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Re-shaping Irish Universities: The Application of Self-Determination Theory to an Entrepreneurial Education Policy.

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Introduction:

"*Entrepreneurs are heroes in our society. They fail for the rest of us….. Courage (risk taking) is the highest virtue. We need entrepreneurs"*

Nassim Taleb (2018: p36 & p189) – Skin in the Game: Hidden Asymmetries in Daily Life.

Drucker (1985) states that entrepreneurship is neither a science nor an art, but a practice. Therefore, this paper works with the assumption that entrepreneurship can be nurtured. The skills and competencies that a deeper learning around entrepreneurship can bring has the potential to make all students more creative individuals. Unfortunately, according to Eurostat (2019), Ireland is one of the worst countries in Europe for start-ups, lagging behind the E.U. average. Additionally, *Entrepreneurship Education at School in Europe* (2015) found that Ireland was the country with the lowest percentage of young people that have started their own business. Is our education system failing to equip our youth with skills and competences needed for entrepreneurship? If this is the case, Ireland needs to implement a policy that can change this, before Ireland becomes even more dependent on multinational/foreign companies for economic growth and employment.

Relative to other countries, a major overhaul is needed for our education policy. Other countries have shown that learning "for" and "about" entrepreneurship can bring many more benefits than just business formation ideas. Even if one does not value entrepreneurship, or has no interest in being an entrepreneur, the skills and competences learned will help every individual, regardless of their career choice. This paper argues that introducing an entrepreneurial education policy in Ireland could reap massive benefits moving forward.

This paper aims to carry out three tasks:

1. To outline an entrepreneurial and enterprise education policy that increases students' autonomy of their own learning experiences.
2. To present a convincing argument of why Ireland should implement this policy moving forward.
3. Recommend plausible and practical actions in order to implement such a policy in Ireland.

This report is structured as follows: Methods outlines the Self-Determination Theory that serves as the theoretical backbone for this argument. Findings presents evidence to back up the need for such a policy and possible solutions towards the improvement of entrepreneurship education. This will build on the theory presented in the Method Section. Conclusions summarizes the argument presented and highlights future lines of research.

Methods:

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of human motivation that examines a wide range of phenomena across gender, culture, age, and socioeconomic status (Ryan and Deci, 2000). It addresses what motivates people's behaviour and what moves them into action. It differentiates between types of motivation based on the reasons or goals that give rise to an action. The biggest distinction is between intrinsic (autonomous) and extrinsic (controlled) motivation. Intrinsic involves doing something because it is inherently/naturally interesting or enjoyable. Extrinsic involves doing something due to it leading to a separable outcome.

According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), humans have three psychological needs that must be in operation, if one wants to engage in creativity activity in a fully motivated way. (i) Autonomy – the need to control the course of their lives. This is the most important need, especially for entrepreneurship. (ii) Competence – having belief and confidence in one's ability to engage in the task. (iii) Relatedness – seeing how the task aligns with one's values and goals. Research of entrepreneurial motivation shows that it is autonomy, not financial gain, that is most often mentioned or rated as the most important motive for starting a new venture (Shane, Locke and Collins, 2003). Moreover, autonomy is also the dominant source of entrepreneurial satisfaction (Van Gelderen, 2010). Autonomy is stifled during secondary school years with a controlled and very rigid curriculum. It is difficult for them to unlearn this regime, and for the third level institutions to foster individuality. If autonomy is the main goal for entrepreneurs, then educators must allow for autonomy in the schooling curricula.

One of the important traits of an entrepreneur is self-confidence; thus, the entrepreneur needs to feel competent in many domains, and this should be developed from an early age. Competence requires positive feedback loops from educators and managers (Stone et al, 2009). However, facilitators should praise effort and strategy, not intelligence (Dweck, 2013:41). Students need to have belief in themselves and making incremental steps towards increasing confidence from a young age is paramount. Therefore, the role of educators here is to install that competence in the student.

Findings:

How do we show students what actual autonomy is, and how can we construct an environment to unleash this potential autonomous drive in students? Relax the controlled and regulated environment; more assignments, case study work and continuous assessments. Currently, students are set up to remember enough material for exams, an exercise in short-term memory retention. Students fall into bad habits such as short-term thinking, diminished tolerance for ambiguity, and narrower focused efforts (Frey and Jegen, 2001). This doesn't allow for the practise of the critical skills found in entrepreneurship. Students aren't being challenged to engage in project and time management. Moreover, case study work and continuous assessments are grounded in a "trial and error" approach. Students get to experiment with ideas – and, more importantly, construct those ideas themselves. No higher power should decide what is best for the student.

Allowing for more continuous assessment will change how the game is played. It wouldn't be just about learning for an extrinsic reward, i.e. grades. It would also be learning for a tangible result. In some ways this involves provoking competencies within the students. As Lobler (2006) noted, in entrepreneurial education the learner must be active in order to gain valuable experience from their activities. Reflection on their activities, and their outcomes, is crucial for their continued success. The role the teacher plays is very important in the reflection process. If we look at the teachers who operate under such a system in Norway, they reported high levels of self-efficacy and job satisfaction (OECD, 2013). Self-efficacy is vital for unleashing creativity (Sternberg, 2006).

The area of 'camp learning' has proven to be successful (EU Expert Group, 2008). This type of teaching involves taking students outside of the usual learning environment, the classroom, and getting them to work on problems and solutions as part of multidisciplinary teams. Entrepreneurship education doesn't solely involve transferring knowledge (Bager, 2011). It involves facilitating the knowledge creation processes. The practical, hands-on, experience is key for students, allowing them to sharpen their analytical and problem-solving skills. Thus, this paper advocates for a camp model-based approach where students of different disciplines work together to find solutions to problems bringing their own unique perspectives and knowledge to the group. This could help them see issues in different ways. Instead of falling prey to stemming their creativity and restricting their way of thinking (Sternberg, 2006), they could realise the importance of assessing topics from multiple disciplines. Essentially, this would involve studying current issues rather than one specific subject/discipline.

By moving students from the spectator seats in the classroom into the real world, they can simulate the experience of being in those positions, being in the action. This hands-on experience can help them learn more about themselves and what their strengths are. This practical knowledge additionally helps with the understanding of the theoretical issues within the field. Parker (2006) examined entrepreneurs and how they change their ways of thinking. He found that entrepreneurs only learned 20% based on new information, at a maximum. They learned up to 80% based on former experience. This outlines the importance of the camp model moving forward.

Conclusions:

Ideas are what Ireland needs, and the application of Self Determination Theory would enhance the creativity in students, if given the chance. The next step is innovation to bring these ideas to market. Unfortunately, this is outside this paper's scope. Further research, and policy recommendations, on how we can finance the young entrepreneur in Ireland would be welcomed here.

Entrepreneurship is not created in a lab; and innovation is not exclusive to science. The success of the entrepreneur is grounded in a trial and error approach. Failure needs to be embraced. Humans learn more when they fail and become more resilient. This paper backs a change in educational policy that equips students with this know-how. While there are some short-term costs, such as the initial costs training teachers, they are outweighed by the long-term benefits. Even if entrepreneurship does not increase, labour productivity will, and students gain the know-how to be more prepared for the work force. The Irish government needs to organise a step-by-step process to increase entrepreneurship in Ireland. As stated, Ireland has (i) the lowest start-ups among young people in Europe, and (ii) one of the lowest start-up rates across all ages in Europe. Moreover, (iii) Ireland

is too dependent on multi-national/foreign firms. Ireland has made great strides in education policy since 1969, when secondary schooling became available for all. Future progress is dependent on embracing change and allowing the youth of Ireland to take ownership of this change.

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