USASBE 2020
Submission - Competitive Experiential Exercises Track

Exposing and Utilizing Context in Entrepreneurship Education

Abstract

Entrepreneurial activity is never void of contextual influence. Every new idea, product, process, and venture is embedded in networks of stakeholders, reacts to or reshapes industries, fulfills or changes the needs of customers, while bounded by conditions and driven through the interpretive insight of entrepreneurially acting individuals. Entrepreneurship education needs to empower students learning to act entrepreneurially to embrace this contextual complexity and help to prioritize how to operate in the uncertainty it generates. A recently published literature review conducted by the authors (Reference anonymous for the review) found that context in entrepreneurship education can be described at multiple levels and structured through sociological phenomena, resulting in a framework to help better understand, prioritize and utilize contextual elements. The contribution of this work aims to present this frame translated into a learning tool through which students can grasp, adapt or adjust contextual elements influencing their entrepreneurial activity. Supporting the tool is an interactive design through which educators can stimulate contextual awareness as well as enable prioritization of next steps for students to take based on contextual analysis, and then following action taken, substantiation of decisions made under uncertainty as relating back to contextual elements.

Keywords:
Context, Learning, Action Based.

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INTRODUCTION

This iterative exercise uses a context canvas (similar to Osterwalder's Business Model Canvas) to enable students to identify which context elements to design for/with and which context elements to react upon. The canvas helps to organize context along multiple levels and sociological phenomena, raising students' awareness of relevant context elements while also getting them to (independently) work and interact with context during the learning process. As students move through the canvas, certain contextual elements will become prominent, allowing for students to prioritize their agency.

The canvas consists of six building blocks: Project, Process, Resources, Who, Where and When. The six building blocks are intended to help address the main context influencers by allowing users to explore the contextual elements associated to each block as well as reflect upon interactions between the six areas. The canvas supports students in:

- Distilling (making more transparent) contextual elements which associate to any project/idea description.
- Identify what is 'doable' relative to the uncovered contextual elements
- Illustrate interdependencies
- Prioritize next steps, given the do-ables and knowledge gaps

The canvas allows students and educators to qualify the students entrepreneurial process through a Kolb (1984) inspired knowledge building, action and reflection process. These guided/facilitated learning cycles enable students to consider also the relationship between theory and practice. As Austin and Hjorth (Austin & Hjorth, 2012) argued there is a distinction between experience-based and explanation-based learning and the relation between these processes are highly dynamic as also Cope found (Cope, 2005). The process is guided by iterative use of the canvas aided by "method cards". Method cards contain questions to inspire deeper student reflection and can be used to scaffold the learning experience for less experienced students. In addition, method cards also connect related theory to guide both novice educators and students. On the process level, the canvas is intended to aid in identifying knowledge gaps and prioritize next best steps in an entrepreneurial process, and thus is designed primarily for use in action-based pedagogy at a HEI level. The canvas could also be used in analyzing cases, but this is not the primary design.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EXERCISE

The interactive session exercise will build around an ideation format, where the idea for the project is provided. The participants are introduced to the context canvas and then work beyond describing the project through the remaining 5 building blocks. Finally, the group formulates an action plan for how to utilize, react to, or otherwise address the prioritized contextual elements in relation to the development of the project. Additional teaching materials will be provided during the exercise.

Timeline for the exercise:

- Moderators present the idea for the project **(3 min)**

- Participants form groups and brainstorm around the project concept **(7 min)**

- The context canvas and method cards are handed out. In the middle block, the group fills in their project with a short description. The moderators walk through the remaining five blocks, addressing contextual elements. **(15 min)**

- Participants summarize and prioritize the most important contextual elements. **AND**
  Participants determine the next actionable steps on the three highest prioritized items, including propositions/hypothesis/expectations of information to be substantiated. **(5 min)**

- Moderators present an example to talk about what happened next and the reflective feedback interface **(5 min)**

- Discussion of what kind of educational scaffolding needs to be in place for reaction to first iteration of canvas and first reflective analysis on the canvas, as this enables moving into the next iteration. **(10 min)**

Each group is then asked to
1. Identify key topics from discussing the particular contextual factor
2. Reflect on the use and application of the associated methods cards
3. Identify what other related contextual areas have been dealt with

Key Discussion Questions

The key discussion questions emerging from this exercise are:
- What are the critical next steps to take in developing your project?
- How are you prioritizing your engagement in these actions?

Lessons Learned or Teaching Tips
When preparing to use the context canvas as part of educational design, the following should be considered:
- The education should address students engaged in some form of action-based entrepreneurial process, in the sense that they are conducting ideation, developing a new project/service for customer, creating a solution to a defined problem, or engaging in new venture/start-up activity
- Determine given and/or specific contextual elements relevant for the course. This can be guided by the context framework (see Appendix 2)
- Determine the purpose of using the canvas in the course
- Reflect upon the maturity and experience of the students using the canvas: When would I need to push the students onwards in the process and when to leave them dwelling/ struggling?
- Determine when the canvas should be introduced, and how often the canvas can be revisited (either through external feedback, peer to peer feedback, or educator feedback).
- Reflect upon the access students have to additional information, and the time allocated for investigating leads generated from the canvas (for example, is information gathering primarily through online web searches, during class-time or over the days or weeks through interaction with users, potential customers, clients, etc?).
- Identify likely relevant reference material that should be made available to students and help guide/scope the use of the canvas, as needed.
- Determine the degree and timing of educator and/or external involvement, peer to peer sessions, etc. This should include discussion of how to filter feedback – awareness of the underlying perspectives/bias of any particular feedback relative to the contextual element.

Key take-aways:
- The canvas helps to filter and utilize contextual influencers

- The exercise helps educators to consider the likely ecosystem around the 'classroom' or 'teaching space'. This potentially reduces assumptions that students are aware of certain networks, resources, information points, and that students know how to access these or talk to one another about what and who they know in a way that is relevant to their entrepreneurial objectives.
- The exercise pinpoints which contextual elements are static and which are dynamic in a given learning situation.
- The educator has an important role in anchoring established knowledge in order for it to be fruitful for the next steps in the process, and challenging students when they are unable or hostile towards investigating contextual elements.
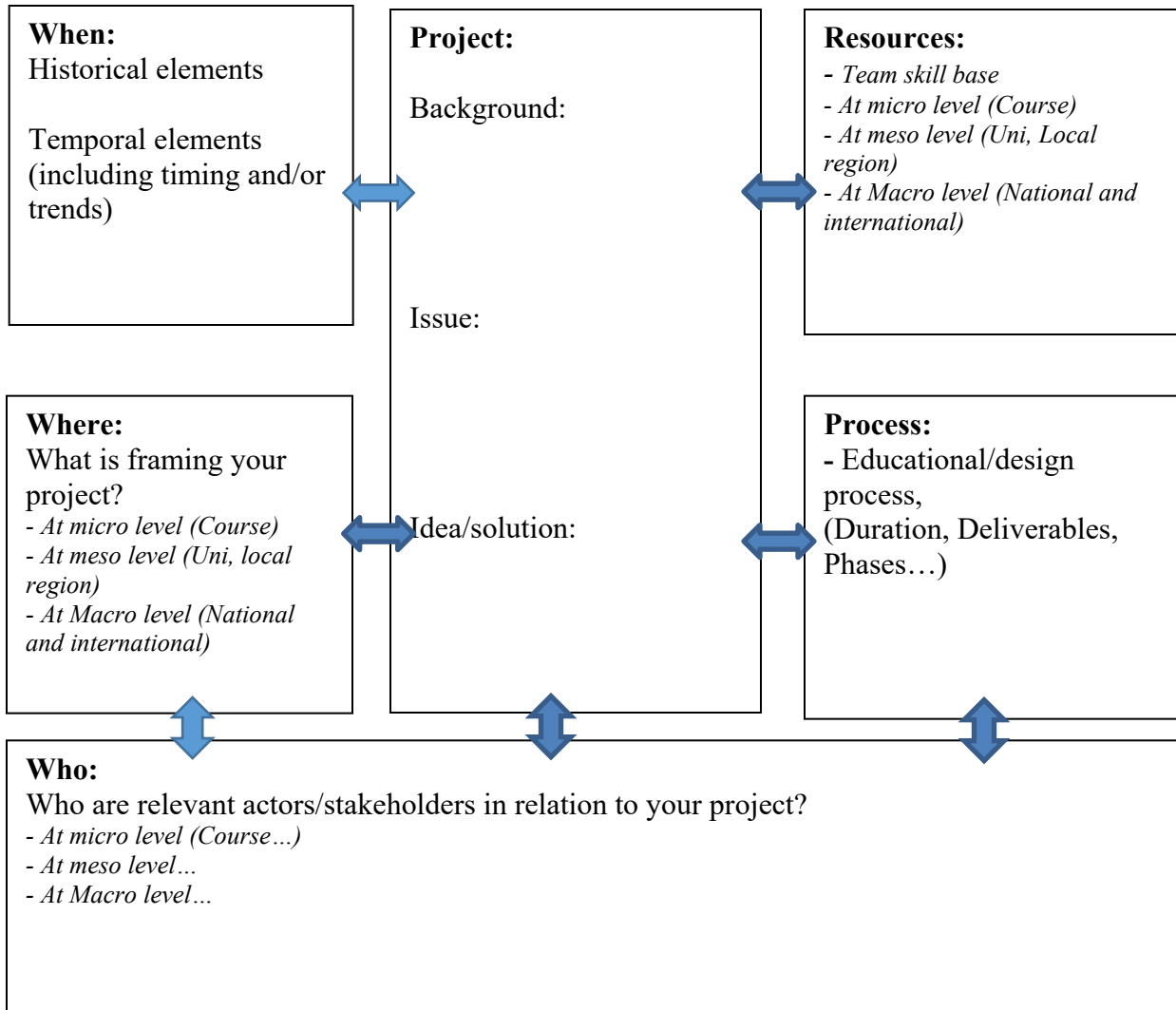
Conclusion:

The context canvas is developed to explicitly expose students to the context in which their project unfolds. This enables students to utilize context in terms of opportunities and prioritize action.   The main objectives are: 1) raise awareness together with others while also allowing for different perspective of context to be captured; 2) help students prioritize actions based upon the context in which they are embedded – thus help them increase prioritization of 'doing the doable' while understanding how that connects to their overall entrepreneurial objective; 3) reflect upon the interdependencies of different actions relative to the contextual embeddedness, and knowing where to push and where to adapt so that expectations are manageable; 4) generate 'evidence' to support entrepreneurial objectives in order to build legitimacy, showing awareness of the 'space' in which one is operating.

The canvas is derived from a theory-based conceptual model created in a Scandinavian context. Participating in this conference, we wish to share the context model as a tool for entrepreneurship education, while qualifying the utility to a broader international audience.

References:

Austin, R. D., & Hjorth, D. (2012). Case-based co-creation of learning processes. *MPP News*, 15(2), 11–14.
Cope, J. (2005). Toward a dynamic learning perspective of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 29(4), 373–397.
Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Appendix 1: Context Canvas

When:	Project:	Resources:
Historical elements	Background:	- *Team skill base*
		- *At micro level (Course)*
Temporal elements (including timing and/or trends)		- *At meso level (Uni, Local region)*
	Issue:	- *At Macro level (National and international)*

Where:		Process:
What is framing your project?		- Educational/design process,
- *At micro level (Course)*	Idea/solution:	(Duration, Deliverables, Phases…)
- *At meso level (Uni, local region)*		
- *At Macro level (National and international)*		

Who:
Who are relevant actors/stakeholders in relation to your project?
- *At micro level (Course…)*
- *At meso level…*
- *At Macro level…*

Appendix 2: Context levels and elements in entrepreneurship education – questions to consider in educational design

	Micro		Meso		Macro		
	Classroom	Program	University	Local	Regional	National	International
WHO — Actors (People)	Who is in the classroom? Who 'controls' content? Who influences learning? What parts are teacher-student, peer-peer, practitioner to student (entrep.), etc.? What roles are there?	Who influences: admission, content, design, assessment, rules, etc.?	Who governs, funds, etc.? Who has a vested interest? What human resources are available to the course participants (experts, extended network)?	Who are engaged in the local entrepreneurial eco-system? Who is engaged in entrepreneurship promoting networks?	Who is active in university ecosystem, regional innovation system and to their primary affiliation? Who influences regional edu policy, start-up/SME policy, etc.? Who are nationally recognized entrepreneurs?	Who is active in the innovation system and to their primary affiliation? Who influences educational policy, etc.? Who are 'the' entrepreneurs (role-models, heroes, etc.)?	Who governs international activity (ex. EU)? Who influences edu policy, start-up/SME policy, etc.? Who are 'the' entrepreneurs (role-models, heroes, etc.)?
WHAT — Content	What is the educational content? Is it curricular, extra-curricular; teacher-driven, student-driven; flipped, etc.?	How does the education progress? Open or closed (ex. no electives)?	What entrep. activities does the univ. host (conferences, events, fairs, student/faculty exchange, etc.)?	What entrep. activities, competitions, resources are available locally? How is engagement encouraged?	What entrep. activities, competitions, resources are available regionally? How is engagement encouraged?	What entrep. activities, competitions, resources are available nationally? How is engagement encouraged?	What entrep. activities, competitions, resources are available intl.? How is engagement encouraged?
WHERE — Framing (Initiatives/created) / Rules/Legislation	What is the learning space? What are deliverables? Are there norms (imposed or created)?	Where else does learning take place (ex. incubator)? Other learning interfaces (ex. online)?	Where on campus is the education located? Access to resources? How does univ. incentivize entrepreneurship?	Is there coordination of different univ. initiatives, local initiatives, etc.? Influence of norms, culture, expectations?	What orgs. decide upon policy, funding, tax-revenue distribution, tax-structure, etc.? Are there reg. industries, specializations, traditions, etc.?	What orgs. decide upon policy, funding, tax-revenue distribution, tax-structure, etc.? Is this industry specific; union or associations, etc.?	What orgs. decide upon policy, funding, tax-revenue distribution, tax-structure, etc.? Is this industry specific, country specific, etc.?
WHEN — Temporal and historic setting	What are the time requirements? What has been done before and how has that changed? Are there norms (imposed or created)? How long does it take to learn what is necessary?	What are the time requirements? What are reporting cycles? How long does it take to learn what is necessary?	What are the time requirements? What are the reporting cycles? How long does it take to learn what is necessary? When are things made available?	What are the time requirements? Are there monthly/yearly cycles of activities, deadlines (funding, events, etc.)?	Are there monthly/yearly cycles of activities, deadlines (funding, events, etc.)?	Are there monthly/yearly cycles of activities, deadlines (funding, events, etc.)?	Are there monthly/yearly cycles of activities, deadlines (funding, events, etc.)?