopolis (Brazil) in COEUR Mundus, or the University of Applied Sciences, Erfurt (Germany) and Tallinn University of Technology (Estonia) in a BCM sub-network.

In the past 10 years, a portfolio of the following different COEUR products has been developed, which covers different opportunities for European universities to participate in the programme to offer their students the chance to develop business creativity skills.

- The COEUR workshop – one week to develop business ideas in intercultural teams.
- The COEUR business creativity module – a blended-learning concept, fully integrated into the university curriculum.
- COEUR Mundus – a workshop to experience EuroPreneurship in contrast to entrepreneurship styles and cultures in different regions of the world.

Further ideas to increase networking amongst former COEUR participants and businesses are in the pipeline, and we are seeking business partners for further development. All formats are open for the participation of further partners and finding new ways to improve.

## **5. The value of COEUR**

From the first conference, all COEUR activities have been consistently evaluated in order to understand the true value of the programme for the participants and how this could be augmented.

The following, empirical part of the paper is based on 110 surveys filled in by participants of the BCM modules organised in Wroclaw (between 2008 and 2013) out of 144 opinions collected. Thirty-four surveys were not included due to a different formulation of questions analysed in this part of the paper. In addition, 62 surveys filled in by the two COEUR idea-generation workshop delegates were added to the sample. These were completed by participants of COEUR events in Wroclaw in 2006 and 2012.

### **5.1. The COEUR workshops**

The effectiveness of the approach was proved by the feedback of the participants in the COEUR workshops. First of all, it was generally emphasised that the workshop gave participants an opportunity to meet interesting and open-minded people. It provided a chance to learn more about other cultures. Many respondents also mentioned team-working and networking as amongst the most beneficial aspects of the event.

The evaluation further investigated participants' opinions since 2004 on the quality and usefulness of particular programme points, including guests' inputs, team competitions, creativity workshops, idea check-ups, cultural presentations, final presentations to the jury and parallel activities. Results proved that the most appreciated experience of the workshop was the chance to deliver presentations in the form of a seven-minute 'elevator pitch' and then answer the questions posed by the international jury panel of business people. The presentations obtained 91.6 % of the maximum possible score, where 100% meant that every single participant was 'entirely satisfied' with an evaluated aspect of the workshop. The 7-grade scale was used in this respect, from 0: 'completely disappointed' to 7: 'entirely satisfied'. This proves that the main idea of the workshop of developing EuroPreneurial visions and presenting them to independent and experienced people was appreciated by the participants.

The second and third elements positively assessed by the students included cultural presentations and idea check-ups, with 85.1 % and 83.1 % respectively. These were also elements prioritised in the COEUR workshop concept.

The final part of the evaluation scrutinised whether the workshop helped participants to develop their skills and competencies. The form included a closed list of those skills that were intended to be fostered during the process, including creative thinking; entre- or intrapreneurial competencies; intercultural understanding; team-working capacity; language and communication skills; presentation skills; and finally, self-organisation or processes and project-management capacity.

The results showed that participants were most influenced by the chance to discover other cultures and learn in an intercultural environment (the satisfaction level was equal to 91.6 %). The second and third places included development of presentation skills (89.0 %) and fostering team-working and language or communications skills (86.4 % each). The further elements, ranked according to their successful development, included entrepreneurial skills, self-organisation and project management as well as creative skills (from 85.1 % to 79.2 % of the maximum score). Even those scores have to be perceived very positively, as educating and influencing such competencies is often questioned.

## **5.2. The BCM**

As in the case of the COEUR workshops, students taking part in the BCM were asked to evaluate the module by filling in a questionnaire when the semester was completed.

The first part of the questionnaire dealt with the best elements of the course. Analysing students' answers, two most frequent responses could be noted. Firstly, it was emphasised that the course gave participants a chance to foster their creativity and innovativeness. Secondly, the possibility to gain experience in teamwork was mentioned. According to many participants, this was the only course where team dynamics – not just the results of collaborative actions – were focused on.

Another five aspects of the BCM classes also frequently mentioned by the students included intercultural learning; the opportunity to exchange ideas with others; replacing typical teacher-student relationships with a coaching model; the chance to discover one's own potential; and meeting interesting, open-minded people.

Considering particular elements of the course methodology, the most important advantage proved to be exchanging the professor-student model for the coaching system. The course was also highly appreciated for its clear objectives; namely, creating innovative and viable business or social ideas.



Considering the provision of certain competencies by the BCM, it should be mentioned that participants viewed it as helping 'a lot' to gain team and networking skills. In addition, it fostered creative thinking; self-responsibility and project-management skills; as well as intercultural understanding. The module was also perceived as helpful in gaining presentation skills, entrepreneurial competencies and language and communication skills.

Finally, it is worth comparing the educational efficiency of both ways of providing creative skills to students; that is, the annual COEUR idea-generation workshop and the BCM academic course. As in prior parts of the analysis, the results stem from the evaluation of the COEUR 2006 and 2012 editions, both organised in Poland, and from all BCMs run at the Wroclaw University of Economics. For the reason that both educational forms were developed under the auspices of the same project and coordinated by the same people, distortions that may result from a personal approach to organising those initiatives can be minimised.

### **5.3. Overall evaluation**

Table 2 shows the strengths and weaknesses of COEUR workshops and the BCM course, ranked according to their importance, as mentioned by participants. The ranks represent an overall number of indications on particular aspects of COEUR/BCM as their strongest or the weakest points. Every participant could mention one strength and one weakness only. It is clear that the three strongest points of COEUR and the BCM are the elements of methodology that the initiators of the project wanted to foster.

Finally, it has to be emphasised that teaching creativity in a virtual environment can be as effective as in a real one. The results of the evaluation of the BCM over its five years of delivery show that this gap is gradually closing. In respect of the three major educational pillars of COEUR/BCM – building entrepreneurial spirit, team-working and intercultural character – the following three conclusions can be drawn.

In terms of providing entrepreneurial skills, a consistent rise in efficiency can be observed, starting from the level of 36.7 % for the pilot run, up to 73.5 % in the most recent one. The rates for COEUR 2006 and 2012 were 84 % and 85.1 %, respectively.

The BCM project also managed to become increasingly effective in providing cross-cultural competencies. For the pilot run, the satisfaction level reached 64.4 % and for the last edition it was up to 77.6 %, whereas for COEUR 2006 and 2012, levels of 92.3 % and 91.5 % respectively were achieved. Finally, it should be mentioned that the effectiveness of providing team-working competence to students proved to be

almost equal in the real and virtual environments, with an average score for BCM over the five-year period of 84.7 %, and for COEUR 2006 and COEUR 2012 the levels were equal to 85 % and 86.4 % respectively.

Table 2. Workshop versus BCM evaluation.

Strong points	Rank		Weaknesses	Rank	
	COEUR	BCM		COEUR	BCM
Team-working	3	2	Infrastructure, technology	2	3
Intercultural learning	2	3	Too intense a schedule	1	6
Learning to be creative	5	1	Organisational issues	4	6
Meeting interesting people	1	7	Too few entertaining, socialising activities	4	8
Sharing ideas	5	4	Inefficient teamwork	—	1
Coaching	7	5	Unfair or unclear evaluation	—	2
Self-development	7	5	Content of classes	—	3
Building contacts	4	8	Insufficient instructions	3	—
Stimulation to become an entrepreneur	9	8	Difficult tasks	—	5
Discovering new environments	9	—	Lack of access to information	6	—
			Working atmosphere	—	8

Note: — represents a situation when no participants found certain aspects applicable to COEUR/BCM

## 5.4. Hypotheses

With regard to the presented scope of the research, the following two working hypotheses were formulated.

**H1: The BCM/COEUR programmes effectively contribute to the development of future talents by providing students with entrepreneurial, cross-cultural and team-working competences.**

**H2: Business creativity may be taught in the semi-virtual environment as effectively as through the real-life workshops.**

The positive validation of hypothesis H1 will require proving the argument that the satisfaction of participants in the COEUR workshops and BCM modules is related to obtaining entrepreneurial, cross-cultural and team-working skills. Those are all essential pillars of the COEUR methodology. In order to test hypothesis H2 it is necessary to demonstrate clearly that the satisfaction of participants in COEUR workshops and that of BCM students is not related to the form of activity they participate in. This situation will imply that it is possible to transfer annual intensive workshops, which involve high costs and are characterised by a limited number of participants, to regular academic curricula, without losing the benefits of team and intercultural work.

**5.5. Research method**

In this study the authors employed the following set of variables. The dependent variable: ‘SATISFACTION’, four independent constructs: ‘SK\_entrepreneurial’, ‘SK\_cultural’, ‘SK\_team’ and ‘Workshop’, as well as a control variable ‘Year’, all presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The design of the empirical research.

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Quantification method</b>
y: SATISFACTION	Has [the workshop/the module] met all your expectations?	1) For COEUR’06 survey the possible answers were quantified with a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 – ‘not at all’ to 5 – ‘entirely’  2) For COEUR’12 and BCM surveys the answers were quantified using a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 – ‘not at all’ to 7 ‘entirely’.
x1: SK_ entrepreneurial	Has [the workshop/the module] helped you to develop intra- /entrepreneurial skills?	
x2: SK_cultural	Has [the workshop/the module] helped you to develop intercultural skills?	
x3: SK_team	Has [the workshop/the module] helped you to develop team-working skills?	
x4: Workshop	COEUR workshop: 1 / BCM module: 0	
x5: Year	Consecutive year of offering activities: COEUR’06: 3; COEUR’12: 9; BCM: from 1 to 5.	

In order to make the results of surveys comparable, the 5- or 7-point scales, used for the dependent variable ‘SATISFACTION’ and independent constructs ‘SK\_entrepreneurial’, ‘SK\_cultural’ and ‘SK\_team’, were converted to normalised

variables, ranging from 0 to 1. The control variable ‘Year’ was introduced to the model in order to investigate whether the quality of activities changed over time, either improving – due to the learning effect, or worsening – due to routine.

## 5.6. Results of regression analysis

To validate the two hypotheses a correlation matrix between all dependent and independent variables was created. Table 4 presents the values of correlation coefficients, together with confidence levels.

Considering the results of the correlation analysis, the satisfaction levels of participants of COEUR workshops and students of BCM were significantly influenced by the team-working and cultural skills they acquired. In the first case, the correlation coefficient reached the moderate level of 0.294, whereas for the other it was equal to 0.236, both at the confidence level of 1 %.

This means students found that intercultural team-working was vital to their personal development. In the case of entrepreneurial skills, it appeared that it was not a factor that significantly influenced participants’ satisfaction. This may suggest that the programme is associated with creativity rather than entrepreneurship. It should also be added that the satisfaction of students depended to some extent (correlation coefficient of 0.19 at the 5 % confidence level) on the form of activity they participated in. COEUR workshops proved to be more beneficial than the module.

Table 4. Correlation matrix (n=172).

	y	x1	x2	x3	x4	x5
y: SATISFACTION	1.000					
x1: SK_entrepreneurial	0.075 p=0.331	1.000				
x2: SK_cultural	***0.236 p=0.002	***0.398 p=0.000	1.000			
x3: SK_team	***0.294 p=0.000	0.069 p=0.370	**0.171 p=0.025	1.000		
x4: Workshop	**0.190 p=0.013	***0.398 p=0.000	***0.352 p=0.000	-0.064 p=0.407	1.000	
x5: Year	0.013 p=0.862	***0.339 p=0.000	***0.232 p=0.002	-0.105 p=0.170	0.548 p=0.000	1.000

\*\*significant at 5 % level; \*\*\*significant at 1 % level.

The analysis further demonstrated other significant relations between the educational elements of the concept. Firstly, the effectiveness of providing entrepreneurial skills was linked to participation in COEUR workshops (with a correlation coefficient of nearly 0.4). Moreover, entrepreneurial skills were developed more effectively over time, which indicates the learning effect in this respect.

It is also important to note that entrepreneurial skills are bound to cultural ones (with a correlation coefficient of almost 0.4). This is important proof that allows a claim to be made that the programme does develop competence in EuroPreneurship, and not 'just' entrepreneurial skills. It is also worth noting that cultural skills are provided more effectively in the form of a workshop and that effects increase over time. The positive correlation of cultural and team-working skills was observed as well, which may suggest that participants acquired that competence through interaction with their team-mates.

In order to validate the aforementioned conclusions, the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was built, with the objective of explaining exactly how cultural and team-working skills, as well as the form in which business creativity is taught, influenced participants' satisfaction levels. The 'SK\_entrepreneurial' construct together with 'Year' were excluded from the model due to their lack of significant correlation with the dependent variable 'SATISFACTION'.

Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis, including values of coefficients, levels of confidence (*t*-test) and variance inflation factors (the upper part of the table), as well as  $R^2$ , adjusted  $R^2$ , a value of *F* statistics and a related confidence level, together with a standard error of the estimate (the lower section).

First of all, it should be noted that the regression model proved to be statistically valid, but with a low adjusted  $R^2$  level of 12.9 %. Moreover, each of the three independent variables turned out to influence positively the dependent variable. Nevertheless, only in the case of 'SK\_team' and 'Workshop' the confidence level of 5 % (or even of 1 % in the first case) could be considered. The analysis of variance inflation factors demonstrated also that the model was not affected by multicollinearity.

The examination confirmed that the fact of acquiring cultural and team-working skills, as well as participation in the 'real-life' workshop increases satisfaction of students and their overall opinion on effects the COEUR/BCM educational offers had on their personal development.

Table 5. Results of regression analysis.

Construct	y: SATISFACTION	VIF
Intercept	***0.562 (p=0.000)	
SK_cultural	*0.071 (p=0.095)	1.213
SK_team	***0.240 (p=0.000)	1.142
Workshop	**0.069 (p=0.037)	1.193
$R^2$	14.5 %	
Adj. $R^2$	12.9 %	
$n$	172	
$F(3,168)$	9.472 (p=0.000)	
Standard error of estimate	0.192	

\*significant at 10 % level; \*\*significant at 5 % level; \*\*\*significant at 1 % level.

Considering the two hypotheses to be tested, the following conclusions resulting from the empirical analysis may be drawn. First of all, the educational offer of teaching business creativity does provide students with cross-cultural, team-working and entrepreneurial competencies. However, only the first two are essential for students' satisfaction with the programme. Cross-cultural and entrepreneurial competencies are stimulated particularly well in the form of a real-life workshop. Interestingly, team-working skills are independent of a form of activities, and can be as well developed by working face-to-face with team-mates, as by cooperation with virtual team members. Finally, it has to be added that the COEUR/BCM projects proved to be more and more effective in providing entrepreneurial and cultural skills over time. It cannot be claimed that it has lost its attractiveness in respect of teamwork.

Summing up, it should be said that hypothesis H1 was positively validated, with the exception of the fact that entrepreneurial skills are still developed more effectively in the form of a workshop, but the positive tendency in this respect over time was observed. As for hypothesis H2, this is not yet confirmed. Still, the workshop is more effective, and gives more satisfaction to students, than the online academic course. However, in terms of providing team-working skills, the form of activities proved not to be decisive, which means that a decision to launch the BCM should be considered as justified.

## **6. The sustainability of the concept**

When COEUR workshops were set up in 2004, the Business Angels appeared to be true-born partners in their interest to find new ideas as investment opportunities. Nevertheless, and not contradicting this view, several lessons have been learned.

- The performance and success of the concept cannot only be measured in numbers of start-up-entrepreneurs who realise their business idea after participation, but rather in long-term orientation and competencies.
- The COEUR programmes are different from traditional business and entrepreneurship education in many respects and they offer unique and innovative opportunities for sustainable development in a changing world.
- COEUR offers these opportunities to all participants, students, coaches and universities, and, as the feedback suggests, also directly to the participating entrepreneurs in a cooperative model rather than a top-down approach.
- The primary ‘products’ of the COEUR programmes are people!

COEUR is contributing to the development of future competences of the participants. Understanding this, the COEUR partners envisaged an additional link that might be even more important in a shorter time perspective; that is, a link to ‘the war for talent’ (Michaels, Handfield-Jones and Axelrod, 2001).

Many large corporations have, for some time, increased focus on creativity, diversity and intrapreneurship in their role as facilitators of change and to counteract shortages of talent. Small and medium-sized enterprises, on the other hand, are in a more difficult position for various structural reasons, including market access, organisational capacities and availability of resources. The COEUR programme’s output may provide assistance and support in this field.

In the period January–March 2012 a web-based survey was conducted with former COEUR participants in order to gather information about their perceptions of entrepreneurship and the effects of the programme on their professional careers. Of over 70 individuals who responded to the questionnaire, 51 % were employees, 36 % were continuing their studies at university, 9 % had started a business as entrepreneurs and 4 % were not yet employed (Schwarz, 2012). Participants clearly recognised the significance of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship as future challenges for themselves and for employees in Europe, and they had clear ideas about which competencies they expected to gain through their participation in one of the COEUR programmes. The extent to which the competences were gained, however, exceeded expectations in all fields, as Figure 2 shows.

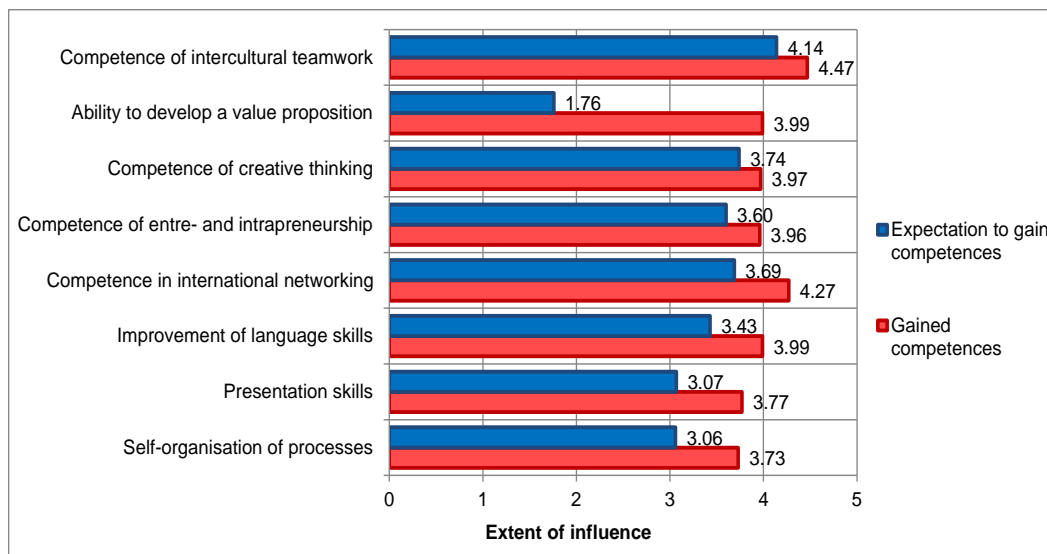


Figure 2. Evaluation of the expected and gained competences in COEUR (source: Schwarz, 2012).

Most importantly, in the long run, the significance of entrepreneurship could be transmitted to all respondents: the number of students who realise that the issue of entrepreneurship is significant could be raised from 18 before the start of the programme to another 37 during and 9 more after the programme; furthermore, 6 respondents recognised the significance in practice at work; everyone acknowledged the significance of entrepreneurship.

The programme had a high influence on the participants’ orientations towards the option of becoming entrepreneurs themselves: before the start of the programme 57 % of the students had thought about becoming an entrepreneur, and after the programme 93 % gave it consideration (Schwarz, 2012).

The students identified a number of ‘drivers’ in their COEUR learning experience. For 21 %, the practice-oriented learning was seen as the most important. A substantial number of programmes throughout Europe offer such opportunities, but the next four top-ranks: diversity, team sessions, multi-perspectivity and creativity techniques – together amounting to 51 % (Schwarz, 2012) – offer a unique combination in the COEUR programmes. They also link to the understanding of creativity as cumulative and collaborative and they underpin the idea, which is inherent to the COEUR concept, that diversity should be seen as a driver in the creative development process of entrepreneurial ideas. Thus, diverse European cultures can be understood *not* as an obstacle, but as a creative asset for Europe that should be further



developed and harvested for European enterprises: in particular SMEs, which make up the vast majority (99.8 %) of the grand total (Stawińska, 2011, p. 11).

No educational programme can guarantee to 'produce' successful entrepreneurs or intrapreneurs. What the COEUR programmes have experienced in the past 10 years is that they offer a surrounding in which new ideas can be unveiled and flourish. Enterprises might profit directly or indirectly by finding young professionals – talents – who have gained their first experience in a creative cooperative and intercultural surrounding and who have been encouraged not just to follow or wait for instruction, but to go forward with and for their ideas, and also to adapt, modify or fail, and begin again.

The COEUR programmes will not be equally beneficial to all participants, but they are worth every effort for those who do benefit, like three of the participants of the first workshop in 2004 who reported their experience at the opening of the 2012 workshop. One of them had started up his own business and the other two are in top positions (Senior Controller; Head of Finance) in leading ICT companies in their country. They agreed with the central philosophy and claimed: 'It (COEUR) changed my life!'

## **7. Conclusion**

The COEUR project has substantially evolved over recent years. The initial 'conference' for students organised by four European universities was soon transformed into annual five-day workshops integrating the founding group of COEUR partner universities. This workshop, in turn, resulted in producing the academic course in business creativity, supported by a European Commission grant. With time, the European meetings evolved into global workshops in China and Brazil, ultimately to return to Europe and integrate new partners into the concept.

Observing this rapid evolution, certain opportunities for the further development of the project can be identified.

First of all, it is encouraging that the COEUR/BCM project is positively evaluated at national and international conferences on entrepreneurship education. This results in interest among new higher-education institutions to implement the COEUR/BCM methodology in their study programmes. The identity of the concept is strengthened by its registered logo and the website ([www.coeur-module.eu](http://www.coeur-module.eu)), including information on all initiatives related to the project and effects achieved by representatives of participating institutions. Although it might not be unique in every single aspect, it is certainly unique in the combination and delivery of aspects.

Another positive feature of the project is that it helped to build sustainable relationships between COEUR partner universities and faculty of the BCM. This resulted in visible integration within the network of European higher-education institutions, which can be measured by the growing number of participants in the COEUR workshop and integrated BCM classes, rising from 35 in 2004 to over 130 each year in 2013.

The COEUR partners still want to extend their activities, to expand their networks and to secure sustainable growth and further development of the project. Other European universities dedicated to the development of business creativity in their students, and enterprises seeking to develop their future options for development of themselves or of their customer relations, are invited to share their ideas and to establish a mutually beneficial partnership within the COEUR networks.

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