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THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES FOR COURSES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the state of development of experiential exercises for use in entrepreneurship and small business courses. Given the pragmatic nature of this field, experiential exercises which are skill related are needed for application. Topics for which experiential exercises need to be developed, along with suggestions for development, are presented.

THE TEACHING OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SMALL BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Kao (19B9) states that the answer to the question of whether or not entrepreneurship can be taught is both yes and no. While no course of instruction can guarantee that a student will be successful in starting and developing a new venture, Kao believes that what can be taught are certain concepts and skills useful to the would-be practitioner of entrepreneurship. Kao's Harvard affiliation naturally leads him to rely on the case method for the development of pattern-recognition skills relevant to the educational process. He believes that by observing the range of factors (through case analysis) which facilitate or impede entrepreneurship, the student is more likely to have a better sense of what management actions are required in certain kinds of situations.

The teaching of a combination of knowledge about the content and process of a subject is particularly critical in an emerging field such as entrepreneurship, where there is very little underlying theory and no unifying model, theory, or concept. What theory does exist has essentially been extrapolated from related management fields such as Business Policy and Strategy, Organizational Behavior, etc., or other Business Administration fields such as Finance, Marketing, etc. Most of what is known about the field of entrepreneurship has been developed from limited case studies. Only recently have longitudinal empirical studies with large sample sized begun to appear in the academic literature.

The content knowledge about entrepreneurship and small business management consists of details about how to start a new business, what regulations and procedures need to be followed, how to get an idea for a new venture, how to obtain financing, how to select a legal structure, how to organize the business, hoe to write a business plan, how to market the small business, how to deal with people, etc. The process of new venture initiation deals with the building of skills in these areas in order to develop some expertise.

Experiential learning is an excellent methodology for instruction in entrepreneurship and small business management, given its emphasis on active learning. Models for effective behavior can be developed from this technique, along with information about whether or not the participant wants to pursue a career in the field.

The applied nature of entrepreneurship and small business management makes it difficult for this topic to be delivered only in a traditional lecture and recitation method. Learning by experiencing or doing is much more preferable, but the realities of entrepreneurship make this hard to do, Many workbooks are available which can aid the prospective entrepreneur to work through the steps necessary to start a new small business, but these manuals require an actual viable idea which is actually going to be brought to the marketplace. Writing an actual business plan can consume six months of dedicated effort to obtain the necessary market, financial, and economic information. Paper--and-pencil simulation exercises which take the student through the new venture initiation process are quite simple, and are really only extended case studies. While a large number of business simulation games exist which employ a small business as the main vehicle for the game, the emphasis in these games is usual upon a particular business administration function, such a strategic planning r marketing, rather than the actual process of small business management. Those simulations which are specifically aimed at new venture initiation are simple, few in number, and incomplete.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The field of entrepreneurship and small business is ideally suited for the application of experiential exercises in its teaching methodology. However, for various reasons, including the rapid development of the field, the necessary experiential exercises have not yet been developed. Parallels exist with the fields of Human Resource Management and Strategic Planning, which only recently have seen the publication of textbooks containing experiential exercises. Tracing a path from the first experiential exercise texts in the field of Organizational Behavior through through extensions to other fields through the recent Business Strategy texts leads this author to believe that an experiential exercise application in Entrepreneurship is not far behind. Exercises which need to be developed include refined applications to start-up, management, and growth situations which are more complex, longer, and more group-oriented than those presently available.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The field of entrepreneurship and small business has grown rapidly. The demand for educational programs has resulted in an outpouring of texts, conferences, and programs. This topic is evidently well suited for the application of experiential learning, with its experience, reflect, conceptualization, and application cycle. However, a shortage of good or even applicable experiential exercises currently exists. There are many possible subjects for experiential exercise application in the field, and the present paper has pointed out a number of them. It is often of value to have a source point Out the opportunities for the future development of a field, and it is hoped that this paper had made such a contribution.

REFERENCES

Kao, John J. Entrepreneurship. Creativity, Organization. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1989.