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Europe is in need of entrepreneurial spirit - but is this spirit conveyed successfully?

Entrepreneurship education and evaluation: Results of the Leonardo-Project ENTREVA¹

Training offers in the field of Entrepreneurship Education have mushroomed over the last few years. Still, not enough thought is given to the efficiency of various educational measures. There is often a lack of approved indicators as well as acknowledged methods when it comes to assessing the results of the numerous and diverse initiatives and measures. In the course of the project ENTREVA, a state-of-art survey of evaluation projects already completed was carried out in a number of European countries. ENTREVA made it its aim to promote networking and the exchange of know-how in this field, and also to make people aware of the necessity to evaluate it. A web tool that was especially designed serves as a guide to the planning of evaluations.

Diversity of educational measures to promote entrepreneurship

In a series of publications over the last few years, the European Union repeatedly stressed the importance of strengthening entrepreneurship in its member countries. 2003 saw the publishing of the *Green Paper Entrepreneurship in Europe*, which shifted the debate around entrepreneurial initiative closer to the centre of politics. On the basis of the discourse among experts and political decision makers that was sparked by the Green Paper, the *European Agenda for Entrepreneurial Initiative* was published. Clearer than ever, it calls for implementing area-wide entrepreneurship education if the Commission's agenda calls on the member states to "include entrepreneurial education in the curricula of all schools, and to support the schools adequately so that they can implement effective, high-quality training programmes"². Various measures in different fields of politics have contributed to a strengthening of the entrepreneurial businesses. In the case of Austria, one has to mention above all steps towards liberating trade, tax relief for founders (law to promote new founded businesses), as well as general improvements as regards legal and administra-

tive regulations (insolvency laws, business foundation laws). The educational sector is an especially decisive starting point to foster entrepreneurial spirit. There have been set up numerous new training facilities and initiatives in Austria as well as in other countries of the European Union. These do not merely train potential entrepreneurs (entrepreneurship approach), but aim in many cases at promoting entrepreneurial spirit and acting, regardless if a future career as an entrepreneur is likely or not. Independence, creativity, and especially new ideas are characteristics that both colleagues and decision makers in companies and organisations ask for ('intrapreneurship' approach).

Manifold targets of Entrepreneurship Education

A detailed review of European educational offers that promote entrepreneurial spirit was made in the project ENTREDU, which had been carried out prior to ENTREVA (www.entredu.com). A thorough analysis of these offers had shown that entrepreneurship education always includes one or more of the following targets:

- (1) Learning about entrepreneurship and the Economy
- (2) Learning how to become entrepreneurial
- (3) Learning to be a business(wo)man

While in the first category of educational measures the focus is on conveying understanding and knowledge of economical processes as well as the importance of entrepreneurs in a society, the second point is all about influencing the peoples' personality and to tease out as well as to foster the following personal characteristics: readiness to take risks, to take responsibility, creativity, etc – and, lastly, to influence young people's attitudes. So as to achieve this, innovative, hands-on teaching and learning methods are needed. The third category finally focuses on teaching specific know-how that is needed to found and run businesses.

Such different targets of entrepreneurship education show that any evaluation of the various educational offers is a real challenge. Due to the fact that the desired results differ, one cannot employ a uniform evaluation procedure. Thus, the demands are diverse – for example as regards determining the subject of evaluation, specifying measurement categories and indicators, as well as choosing apt methods; and they are to be seen as dependent on the targets of the respective educational offers. To adhere to the above classification, the subject of evaluation in entrepreneurship education can be economic knowledge, a change in attitudes and typical behaviour, or the number of businesses founded.

The targets of evaluations

As part of the ENTREVA project, the first methodological step involved assessing and analysing the evaluations in the field of entrepreneurship education that had been carried out in European countries. As a further step, experts from education providers, evaluators, and politics were consulted. Different criteria were used to describe the evaluation studies that had been carried out. Hereby, the aim of the evaluation projects served as a means of differentiation. While doing so, the team of ENTREVA researchers drew upon an approach by Diamond and Spencer (1983) which says evaluation research tries to ask questions that can be subsumed under the four following categories:

1. Questions of planning a programme / an educational offer
2. Questions regarding monitoring a programme or an educational offer
3. Questions that are to do with effect analysis
4. Questions regarding economic efficiency

A comprehensive evaluation approach usually accounts for aspects from all four fields of research. Still, ENTREVA has shown that many evaluation projects are confined to fewer factors – with the reasons for this being manifold. Storey and other researchers (2000) recommend carrying out evaluations step by step. This approach considers it important to check if a programme or measure has been carried out according to plan, before asking questions about the effects it has. A further step therefore seems to be suitable, where the effects of one measure are assessed before answering questions of efficiency.

The investigation into evaluation studies that was carried out in the course of the project showed that 48 out of the total of 90 studies had as their primary target an economical analysis. Questions of programme planning (19 cases) and programme monitoring (17 cases) were equally prominent regarding their primary aims. Questions concerning economical efficiency only gained importance in the second instance. In a categorisation according to secondary targets, the four targets above were given equally often.

Internal and external evaluations

The question as to whether the evaluation was carried out internally or externally served as yet another attribute in categorising the evaluation studies covered. Internal evaluations are either made by the programme or education providers themselves or commissioned by them. Internal evaluations often make it their aim to develop the educational offers further and to improve them. The object of such evaluations could be a survey among participants or students: these would find out about how satisfied they are and what they know, as well as what is their subjective perception of changes in knowledge and skills. Yet, more globally speaking, there can also be the underlying question whether the aims and expectations of the participants or customers can be met via the measures that are offered³.

In the case of external evaluations, an outside institution is asked to carry out an evaluation for a third party. Furthermore, external evaluations differ in other ways, too: whether they are funded by public institutions and carried out by private organisations that are profit-oriented; or, whether they can be carried out by independent academic research organisations which do not want to make profit.

Of all the evaluation projects that were carried out as part of ENTREVA, 52 evaluations were made externally. 35 of these had been commissioned by political decision makers, and 17 external evaluations served research purposes such as in theses and dissertations. 36 of the studies were based on internal evaluation – and in 28 cases, the party that benefits from the evaluation did it themselves.

Education providers and also evaluators prefer internal evaluations which focus on giving advice, and aim at improving the programme sequence as a whole. Still, there were also mentioned some facts that favour external evaluations:

- independent assessment from outside the company is seen as being reputable, especially with regard to third parties;
- people associate a high degree of transparency with external research teams;

While education providers see the single educational measure as being in the foreground, politics uses more of a macro perspective for the topic of evaluation. Thus, for many studies that had been funded by the public, the centre of interest was an analysis of the education system as a whole, or specific sectors of the former - with a view to assessing their contribution to entrepreneurial orientation.

A further differentiation is that evaluations may either be voluntary, or mandatory. In more than half of the cases assessed (61%), evaluation was voluntary, while evaluation was compulsory in merely eight percent of all cases (such as by public assignment). In many instances, there was not sufficient information available to answer this question. If evaluation was included in an educational measure from the start, it may be regarded as being both voluntary and mandatory.

Education providers, evaluators, political decision makers: interests diverge

The scenarios that were outlined above show that there is usually more than just one party involved, and their interests in the results can be quite different. Especially the source of funding can be a critical factor in this respect.

In the evaluation studies investigated, it was usually public institutions which funded these evaluations, diverse as these institutions may be; Besides the European Union and its numerous programmes, money was provided by national ministries and regional administrations (both on a provincial and a communal level). In some instances, however, evaluations were self-financed, for example by tuition fees, i.e., by the participants. As regards availability of financial means for carrying out evaluations, a number of experts interviewed stressed the fact that the existing sources of financing did not suffice; and that there was a lack of funds for the truly extensive evaluation projects.

Curran et al. point out in their review of evaluation studies (1999) that publicly funded evaluations are more likely to produce glossed over and favourable results than evaluations that are carried out for scientific reasons by independent institutions. Yet, the experts consulted in the course of ENTREVA, did not see the danger of political decision makers and financiers exerting influence. Some experts, however, expressed their concern that those in charge of politics favour certain institutions when commissioning evaluation jobs so as to achieve positive results.

Conclusions drawn from the project

The insights gained from the ENTREVA project again show up how important it is to evaluate educational offers which promote entrepreneurial spirit. What is more, the results of the project underline the necessity to develop approved indicators. A diversified application of indicators in future evaluation projects would, moreover, make evaluation results comparable across the boundaries of different programmes and educational offers, as well as between different countries. A widespread indicator is, for example, the number of businesses founded. Even though many educational offers in entrepreneurship edu-

cation pursue this aim, there exists a number of other factors and measured data that can be drawn upon when assessing entrepreneurial training.

Measuring factors according to the underlying aim of the evaluation:

Planning	Monitoring	Impact analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation and expectations in taking part • Meeting the expectations • Assessing the usefulness of an educational measure • Degree of satisfaction • Assessing learning success • Suggestions to improve the course / the measure taken • etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of participants • Analysing the participants (for example according to sex, age, prior education, etc.) • Costs / participants • Number of people who did not participate successfully • etc. 	<p>New foundations, Start-Ups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of Start-Ups • Number of those who did not set up a business • Successful Start-Ups (time of survival) • Comparing foundation projects
		<p>Attitudes, intentions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Founding tendency • Entrepreneurial orientation • readiness to take risks • etc.

Detailed results and analyses of the project you will find at <http://www.entreva.net>

- ENTREVA- download the full report (English)
- web tool: guide to evaluation design
- data base: collecting information about evaluation studies

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¹ ENTREVA – State-of-art survey of the evaluation and measurement methods, tools and practices of enterprise education, theoretical analysis and presentation of results in www-database. Partner associations exist, among Austria, in Finland, Norway, Ireland, Germany, and Spain

² European Commission 2004, page 9

³ This differentiation follows an approach by Curran (1999).

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