The Impact of E-Learning strategies for Entrepreneurship Education

Joanna Mills, Shima Barakat and Shailendra Vyakarnam
Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning, Judge Business School, University of Cambridge
Keynes House, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, CB2 1QA
Tel: 01223 766900, E-mail: j.mills@jbs.cam.ac.uk, Website: www.cfel.jbs.cam.ac.uk

Objectives:

To explore the role and impact of E-learning strategies in education ‘for’ entrepreneurs concurrently working on new business ventures.

The importance of prior experience to entrepreneurs as they continue to learn has already been studied extensively. In addition there are studies that have highlighted examples of E-learning within entrepreneurship education. Asynchronous discussion forums are key components of the E-learning toolbox and are well known to provide opportunities for students to share experiences and learn collaboratively. There are various techniques that educators can use to ensure their success. However the use of these specifically in education programmes for entrepreneurs, and their role and impact as a collaborative learning intervention has not been investigated.

Approach:

This paper is based on interviews with students participating on a new programme for entrepreneurs delivered though a blended approach of a small number of face-to-face sessions and significant online learning. The cohort of students is both internationally and experientially diverse – ranging from nascent to experienced serial entrepreneurs. As the programme leads to a recognised university qualification, it is founded in academic rigor and has clear assessment strategies which are linked directly to the development of students own entrepreneurial ambitions and ventures, and also to their participation within the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Although data can be drawn from contributions and student feedback within the VLE, interviews will allow an exploration of the specific impact of discussion forums, including question design and assessment strategies.

Results:

At present the programme is part way through its first cycle with a small cohort of students. However, what is emerging from the VLE is that asynchronous discussion forums provide a rich source of entrepreneurial experience and knowledge that builds significantly upon the core written and multimedia content provided. Students’ awareness of the assessment criteria for participation in the VLE and the opportunity for them to self-reflect through sharing their prior experiences, guided by the pace and structure of the content is fundamental in achieving this.

Implications:

E-learning can effectively support entrepreneurial learning when utilised as a significant proportion of a blended programme for entrepreneurs. Asynchronous discussion forums are a pivotal in enabling entrepreneurs to learn collaboratively through the sharing and discussion of entrepreneurial experiences.
Value:

This research has value for entrepreneurship educators considering incorporating E-learning into programmes at the levels of 1. Design of the E-learning component, 2. Construction of asynchronous discussion forums and questions, and achieving student engagement.