

INNOVATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE GROWING VERMONT STORE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to evaluate the educational impact of experiential entrepreneurship education using the specific case of the Growing Vermont store (GVT) at the University of Vermont (UVM). Variance in entrepreneurship curricula, both content and means of transference, has presented a challenge to educators wishing to prepare students for careers in entrepreneurship. By examining the benefits and consequences of the Growing Vermont program, recommendations can be drawn for future innovation in entrepreneurship education. Additionally, this paper uses a novel means of measuring the change in the entrepreneurial capacity of individuals. Entrepreneurial orientation (EO), proposed by Miller (1983) and refined by Lumpkin & Dess (1996), is used as a means of measuring the extent to which firms exhibit entrepreneurial behaviors. This paper uses the five dimensions of EO to score individuals in order to measure the educational impact of the GVT experience in participants. Finally, this paper develops a model of the relevant factors affecting EO in addition to the simulation of the entrepreneurial process by GVT.

The research uses a mixed methods approach: a pre and post survey measuring individual EO, organizational EO, level of commitment, and relevant skills, characteristics, and behaviors; semi-structured interviews; and journal entries. Restricted by a small sample (13), the author relied on visual analysis to spot trends and test for mitigating factors. Qualitative data is used to further understanding of the causes and effects of these trends. Findings do not reveal any significant change in EO, with nearly equal groups having a positive change (6) and a negative change (5), and only two participants having no change. Factors relating to motivation, such as desire to own a business or commitment to the GVT store, do correlate with a positive change in EO. Different interpretations of EO dimensions by participants suggest that EO may not be suited for measuring individual entrepreneurship capacity.

This study explores a few of the many factors affecting the learning experience of students of entrepreneurship; inconclusive results indicate that a significant element is missing from the experience. Literature suggests that personal risk is an inherent component of entrepreneurship which cannot be simulated in a learning environment. The results of this study support this theory, and suggest that experiential entrepreneurship programs must consider ownership as a critical part of the experience.