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INNOVATIVE TRAINING METHODS IN BUSINESS HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract: A unique business-oriented educational method was launched in 2010 at the University Of Debrecen, Hungary, in the Faculty Of Applied Economics and Rural Development; the method has existed in the JAMK University of Applied Science in Jyväskylä (Finland) since 1993, and is called Team Academy. The gist of this training is that the students learn entrepreneurship through their 'living' organisations with the application of the principle 'learning-by-doing'. Besides developing the students' entrepreneurial competencies and skills, this educational model also offers team coaching tools to develop teams of 12-13 students that can cooperate in an efficient way. The key point of Team Academy, which has been launched in several European higher education institutes over the past years (e.g. Spain, France, the Netherlands, etc.), is that the most efficient way of learning how to operate a successful company is to learn it in practice.
During the professional and project trainings, the cooperation of the team and their company's efficiency is continuously developing with the help of team coaches. A quite wide variety of team coaching tools is used in this system, e.g. 360◦ evaluation, which is a very important tool of human resource management. Feedback from students also plays an important role in developing team cooperation; the professional frame for this is also given by the above-mentioned methodology. This method is used successfully at the Debrecen Team Academy which / and (do you mean that the a) Team Academy or b) the above-mentioned methodology will be presented? If B), then write 'and' instead of 'which') will be presented in this study. A database of 150 questionnaires is analysed through qualitative research methods.

Key words: higher education, entrepreneurship development, learning by doing

Motto

Tell me and I will forget; show me and I will learn;
let me do it and I will understand it!

(Confucius)

An introduction to the Team Academy model

The basic principle and gist of Tiimiakatemia (Team Academy), which has proved to be a very efficient learning method and was introduced in 1993 in Jyväskylä (Finland), involves experiential learning, the application of 'learning by doing'. This well-recognised method combines higher education and the business world and has received several Finnish professional awards as well as the OECD award in 2006 because of its novelty. All teams operate as independent cooperative companies. Students have to do real-life projects, which they have to find themselves, to cover all the expenses of the company. Projects function both as learning environments (for studies and developing the individual's competence) and as ways of doing business (for team companies). Learning is a process that is not divided into modules or subjects like marketing or leadership. Tiimiakatemia has no legal control over its team companies; it only provides the coaching for the learning process. The main methods are learning by doing and team learning. Projects offer opportunities to apply studied theory directly to practice and also provide a platform for students to reflect on theory in light of their own experiences while studying. Teams use dialogue as a tool to share knowledge and think together. The purpose of dialogue is to go beyond one individual's understanding – the whole organises the parts, rather than trying to pull the parts into a whole. In dialogue, people become observers of their own thinking. Team Academy is a "flat organisation"; thus, instead of involving a hierarchy, the management is done by using leading thoughts. Thus, it is the coaches' and leaders' main function to continuously remind everybody of these values. (I1)

Each Team Academy student takes intensive training in leadership, entrepreneurship and marketing as a member of a team through real life project work. The Team Academy is open for business students but based on its experiences, a set of courses promoting entrepreneurship has been developed for all students, entitled "the path for nascent entrepreneurs" (OECD, 2011).

At the University of Debrecen's Faculty of Applied Economics and Rural Development, Team Academy started operation in 2010. Students of Finance and Accounting, Commerce and Marketing, and Tourism and Catering BSc programmes partook in this training from their 5th semester onwards.

The core idea of the training is based on the principle of 'learning by doing'; the students found a limited liability company just like in Finland and work in small groups on several projects. Each teampreneur's academic studies are approximately 3,5 years long in total. Each team organises its activities as a real-life team company that is owned entirely by the teampreneurs and is totally independent from Team Academy as a juridical entity.

The learning path involves doing three things (Partanen, 2012):

Training sessions: Teampreneurs participate in team coaching sessions twice a week for four hours at a time with their team. These are called "training sessions", and use a learning organisation practice called "dialogue", facilitated by a team-coach who uses questions to steer the dialogue. Sometimes team members might organise brainstorming sessions to solve difficult problems or hold presentations and lectures for each other on theoretical subjects.

Projects: the project is the learning process where the rubber meets the road. Teampreneurs carry out projects **to the business life** using their team company as a vehicle to get them done. They are responsible themselves for finding clients, negotiating with them on the projects, signing contracts and doing the jobs they have promised to do.

Theory programme: Learning by doing and training sessions are supported with a theory programme. This consists of reading 50-60 management books that are chosen from The Book of Books – a catalogue that has approximately 1000 book recommendations to choose from. For each book, the teampreneur writes a reflective essay on it. The key idea of the theory programme is to support "applying theory to practice" and vice versa.

Concrete tools, methods and concepts in Team Academy:

- Team coaching
- Before and after Action Reviews (Pre- and Post-Motorolas)
- Internal community meeting days (Houston calling)
- Network days and forums (seminars and conferences)
- Individual's competency assessment (Skill profile)
- Team quality assessment (Quality 47)
- Leading thoughts (vision, mission, values, principles, etc.)
- Internal leadership program
- Rules of dialogues
- Brand envelope
- HIT MR Leadership philosophy
- Leadership positions within Team Academy
- Competency demonstrations (Birth Givings)
- Around-the-World Trip (concrete goal of team, TA Jyvaskyla)
- Individual's development discussions

In this paper, we would like to present the method of 360 degree evaluation, a tool for assessing an individual's competency, which is a special method in Team Academy as well as being an applied method in the business world.

360 degree evaluation in the model of Team Academy

In the Skill Profile, the term "skill" refers to extensive competences. It is a consciously chosen term, because the concept of competence sounds slightly artificial. Skill, on the other hand, is a genuine and basic word referring to mastery. The word "skill" in the Skill Profile contains the "five fingers" of the "learning hand" defined in the EU: (1) knowledge, (2) skills, (3) experiences, (4) contacts and (5) attitudes.

The Skill Profile consists of 21 skills that are important for Teampreneurs, divided into three categories: (1) team learner, (2) team leader and (3) teampreneur.

(1) Team learner: Information processing and IT-skills, Team learning skills, Personal skills and attitudes towards learning to learn, Creativity skills, Internationality skills, Communication skills, Initiative
(2) Team leader: Self-leadership skills, Project leading skills, Team leadership skills, Planning skills, Coaching skills, Strategic skills, Courage to make choices and Goal-orientation
(3) Team entrepreneur: Service, Negotiation and selling skills, Understanding of financial issues, Marketing skills, Innovation skills, Entrepreneur's modelling and theory skills, Networking skills, Courage and desire to break boundaries

Each skill is given a score according to the skill level:

Table 1. Scoring of the Skill Profile

Points	Level	General description
0	No know-how	Has no command at all of the skill, no knowledge or experience in the area.
1	Beginner	Understands the basics of the skill area, but has little practical experience (a few experiments).
2	Advanced beginner	Understands the theoretical background and also has a little more profound knowledge. Has some experience in using the skill (has completed a project in which the skill area has been practised significantly).
3	Practised	Has profound knowledge of the skill area and experience in using the skill (2-3 projects in which the skill area has been practised and/or has had a leadership position in the skill area).
4	Experienced	Has profound, diverse knowledge of the skill area, and has significant experience in using the skill (several projects and/or leadership positions).
5	Expert	Has extremely strong mastery of the skill area in both theory and practice. Is capable of working as an initiating expert in the area.

Source: Partanen, 2012

The scoring of skills is a way of understanding your own know-how. However, the numbers do not tell the whole truth – many important things are beyond their scope.

Roadmap for using the Skill Profile

1. Personal evaluation of skills
2. Asking for feedback from team members, coaches and customers about personal skills
3. 360° evaluation. The more people give to the teampreneur feedback, the better.
4. Reflection phase. Examine the evaluation through conversations in the team company. The idea is to acquire development tips to improve skills. When Skill Profile has been discussed, the teampreneur can set new objectives; the Learning Contract is the best tool for this.

In the model of Team Academy, this 360 degree evaluation starts with a quite strict (strict in what way??) self-assessment, after which the team members, coach and customers also add their point of views. The team then discusses the results in the form of dialogue, focussed on each teampreneur's improvement. The new goals which arise will be set in the Learning Contract of the teampreneurs.

360 degree evaluation in the business world

360 degree evaluation as used at the University of Debrecen's Team Academy is quite similar to the one used by HR professionally in the business world used for the evaluation of managers. After self-evaluation, the individual is analysed from all "angles" (i.e. 360 degrees). After this self-evaluation, the individual is evaluated by his/her supervisor(s), colleagues and staff. The tests are anonymous, so the colleagues can give their honest opinion on the individual and his/her work. Its application happens in different ways, such as with a pre-prepared evaluation paper, orally or in writing. The evaluated individual evaluates him- or herself using the same questionnaire as the colleagues, thus making more objective.

To supplement the methodology of Team Academy we applied this 360 degree evaluation in the Autumn semester of 2012. We focused on the fields shown in Table 2 and asked questions from a pre-prepared questionnaire. The results of both the teampreneurs' self-evaluation and the other team members' evaluations were discussed at a special training **in dialogues of the teampreneurs and coaches**.

Field of the questionnaire on 360 degree evaluation

Application of professional knowledge: *The individual bears the knowledge and skills needed for his/her position, can apply them properly and in a creative way in his/her work, and can share his/her knowledge in an efficient way and improve it continuously.*

Communication, relationship management: *The individual's behaviour and communication is trustworthy, plain, flat (??? sounds negative) and persuasive. He/she considers his/her partner's signs and applies the tools of informatics in a creative way. He/she is able to make contacts and to maintain it to represent the company. He/she is able to manage conflicts properly.*

Reliability, taking responsibilities: *The individual knows and observes the regulations for his/her position. He/she can apply the regulations in a trustworthy manner and can judge the acceptable differences. He/she proposes a correction if it is needed. He/she weighs up his/her judgements and arrangements. He/she fulfils tasks with responsibility, independently and precisely. He/she undertakes decisions, recognises mistakes and corrects these on his/her own.*

Cooperation: *The individual can cooperate with different partners efficiently. He/she is able to form team norms and to keep him/herself and other teampreneurs to them as well. He/she acts according to the roles in the team. He/she is able to follow team goals and/or to take part in their forming. He/she manages the rate of trust and request correctly.*

Management of complexity: *The individual is able to think, decide and act in a complex way in routine and open situations. He/she applies the tools of cause and effect analysis and problem solving, and can set and/or accept goals. He/she plans his/her activity, carries it out according to the plans, analyses, evaluates the results and makes/suggests corrections if needed. During decision-making, he/she considers the spheres of action and tasks.*

The evaluations of these characteristics are evaluated on a 6 degree scale, where the values mean the following:

(1) poor
(2) sufficient
(3) less than average
(4) better than average
(5) good
(6) excellent

The questionnaire was filled in by teampreneurs for themselves and for other students in written form.

During the dialogue the teampreneurs reviewed their self-evaluations based on the most important competences; after that, they listened to the feedback of the other teampreneurs and coaches.

Each teampreneur received his/her evaluation in the form of a diagram (Appendix 1) and a questionnaire (Appendix 2) that showed the comparison of their self-evaluation and the other students' opinions. Through this diagram, they could see more clearly which fields are to be improved based on their own opinion and on that of the other team members.

After this evaluation, the teampreneurs continued their work taking into consideration the 'criticism' they had received through the 360 degree evaluation, focusing more on the fields to be improved. This 360 degree complex evaluation is done every year in the teams with the help of their coaches.

Summary

Performance evaluation is a key factor in human resource management. One of the most important goals of its application is to enhance the individual's performance and to evolve their skills as much as possible. 360 degree evaluation ensures a communication path between the individuals at a company, through which they can express what they expect or wish from one another. The application of this method is quite novel in business higher education, as is the methodology of Team Academy. However, based on the Finnish experience, its efficiency is incomparable. Nowadays, the need for self-employment and entrepreneurial activity is increasingly apparent in Hungary, and the application of the Team Academy methods and continuous, fully comprehensive performance evaluation is of prime importance in helping to fulfil this need.

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