Students Who Co-Create Their Case Studies:
How Participative Experiences Enlighten Business Education

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Abstract. This study originates from considerations on the essential role of case studies in effectively and efficiently developing students' awareness of business phenomena. More precisely, the reference to empirical evidence enables a multi-dimensional discussion on factors that support or threaten a company in specific contexts/sectors. Through the discussion on case studies, one wants to bring to light emblematic details and significant frames; draw to them the attention of operators and scholars; and promote analyses and actions aimed at increasing awareness of business dynamics for all involved actors. The orientation is that of an explorative analysis which leads to the individuation of fields of specific interest in the perspective of advancement of knowledge and collective development (Yin, 1989; Stake, 1995).

On the role of case studies in the advancement of knowledge, many authors have expressed themselves and the reference to such methodology in literature is vast, as widely documented in Yin (1993). In particular, in a fundamental introduction dedicated to case studies in 1997, Tellis highlights the relevance of such methodology in the dimension of critical thinking, underlining the centrality of research design and of rigour as elements that are decisive for the significance of the results. Eisenhardt e Graebner (2007), discussing the opportunities and challenges generated by the methodology of case studies, emphasise how such approach requires a careful individuation of relations between constructs inside the case study and underlying logical references. In the perspective of such connections, we here want to specifically focus on the experimentation of a co-creation of case studies based on the proactive engagement of University students.

Starting from case studies solely developed by the Professor, how does the students' own architecture of the case modify the individuation of the key points and, even more importantly, of the intricate, all-connected, web of relations amongst such key points? Moreover, what importance does their reading of the case have in regards to the growth and development of their awareness on the dynamics of business in specific sectors?

To answer these questions, a significant number of students is invited to autonomously research and analyse business contexts and concepts, referring to related information sources which will be completely independently and freely chosen. This experimentation is operated with reference to two emblematic digital businesses: Hopper, a company operating in the travel sector (Hopper, 2020a,b,c,d,), and Evaneos, a company active in the tourism sector (Evaneos, 2016, 2019, 2020).

The main, driving purpose of this work is to highlight the potential of content co-creation, in a mindset of a pro-active critical approach (Mingers, 2000) and of an independently-led problem solving (Carriger, 2015). This is an experience that generates surprising levels of engagement, involvement and motivation, similar to those observable in gamification (Poole et al., 2014; Dias, 2017), and perhaps even higher, because here the experience is real; it happens in the field of a real "product": the co-designed case.

Keywords: business education, digital businesses, co-creation of case studies

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