

NEW TIMES, NEW CHALLENGES AND NEW METHODS

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ABSTRACT

We live in changing and challenging times. Many countries in Europe are making plans on how to improve their competitive advantage in order to match the current global challenges in the best ways. In many countries the focus is on how to meet the global challenges with the support from the educational sector. In Finland education has been an important part of building the Finnish economy. When the tough times continue in the economy it is still good news to see how the educational sector and business life still continue to support each other through continuous exchange. One of the educational aims in the country is to continue to learn new things through your whole life – this is one of the key stones upon which the society is built. This is also one way to continue to improve your competitive advantage in the country. According to the last statistics from July 2015 the Vaasa region and the region where the capital of Finland is situated belongs to the most successful ones when it comes to competitive advantage. This is where Novia University of Applied Sciences is situated with one of several campuses. Among the success factors are educational level, innovation, company dynamics, and productivity. Cross sectional knowledge exchange is prioritized in society and therefore research and projects in this area receive high attention and also funding. In comparison with many countries Finland is also a very open and transparent society. This supports the knowledge exchange between business and educational sector. The paper is based on the results from one of the cross border projects where new teaching methods in entrepreneurial education in four countries were documented and took place in Croatia, Slovenia, Portugal and Finland. The results showed that the project and the methods were successful in using new methods within business education in these countries.

Key words: *competitive advantage; education; teaching methods*

1. INTRODUCTION

We live in changing times. In most part of the world we see rapid changes in the economy and society as a whole and solutions about how to handle it are interesting to find out more about. As the competition is getting tougher many organizations are looking for new solutions and the answer is often to organize the activities in new ways and industrial networks are often the only answer. Competition nowadays very much takes place between networks (Möller and Halinen, 1999; Ghauri, Tarnovskaya and Elg, 2008) and learning more about dynamics and development in networks is an interesting research area.

Our world can be described in terms of connected networks where change takes place in a rapid pace and every actor in the network takes part in the change in different and unique ways from the position where they are positioned. When we describe the world as connected industrial networks we present how relationships and links connect actors, resources and activities (Håkansson and Johanson, 1992). Both the business world and the educational sector work in networks and these networks also run together in their unique ways of connectedness.

2. NEW TIMES, NEW CHALLENGES AND NEW METHODS

Our reality of today is filled with challenges of different kinds. One of the challenges of today is globalization and the increased competition that results in a new awareness of where we stand in terms of competition, resources and the future.

One way of working ones' way forward is found in the paths of innovation. This is to be found in the creative environment. This growth ground of creativity is one of the corner stones of development of today. As society changes in a fast pace there is a need of mapping these changes and meeting them with the right mix of readiness. This readiness lies in the inner organizational culture and its connections (Judge, Fryxell and Dooley, 1997).

Finding the existence of innovation and creativity and choosing the right form for it is of utmost importance today in order to be competitive enough. In the right form it can contribute to the development of new solutions of all kind to the activities in public sector, business or educational sector. The society and the reality today is a connected world in terms of internet, technical solutions and needs of the separate organizations connected. Therefore it is important to create the right capability inside the organization that can respond to the fast changes outside the organization. The key to developing and controlling the organizational dynamics and its response to the outside world is the key to how you can innovate and handle your creative path (Judge, Fryxell and Dooley, 1997). How the organization manages the connectedness to the global changes is very much a matter of strategy, choice and inbuilt flexibility in terms of the fast changes. The key is often built into a well-planned cooperation (Axelsson and Easton, 1992; Gadde and Håkansson, 2001).

The educational sector of today is also very much dependent on the cooperation and strategic alliances of international educational networks. One of the key issues to focus on is how we can enhance innovative thinking, innovation, creativity as the source of competitive advantage (Florida 2002). The connection between the educational sector and the business world of today is one of the key areas to develop as much of the needed innovative thinking is found in several sectors and their resources. And the sectors need each other because of several reasons. Therefore the connectedness of international networks are of importance especially in the educational sector. It is also important to understand how cooperation in your networks affects your competitive advantage (Wagner and Johnson 2004).

A solution forward can be found in co-competition – cooperation with competitors in new ways and in untried combinations. Competition can be seen as something that is hindering our activities, but it also supports us and helps us develop in experiencing our own organizations strength and weaknesses in the mirror of the market and others. It supports us in building our strengths. Time in this kind of cooperation is of big importance as it shapes the cooperation to what you need to something new compared to before. This is especially important when you act in the same market (Tidström and Hagberg-Andersson 2012).

We can create and develop many activities ourselves, but in today's competition our activities mirror of what the global market looks like and how we make it. The global market means access to resources and possibilities for our customers and creates a picture in choosing the alternative that is the best in their view. In our connected world of internet and global business most actors are connected in some ways. Our network connections can be characterized in many different ways and they are built for certain reasons and with certain resources. Through your network you can strengthen your competitive advantage. The tools to develop and improve your competitive advantage on the market can be found locally or globally. These are in your connections of partners, customers and suppliers and every organization can be identified as a possibility and mirror of what your market is today in your cooperation potential (Hagberg-Andersson, 2007). In network cooperation one can see network actors as competitors or cooperation partners (Ford, 1998, p.8). A common way to work in today's world is to cooperate with competitors around common goals and share certain resources and insights. Being in the same market gives you the same base of understanding the needs of your customers and by cooperating you do not need to have the double amount of resources – in strategic cooperation around certain focus areas you can instead benefit from needing just half your resources and in this way both continue stronger on the market – in different niches as your competitors. This is one way of reaching common goals by using new ways and strategies in order to develop. New times demand new ways of thinking. And by working with others you often receive presented options – this is one benefit of cooperating (Brown 2009). But in which ways is it suitable to think in these terms?

What are then the areas and arenas you choose for cooperation? Working in a network of partners is a good solution for improving your own activities. In these strategic networks it is possible to focus on common values and resource sharing. It is also important to decide on value sharing in the strategic networks as these are important strategic factors on the global market in your own branding. Survival on the market also depends on

creativity, innovation, discovery and inventiveness (Martins and Terblanche 2003). In your communication on the market stating your brand and strategy is a very important part of your identity and the connectedness you state as you show who you are and what kind of player you represent to your key group you aim to reach (Klein, 2000)

Cultural differences and local market presence in global networks can support the network with knowledge transfer and valuable information about the outside world and your role in it (Guirdham, 2005; Minkov, Hofstede and Hofstede, 2011). In each of these network connections certain adaptation takes place in the cooperation and a new reality comes out as a result of the interaction (Brennan and Turnbull, 1999; Brennan and Turnbull and Wilson 2003; Hagberg-Anderson 2006; Hagberg-Andersson, 2009).

The area of lifelong learning, in Finland, is an important part of building the overall competitive advantage of the country, the workforce and the society. The networks in between these provide an educated workforce that participate in the learning process both as individuals, but also as educators in for example business schools. These persons in local companies act as guest lecturers, provide cases and the companies open doors and windows for the connectedness of knowledge that is a solid ground for the competitive advantage of the region and country. In a globally connected world there is a danger that the students at business schools get better acquainted with global enterprises on the other side of the earth than local companies (Vasabladet, 2012). Therefore a balance between local entrepreneurs connected to entrepreneurship education can be good as part of the educational network of multinationals and the other network partners with schools and universities in other countries. This as a global mix with information about entrepreneurial opportunities globally as well as information also about local businesses ready for generation shift as a possibility for a student. Being a part of different surrounding networks and projects gives also a good view of the business reality for students within entrepreneurship which provides a contemporary view of the world. Different networks, cases and projects gives a good opportunity to experience different dynamics and opportunities depending on what you as an actor are a part of (Möller and Halinen 1999; Möller and Svahn 2006).

New teaching methods and their innovativeness is a very important part of the society as an output of the research in these fields create the ground for the future society. Entrepreneurship is about the process of creating value by bringing together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity (Sahlman et al, 1999). Therefore it is of utmost importance within entrepreneur teaching that it is contemporary and connected enough to the global opportunities that represent entrepreneurship of today. Because entrepreneurship is not only about the creation of new business we also need to support the students in their contemporary strive of identifying new business opportunities in a connected world – by building strategic networks that promote new ways of thinking by creating an open minded environment where not only the theoretical foundation is competitive, but a teaching environment that supports creativity, own initiatives and problem solving that can be the innovative platform for new business. Creating a platform like this is challenging enough and by exchanging ideas in networks of teaching entrepreneurship in different parts of the world supports the possibilities of creating a base for successful innovation and renewal.

In global development work the support is partially found in the results from the global Pisa survey. It is of interest how the educational system is built up in different countries and how it is developed in supporting the rest of the society. In Finland the results from the Pisa survey have been good through the years (Meyer and Benavot (2013). The explanations are explained by the solid foundation of the school systems that has been built up during several centuries. The focus has been on creating a solid foundation on equal opportunities for the pupils on all levels and a school system where the education is free of charge. In the PISA survey one part is creative problem solving and Finland has been here in top of the world (<http://finland.fi/Public/default.aspx?contentid=293516&nodeid=41807&culture=en-US>). Creative problem solving is a very important part of the entrepreneurship education and different teaching methods supports this (Handbook of good practices 2013).

In entrepreneurship education the foundation is supported by an awareness in society that education is important and that it needs support on different levels and parts of the society in order to continue to deliver good results. One part of society is the business world with managers and entrepreneurs that continuously give feedback on how contemporary contents and methods are when compared to the real world. The empirical results in this paper present the results from Finnish managers' view on networks and innovation in these. The managers are connected to the teaching in network building and creativity in these.

The paper also contains results from one of these connected networks in Finland – connected to the rest of Europe in the project “Developing Skills for Future Jobs” during the year 2013-2014. The project presented insight into the interconnectedness between business schools, entrepreneurs, new teaching methods and the educational networks between University College of Economics, Entrepreneurship and Management Nicola Subic Zrinski, Croatia; Faculty of Commercial and Business Sciences, Slovenia; University Institute of Maia in Portugal and Novia University of Applied Sciences in Finland. The results present a mix of examples and ideas from these four different countries that are connected to a more innovative result mix than the separate schools could have come up with themselves. As the base for the project were the different schools views on entrepreneurship education in the four countries and the cultural and local mix of entrepreneurial education experience that was connected to the project network before and during the time.

From a network perspective the dynamics in this network is one of its most valuable results. The dynamics, the network and the contents is a result and so is also the knowledge developed during the project time. But the result is also the continuance of the project and especially in the network structure and dynamics. In the journey of the process one thread lies in the attitudes and values exchanged and developed during the project time. This is an important part of networks as values in today's business world continues to be important and needs to be communicated as one key stone in network cooperation. Values will also continue to be an important part of tomorrow's business world (Klein 2014). Dynamics in this project was partly created from results combined with enthusiasm from the participating actors from the different countries and this combined together was one explanation to the good results from the project.

3. NEW TIMES AND NEW APPROACHES

The results from the cross border project Developing Skills for Future Jobs compares and presents new teaching methods in entrepreneurial education in four countries and were documented and took place in Croatia, Slovenia, Portugal and Finland. The results showed that the project and the methods were successful in using new methods within business education in these countries.

Earlier study results show an awareness of network development as a base for competitive advantage. As the outsourcing trend continues in society the need of new successful outsourcing and insourcing combinations are needed in network cooperation and adaptation in these (Brennan and Turnbull 1999; Brennan and Turnbull 2003; Hagberg-Andersson, 2007 and Hagberg-Andersson and Grønhaug (2009). As the surrounding network and the challenges in these the network actors need to be aware of the strategic direction of the activities in the network. These are very much connected to the overall values outspoken and shown in most organizations of today. Studies show that networks are nowadays more and more built upon common values that supports the strategy and goals that are the base for the actions taken towards the outside world.

In an earlier study among Finnish entrepreneurs as managing directors in a study beginning from 2011 and onwards show an awareness in selecting network partners that support their competitive advantage and values that are represented as a part of this. This value base was then the base for a platform of creativity over organizational borders in the network relationships. The companies in the study cooperated with companies like suppliers, customers and universities and other schools in different ways. The entrepreneurs mentioned characteristics and key words important in cooperation and adaptation like trust, honesty, loyalty and reputation of outmost importance. The cooperation had to stand on a genuine platform with open doors and windows – without a façade – about being authentic. On manager described the importance of being personal – it is a dialogue between people that is based on communication. This is also the base if you need to solve problems together. And it is part of cooperation competence. This is also a base when you renew yourself and your business in your cooperation with others. The manager in the creative industry mentioned especially culture as important for competitive advantage and a source of creativity in the network of genuine cooperation partners in different countries and this was also mentioned by the law firm as something that contributed to competitive advantage and creativity. The managers and entrepreneurs in the study came from manufacturing, food, law and the creative industry. These results are interesting to compare to the dynamics in the educational sector in a project like DSFFJ.

As part of the competitive advantage on the national level cooperation in the educational sector values are mentioned as an important glue and especially the cooperation between universities in different countries. The networks between business sector and universities were a bit different in terms of structure and content. These differences can partly be described by cultural differences and contents. It was described many times as “a cultural thing”. This cultural thing contains market knowledge, communication, cultural heritage and above all – information as a contemporary analysis of this jig saw puzzle piece of today that surrounded the schools.

The project “Developing skills for Future jobs” (DSFFJ) was an EU founded project that was initiated in order to promote entrepreneurship learning in exchange between four countries and four schools and universities. The project was owned by University College Nikola Subic Zrinski in Zagreb, Croatia. Cooperation partners were Novia University of applied Sciences in Finland, Faculty of Commercial and Business Sciences in Slovenia and University Institute of Maia in Portugal. In the project different kinds of new teaching methods and contents were exchanged and developed during the year 2013 – 2014 when the project took place. The outcome was very successful and the project is planned to continue on the results in addition to new cooperation forms being planned. The project contents contained video lectures, job shadowing, Facebook groups for communication between four countries between students and staff and lectures of local entrepreneurs. More of the results of the project is to be found in the Handbook of good practices that was published in the end of the project (2013).

As part of building anything new there is an importance of failure and risk taking both in business and educational sector. Without these two we do not learn and we cannot create new approaches and new thinking – which need to be the base for renewal. Understanding the world is an important part of creating something new and without being connected to the world we cannot understand it. And understanding something like this is an important thread to look into for both business managers, innovators, teachers and becoming entrepreneurs – how we in different ways convert need into demand.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Networks are important for the success of many – it is said that “no man is an island”, but this goes double for both the corporate world and the educational sector of today. We tend, in most sectors, to live in a globally connected world where you are dependent on access to knowledge that in many ways build your competitive advantage. You are what you have learned and you can learn in many ways, but the most successful ones stress the importance of partners in strategic knowledge alliances. Therefore, the active development and communication with your partners is very important. Your network dynamic is your own organizational potential as you are very much what your reality and network embeddedness is.

The results from the DSFFJ project showed a special appreciation in the connectedness and exchange of new ideas between the personnel and students in the project. As very many universities are cutting costs the extra possibilities that a project like this can enhance result in an extra innovativeness and joy among staff and students and this is something that can also be noticed as positive development dynamics and one extra bonus from an international project within entrepreneurship. Both the students and the staff enjoyed the extra resources that the DSFFJ project provided to the participating organizations and the positive dynamics that it could provide to the network of connected schools. In the study of the seven entrepreneurs being interviewed about how network dynamics in terms of values shown and being the base for cooperation activities was a common factor for these two studies – in both studies were these under discussion as one important factor that interested – for example the view on failure among entrepreneurs, business and individu-

als in the four countries. Without communication about what is important in network cooperation the network is not as strong and competitive as it can be. An international network can be built stronger by using its internal resources like market access, cultural understanding, knowledge and information exchange, values, competitive advantage and innovativeness. In the project DSFFJ the resource awareness was available and the innovative readiness of the partners was available. Therefore new methods of teaching and communicating was possible to use and the knowledge level of the participating schools made the project a valuable one that built the partners competitiveness on the market.

The results from the empirical material from the two studies included in this paper especially want to highlight the extraordinary resources that the strategic educational networks have for the support of the educational system in entrepreneurial teaching. The results from the DSFFJ project highlight these supporting resources that come from cooperation in strategic networks of connected entrepreneurs to teaching as well as projects with exchange of alternative and new methods in teaching. The resources support each other in the foundation of a strong base for the upcoming years of entrepreneurial teaching and future challenges of it as a network hub better can guarantee that you have the knowledge and information that you need for your activities.

Future challenges and paths for future research lies in how to keep the described competitive paths connected and strong in order to continue to keep up the quality in entrepreneurial research and schools in society in general. Will competitive advantage still be reliable of the support in strategic networks or something completely new for us?

NOVA VREMENA, NOVI IZAZOVI I NOVE METODE

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SAŽETAK

Živimo u promjenjivim i izazovnim vremenima. Mnoge zemlje u Europi izrađuju planove o tome kako poboljšati svoju konkurentsku prednost kako bi najbolje udovoljile trenutnim globalnim izazovima. U mnogim je zemljama fokus na tome kako zadovoljiti globalne izazove uz podršku obrazovnog sektora. U Finskoj obrazovanje čini važan dio u izgradnji finskog gospodarstva. Kada se teška vremena u gospodarstvu nastave, dobra je vijest ta što se obrazovni sektor i poslovni život nastavljaju podržavati i dalje kroz kontinuiranu razmjenu. Jedan od obrazovnih ciljeva u zemlji je učiti nove stvari kroz cijeli život – to je jedan od temelja na kojem se gradi društvo. To je također način da se poboljša konkurentna prednost u zemlji. Prema posljednjim statističkim podacima iz srpnja 2015. regija Vaasa i regija gdje se nalazi glavni grad Finske pripadaju najuspješnijim regijama kada je u pitanju konkurentna prednost. Tu se također nalazi Veleučilište Novia u jednom od nekoliko kampusa. Među faktorima uspjeha su stupanj obrazovanja, inovacije, dinamika tvrtke i produktivnost. Poprečna razmjena znanja je prioritet u društvu, stoga istraživanja i projekti na ovom području dobivaju veliku pažnju te novčanu potporu. U usporedbi s mnogim zemljama finsko društvo je vrlo otvoreno i transparentno. To podupire razmjenu znanja između poslovnog i obrazovnog sektora. Rad se temelji na rezultatima iz jednog od međunarodnih projekata u kojima su dokumentirane nove metode poučavanja u poduzetničkom obrazovanju u četiri zemlje: Hrvatskoj, Sloveniji, Portugalu i Finskoj. Rezultati su pokazali da su projekt i metode bili uspješni u korištenju novih metoda unutar poslovnog obrazovanja u tim zemljama.

Ključne riječi: konkurentna prednost; obrazovanje; metode poučavanja

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