

Panel Discussion: Design & Entrepreneurship Education

Thursday 9th September, 10-11am

Parallel Sessions 1, Notes from Diwakar Thakore

After a thoroughly entertaining and highly pertinent opening day keynote address on the need to teach failure in design and entrepreneurship by Heidi Roizen, former entrepreneur, VC and now Entrepreneur-in-Residence at the Entrepreneurship Club of the University of Edinburgh Business School, the first panel discussion of the Accel REE Europe 2010 took place. Entitled 'Design and Entrepreneurship Education, the panel brought together an impressive mix of design and entrepreneurship teachers to discuss how design thinking and methodologies can enrich and enhance the pedagogies and approach to teaching entrepreneurship.

Representing the University of Edinburgh was John Lee, the Professor of Digital Media and co-founder of the university's MSc programme in Design and Digital Media taught at the School of Art, Culture and Environment. He was joined by Dr. Sheila Danko, Professor and Chair Department of Design and Environmental Analysis at Cornell University, Dr. Geoff Archer, Associate Professor and Director of the Eric C. Douglass Centre for Entrepreneurial Studies at Royal Roads University, Canada and Arthur E. Lindemanis, Head of Entrepreneurship Department at RISEBA, Latvia.

Moderated by our very own Michael Clouser the panellists discussed a range of crucial issues, beginning with the simple questions of the similarities and difference in design and entrepreneurship education and how much of design thinking was being currently used in teaching entrepreneurship at their respective institutions. Dr. John Lee was optimistic but cautionary, pointing out the cultural shift that he experienced at his university where design thinking is now embedded in two Masters programmes on tech-entrepreneurship and digital marketplace that could never ever be conceivable in the past. Expanding on this point, he noted that design thinking incorporates a rounded holistic and creative approach to business problems.

Dr. Sheila Danko was far less optimistic in her assessment, claiming that the design can change concepts of business and should become an integral part of the entrepreneurship pedagogy. She pleaded her case forcefully as to why entrepreneurship should care about design. Expanding she said 'the most powerful social institution for change is business' and 'design equips one with tools to effect those changes'. In response to its potential learning outcome, she

said that sustainable design practices expands the concept of leadership, encourages social responsibility and helps entrepreneurs think out of box.

When the same question was posed to former entrepreneur and VC, Dr. Lindemanis , he seemed to agree more with Sheila, noting that how he has moved away from the traditional teaching tools of power point slides and text books. Crucially, as he has to teach Latvian students who typically have full time jobs and considerable working experience, Dr. Lindemanis said that he developed living case studies from Latvia rather than traditional self-contained borrowed ones to help think critically and motivate a mind-shift that enables them to undertake international ventures with confidence.

Finally, Dr. Archer concurred that different eco-systems needed different teaching approaches. He claimed that as his students were also working full-time and matured, the online courses were designed to be asynchronous where all potential questions have to be anticipated and incorporated at the design stage. Like Dr. Lindemanis , he also stressed the central importance of non-traditional teaching explaining how Hollywood movies was an essential part of his teaching curriculum.

In the closing minutes of the discussion, the floor was opened to the audience who asked a number of interesting questions. Chief among them was a request to Dr. Lee to explain the assessment of the design courses to which he commented that it was a subjective procedure where every student was assessed individually by teacher's consensus. The audience also made some incisive comments on the difficulty in unravelling the natural outcome of design and the prediction of creativity. However, what left the audience much take in and think about was Dr. Lindemanis's repartee that traditional western management practices are dinosaurs waiting to be swept away by the tsunami of new thinking and approaches, design being the chief among them.

Thus, this impressive and informative discussion was concluded setting the tone for a successful second day of the conference.