

REENGINEERING THE BUSINESS EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF ‘MODULAR CURRICULUM’ OF SAKARYA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with Educational Curricula Design and is set within the context of a national policy agenda to drive forward a knowledge-based economy, and an enterprise society. The study was conducted with all the academic members of staff of Business School of Sakarya University as well as final year and MBA students. An empirical research has been planned to analyse the perceptions of the academic staff and the students on the new coming programme.

The aim of this paper is to develop the argument that university business schools are about to undergo a period of radical transformation as a result of pressure created by developments in external forces and changes in the economic environment favouring the evolution of knowledge work. In particular, the paper will assess the ability of business schools to transform them selves as they come to terms with these environmental changes.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Unemployment is a growing global problem that besets industrialised countries, developing countries and the countries in economic transition alike. Virtually any country in the world is struggling to cope with the limitations of wage labour and the public sector and is turning, either by plan or out of sheer necessity, to the informal sector and self-employment to help address the unemployment problem. The position of business schools has been highlighted as being particularly problematic, primarily because business schools find themselves at the interface of the business and academic worlds. They therefore have to cope with the changing external environment earlier than other more sheltered faculties of the university. The idea of this paper comes from the ‘best practices’ of the British universities in promoting business schools to update their curricula according to the external factors. The British system recommends to higher education institutions that “they consider the scope for encouraging entrepreneurship through innovative approaches to program design and through specialist postgraduate programs”.

In parallel with the necessity to compete in a global market, the government has a lifelong learning agenda that recognizes the need for individuals to engage throughout their lives in a personal process of learning and retraining. A recent trend in business education is to use the Higher Education sector to increase enterprise and entrepreneurship. The aim of this initiative is to increase the commercialization of science and technology from high quality university research, and to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship in business schools. As part of a wider audit of enterprise within the curriculum it has considered how academics themselves define enterprise and thus how their conceptualizations of enterprise influence and shape the curriculum and how enterprise may be embedded within the university.

THE CONTEXT OF THE RE-ENGINEERING

Today's economy is constantly changing, and the trends in business education must change with it. Therefore, the structure of business education has undergone numerous changes and improvements during the past few years, and it is critical that developing countries such as Turkey note these changes in order to establish themselves in the world business arena as competent and reliable partners. To be such a partner, a country needs skilled managers in all areas of business and administration, especially in an environment of globalization where so many businesses must be part of the world economy. A major criticism of contemporary business education centers on its failures to help business students achieve sufficient educational breadth, particularly with regard to the external environment of business faculty and excellent opportunity to address this deficiency. By developing curricular projects linked to community needs, faculty can further their students' technical skills while helping them simultaneously develop greater interpersonal, intercultural, and ethical sensitivity.

The Managers and the entrepreneurs of the future should be professionally educated and equipped with sufficient tools to cope with increasing global competition. The contemporary business education should therefore take into account the changing environment of the domestic and international markets.

METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This research has been conducted in the light of Yin's (1993) case study research. The representativeness of the Department's innovative ideas and practices gave the idea of presenting the case in a form of "case study". Case study research requires a systematic investigation, of one or more organisations, often with data collected over a period of time, with the aim of analysis of both the context and processes of the case under investigation. "Case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of object to be studied" (Stake, 1994:236) and it is also a research strategy that "should not be confused with qualitative research" (Yin, 1994:14). The data collection methods in our case study research have been observation, interviews and questionnaires. Our case study is a single and descriptive, presenting a complete description of a phenomenon within its context, one (Yin, 1993:5).

Case study research has a vital role within the research framework and it has some similarities with qualitative research in general. Because, the selection of cases is very important for the reliability, accuracy and the originality of the qualitative research.

ORGANISATION OF THE CASE STUDY

Sakarya University is one of the newest universities of Turkey founded in 1992. However, in such a short time, the University has been transformed and radically changed its education mentality and procedures. Parallel to its pioneering role in distance education practices in Turkey, the University started to produce high quality publications both in the national and international academic platforms. The Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences is one of the leading faculties of the University in terms of conducting scientific research projects and producing scholarly publications. The Department of Business Administration which has a promising profile of dynamic academics is the most productive department of the faculty. Most of the academics completed their Ph.D.s abroad mostly in the UK and the USA or in high class universities in Turkey.

Next year, Sakarya Business School will be launching what we call a 'modular system' to enhance the quality and the employability of the business education. This system includes placement programmes in the 3rd and final year as well as a tight relationship strategy with the industry. The modules are categorised under the main headings of; HRM, Manufacturing, Marketing, Finance and Accounting. This is a very similar approach to the British universities such as Warwick Business School in terms of business education. In this way, it is expected

that the students will plan their career paths earlier as this will increase the speciality and hence the chance of finding a suitable job with their educational background.

The emphasis of the undergraduate business program of our department is to train and educate students to be business literate people who can adapt increasingly keen global competition. The curriculum includes basic courses on business, social sciences as well as courses related to numerical methods and computer programming. In addition, the program gives an opportunity to select one of the three-specialization areas: Production Management and Marketing, Accounting and Finance, Management and Organization. The objective is to prepare the students for professional life as specialists, or researchers in public and private sectors. Finally, we believe that this program prepares our graduates to be ready for the advances in their field during the 21st century.

Students may specialise in areas such as marketing, operations management, human resource management, production, marketing, finance or accounting. Students may choose modules which lead to professional career options.

The course aims to provide students with:

1. A firm core of knowledge of the basic disciplines which are fundamental to the study of management;
2. Experience of in-depth study in a series of management-related functional areas;
3. The requisite knowledge base for a potential manager, and skills in the application of that knowledge to the analysis and solution of management problems;
4. Preparation for a career in an increasingly dynamic and international business environment, and/or for further study of management at a higher level.

CREATING A SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In the case of Sakarya University, entrepreneurship is seen as a creative and dynamic changing process characterised by learning, experience-orientation, and interaction with the environment. Entrepreneurship as a process is something that concerns the human being as a whole. According to the present concept, entrepreneurship is divided into internal, self-initiated, and external entrepreneurship. The universities and other education institutions should create in the student a capacity for the independent practice of a vocation. The foundations for these attitudes and readiness and skills should be created in the comprehensive school. Quite a number of values, attitudes, fantasies, and prejudices are associated with entrepreneurship. Through entrepreneurship education and training it may be possible to eliminate unnecessary stereotypic viewpoints. In this teachers and teacher training are in a key positions because they convey what they know about entrepreneurship as well as the attitudes they hold towards it to the students. The surrounding culture and the society have a contribution of their own in this regard, Today, the demands of working life call for internal entrepreneurship (so called intrapreneurship) in the worker. By this term we refer to a collective entrepreneurship-oriented attitude within the organisation. One of its features, for example, is teamwork, as well as initiative, creativity, risk-taking ability and a sense of responsibility in the individual.

Entrepreneurship can be considered to be the individual's own development story, in which case the question, is about spontaneous entrepreneurship. This is seen in the entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour of the individual, for example, in learning, in interaction with others, and in the workplace community. Implicit in the exhaustive definition of entrepreneurship is the comprehensive development of the human being as a survivor in changing conditions. The entrepreneur - external, internal and self-reliant - is forever learning something new, also having the ability to meet failures as potential learning situations. According to this view, the different forms of entrepreneurship interrelate to each other and are in a constant state of dialogue with each other.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND TRAINING

What we mean by entrepreneurship education and training of entrepreneurs is the developing of the individual's models of enterprise-oriented thinking and behaviour, as well as increasing his knowledge of the different forms of entrepreneurship. All three forms of entrepreneurship, external, internal and self-initiated, are currently seen as

important properties, with entrepreneurship education and training being considered a necessary process. It is essential to equip the students with learning abilities allowing them to manage in their own life and especially on the labour market. In the United States the revolution into entrepreneurship during the last few decades has been considered to have been more profound a change than was the industrial revolution.

We may well ask, for what kind of world - of the past, the present, or of the future - are we preparing the students? The global markets, changes in the organisations, the advent of teamwork in workplace communities, as well as the emphasis on entrepreneurship, require changes in the skills and attributes of the workers. Entrepreneurship education and training and coaching does not aim merely at the establishing of new companies. It has to be seen in a wider perspective, in which case the goal is to make entrepreneurship a part of the student's life. This way both the new companies and the workplace communities already in existence will reach a higher qualitative level. Knowledge and skills can grow old, but positive values and attitudes do not easily grow old or become forgotten. The spirit of entrepreneurship can therefore be adopted in all the professions and occupations.

The objective, at this point, then, is to bring up individuals acting in the spirit of entrepreneurship in all walks of life. One important form of activity of the entrepreneurship education and training and coaching programme at Sakarya University is the development work and co-operation directed at the existing companies in the region. In practice, this will take place within all the fields of education as theses, as a variety of commercial development projects of companies, as enterprise-oriented learning cases and as applied research activities in the universities. The interaction with companies and other organisations in the world of work must be continuously extended, developed and concentrated to ensure that the learning process of as many students as possible takes place in a real enterprise context, allowing the student to participate in the enterprise's own innovations, this being one of the most important development challenges of our university.

The Department of Business Administration is committed to providing all of its students with an understanding of the global environment. Especially important is the on-going development of an International Business concentration that will provide students with the knowledge and experience to make them competitive in the market. The process is a dynamic one. It is the responsibility of the faculty and the administration to stay current in order to keep the curriculum up-to-date and to look for additional ways to provide the resources necessary to support the program.

NEW INSIGHTS FOR UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY COOPERATION

In his classic study of the competitive advantage of nation states, Porter's analysis of Britain concluded that attention to the education and training system was the most pressing issue facing policy makers and an area in which "current policies provide the least comfort". Without a broader pool of well-trained employees, the competitive advantage of the companies is being constrained. A key part of Porter's solution to the lack of investment in human resource development (HRD) was that firms should forge a much closer working relationship with education providers. According to Porter: "... companies will benefit by working closely with local universities in developing curricula, sponsoring research and in recruiting graduates (p.721).

Results show that there is an increasing trend in university-industry collaboration over the last decade (Caloghirou, 2000). Universities are involved in large and longer-term consortia. Significant participation from peripheral regions is identified along with the emergence of a small group of Universities with involvement in a large number of cooperation initiatives.

Universities both provide the qualified workforce, and participate in the accumulation of scientific knowledge and technology, that industry demands, along with its primary function of education. Today, there is intensive cooperation between university and industry, in industrialized countries such as England and Germany. However

in such countries as Turkey, where research and development (R&D) efforts are far from being adequate, and transfer of technology is preferred rather than designing it, the ways to realize such cooperation are being investigated with the emerging intensive global competition. For this reason, both the universities' and industrialists' ideas, the problems encountered in this process and some proposed solution are analysed in this study.

The socio-economic impact of the higher-education sector on the economy includes three areas: (1) Fundamental and applied research activities of universities contribute to the stock of knowledge in the economy; (2) Universities provide highly trained human resources; (3) the sector supplies ideas and inventions through technology transfer.

To analyse socio-economic impact, economists are obliged to dissociate variables, and the most commonly known work is that which focuses on the impact of academic knowledge creation on samples of firms. Analyses point to increased probability for innovation, profitability and growth among firms, which form linkages with universities, but, to locate and assimilate knowledge, expertise and technology, such firms must already have in-house technical capabilities.

Studies of fast-growing high-technology regions have shown that even if universities are not a direct causal factor, they are certainly one of the catalysts for effective regional economic development. Successful innovation-based regional growth depends on a number of conditions which facilitate university-industry and firm-to-firm communications and collaboration, including:

- a regional knowledge-base, founded on a mix of universities, colleges and research laboratories;
- clusters of large and small high-technology firms;
- proactive support groups and organizations, such as networks, intermediary organizations and business service units working jointly with the regional government;
- adequate local communication and transportation infrastructure which permits access to international, national and local sites;
- a physical closeness between the relevant institutions; and
- complementary federal, provincial and local policies supportive of university-industry links based on research and development and training.

Unfortunately, there appear to be very few recent analytical studies on the impact of Turkish regional organizations on university-industry cooperation and local economic development. It is hoped that by reengineering the business education and also presenting the 'best practices' of the university-industry cooperation, regional development initiatives will be faster and more efficient.

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