ENHANCING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY: AN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION ECOSYSTEM APPROACH AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

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Abstract - The aim of this paper is to create, develop and disseminate a collaborative guiding framework for an impactful entrepreneurship education ecosystem (EEE) at La Trobe University; based upon theoretical frameworks and international best practice of cross-disciplinary entrepreneurship education (EE) and ecosystems. The purpose is to engage La Trobe University (LTU) stakeholders and wider entrepreneurship community toward aligning with University Essentials, with particular integration of the innovation and entrepreneurship essential, further complementing the Career Ready Advantage capabilities framework of student skills and attitudes. Priority areas, in order of outcomes proposed, include graduate employability (contextually enhanced as creating employment), student satisfaction and teaching and learning quality. Outcomes include a report and framework to inform University stakeholders on the application of a synthesis of best practice entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship ecosystems within the context of the LTU community of practice. Wider dissemination of this first of its kind study to disseminate findings and resources include cross-disciplinary LTU workshops, conference papers, journal articles and a unique scholarship of learning and teaching book on entrepreneurship education ecosystems.

OVERVIEW

Entrepreneurship and engagement are key for Universities that aim to provide greater social, cultural and economic impacts (ACEEU, 2017), and over the last two decades entrepreneurship has been heralded as the solution to many global social, cultural and economic woes (Audretsch, 2014). Recent entrepreneurship studies have provided evidence of the benefits of expanding entrepreneurship ecosystems at higher education, regional, national and international levels; including the promotion of entrepreneurial behavioural patterns of business, individuals and institutions, university-industry-government-partnerships, start-ups, scale-ups, entrepreneurial aspirations and orientation (Belitski and Heron, 2016). Both economic and entrepreneurship literature have devoted increasing attention to university's contribution to society and economic development more directly, through development of entrepreneurship ecosystems and the entrepreneurial university (Markuerkiagaet al., 2016).

An entrepreneurship ecosystem is a system, network or group of interconnectedelements, formed by the interaction of an entrepreneurial community of stakeholders/organisms with their environment (Maritz et al., 2015). University-based entrepreneurship ecosystems havemet with interest from entrepreneurship researchers and entrepreneurship educatorsworldwide, with many academic institutions looking for guidance on how to frame,design, launch and sustain their efforts in the area of entrepreneurship (EU:OECD, 2012; Fetters et al., 2010).For an entrepreneurial university to thrive, it is necessary that it interact within thelarger economic community entrepreneurship ecosystem. Such entrepreneurshipecosystems replace or complement, or even pre-condition to, cluster strategies,innovation systems, knowledge-based economies and national competitiveness policies(Isenberg, 2011). A relatively new body of knowledge on EEE has since been developed, highlighting the central importance of EE on entrepreneurship ecosystems (Belitski and Heron, 2017; Nabiet al., 2017).

The rationale for this paper is strengthened by the positive impact of current initiatives regarding the La Trobe Essentials, Career Ready Advantage (McCormack and Scanlon, 2017) and LTU Strategic Plan (outstanding student experience and student employability specific), particularly cross-disciplinary initiatives centered on the innovation and entrepreneurship essential. The rationale for this paper also includes enhancing momentum on these initiatives, including the launch of the La Trobe Accelerator. An opportunity however now exists to create and develop a collaborative guiding framework for an impactful EEE at La Trobe University; based upon theoretical frameworks and international best practice of cross-disciplinary entrepreneurship education and ecosystems. Such a collaborative and informed framework further enhance priority areas of graduate employability, teaching and learning quality and student satisfaction by providing robust guidelines to achieve excellence across these priority areas.

Theory for practice approach to knowledge and learning

Our approach is guided by a theory for practice-based approaches to knowledge and learning (Rae, 2004). Such an approach views knowledge and practice of

learning and teaching not as a fixed embedded capability, but rather an ongoing social accomplishment constituted and reconstructed as teachers and scholars engage with the world of practice (Johnsson and Boud, 2010). Due to the multi-disciplinary context of this project, such an approach is deemed appropriate as it stresses the importance of conceptuality, participation, expansion, translation, social capital and views practice as simultaneously both individual and collective (Fenwick, 2006). Specific activities included (1) development of a systematic literature review and research agenda on the impact of entrepreneurship education; (2) development of a systematic literature review and research agenda on the impact of entrepreneurship education ecosystems (including university-industry-government partnerships), and (3) International best practice international entrepreneurship ecosystem site visits and interviews. Three best practice institutions were visited, Stanford University (Stanford Technology Ventures), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the EU:OECD Entrepreneurial and Engaged University Association (ACEEU).

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the transformative paradigm, we use a participatory action research (PAR) methodology to explore the current status of engagement and application of the La Trobe Essentials (specific to innovation and entrepreneurship) at la Trobe University. We believe a qualitative approach to be appropriate to gather in-depth data from multi-disciplinary platforms. In line with the PAR approach, an emergent enquiry paradigm will be initiated as a form of collaborative or participative action research (Keegan, 2019). We regard this as a platform for dialogue that is shared, ongoing, iterative learning and emergent due to divergence. Specific activities include identifying and analysing exemplar La Trobe University wide subjects/courses/initiatives adopting the innovation and entrepreneurship essentials and interviewing prominent stakeholders of the identified La Trobe University EEE. Such participants may include, for example, DVC (Academic), PVCs (Colleges, Graduate Coursework, Industry Engagement, International), the College Chairs of Learning and Teaching, Heads of Schools, School Learning and Teaching Associates, Accelerator Director, External Partners and other relevant stakeholders. It is proposed that approximately 15 interviews be conducted.

Synthesis of data analysis, activities and initiatives

Upon completion of the above two methodological approaches, this stage incorporates the empirical analysis of interviews and emergent enquiry using a qualitative analysis platform such as NVIVO. Thereafter, all the data from the two approaches will be integrated to develop an EEE framework, specific to contextual inferences and enquiry to La Trobe University. The final stage will include dissemination to La Trobe University stakeholders; and ultimately wider dissemination through scholarship of learning and teaching avenues such as impactful conferences, journals and a dedicated book publishing initiative (such as Routledge).

Outcomes

The proposed deliverables for the project include engaging entrepreneurship communities and stakeholders in the EEE agenda, supporting development, curriculum and assessment renewal through EEE framework development. This is accomplished by including: (1) A final peer reviewed (reference group) report to the University and SOTL Executive summarising an EEE framework for activation and implementation. This will include external synthesis of EEE from 3 prominent and best-practice site visits; systematic literature reviews and recommendations on EE and EEE; engagement and application of EEE at LTU, and a final conceptual framework of EEE recommendations at LTU; (2) Supporting evidence will include documentation and data on all empirical components of the study, together with implementation and evaluation of a professional development (PD) process with project team members; (3) Strengthened collaboration, communication and teamwork across the LTU EEE. From a sustainability perspective, such collaboration is intended to extend to broader regional and national entrepreneurship ecosystems; (4) Establishment of a community of practitioners committed to enhancing the quality of a LTU EEE; (5) Workshops to support the implementation of a robust EEE at LTU; (6) Scopus and web of science conference papers and journal articles to disseminate findings and resources; (7) A dedicated peer review book on EEE's, featuring LTU as a case perspective (Routledge or Edward Elgar Publishers); (8) Press releases of outcomes, such as Campus Review, The Conversation and LTU media channels, and (8) External evaluation report on the proposed outcomes, project processes, impact and sustainability.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This is still a work-in-progress paper, and the authors confirm results will be available to be presented at the ICEBM Conference in November 2017.

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