

International Entrepreneurship Educator's Programme

Entrepreneurial Learning - Pedagogical Note Series

17. Use of Organisations as Networks

1. What is Use of Organisations as Networks?

All organisations can be described in terms of networks of relationships. Independent business management, for example, can be characterised as a process of managing interdependency with a range of stakeholders (customers, suppliers, financiers, professional services, staff, family, competitors and so on). The same concept can be applied to all organisations. The aim of this pedagogical exercise is to get participants to see new ventures as a process of negotiation with all key stakeholders.

2. How is the exercise constructed?

Participants are given an event to organise, preferably one that involves some risk and uncertainty. This can be a business, social enterprise and other (public) activity. They are first asked to identify all the stakeholders, internal and external, who will impact on the success or otherwise of the venture. They are then, using empathy, asked to personalise the key players as far as possible and identify attitudes towards the venture. In particular they are asked to identify: the nature of the interest of the stakeholder in the venture; the benefits to the stakeholder that will be recognised and unrecognised; what exactly they want from the stakeholder; the reasons why the stakeholder might buy into the venture; why they might oppose it; and the importance of the support or otherwise of the stakeholder to the success of the venture.

Having done this for key stakeholders participants are then asked to: assess who might be most supportive of the project and who will be most negative; consider the relationships between the stakeholders if any; identify who among the probable supporters might be used to influence those who have reservations or are likely to oppose. Finally the exercise can be carried forward in reality – if it is a real venture – or by a process of simulation and role play. Strategies for negotiation are developed and played out providing consideration of use of different forms of communication.

Among examples that can be used are: the organisation of a local pop concert for charity; the development of a social enterprise focused upon providing disadvantaged women with families with a greater capacity to find employment or a conventional business start up.

3. Relevance to Entrepreneurial Learning

The emphasis is upon relationship learning and education of stakeholders and the development of trust-based relationships. The focus is upon doing things through people.

4. Outcomes

There will be enhanced capacities to: see all ventures as sets of relationships to be developed; build trust based relationships; develop strategies to build effective networks: and use negotiation skills.