

## **Debating the soft support of starting entrepreneurship in an educational setting.**

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### **Abstract**

There are all kind of support programs to support entrepreneurship. There are several ways of supporting entrepreneurship, where the person, the entrepreneur, is seen as one of the key factors for stimulating entrepreneurship. The support of the person is what I mention as soft support. To avoid confusion and to get insight in the different kinds of soft support of the entrepreneur, different terms used for this support should be put into perspective.

Soft support like coaching, mentoring, consulting etcetera is already known in ancient history. The last century this kind of support developed a lot and since the start of this century it became more professional with an emerging number of papers about this subject as a result and also as a result a lot of different definitions which makes it confusing. This will not end by struggling about these definitions. Better look at the similarities in supporting personal development.

The designed soft support model can be used to talk about similarities instead of differences, without neglecting the large variation in soft support. There are some models that describe the same sort of variation, but only from one perspective e.g. coaching or mentoring. This model combines those models into one common model that can be used to point out where to place the different sorts of personal support. The axes, used to combine supporting methods like coaching, mentoring, supervision, teaching etcetera, are about how the supporter is behaving. On one hand there is the direction of the goal; focusing on the person or focusing on the business, and on the other hand the intensity of leading; directive or non-directive.

Some of the aspects of soft support, like teaching, are already know for a long time in education. Others, like coaching, are not so commonly known in education. While the education of entrepreneurs needs an entrepreneurial way of education, which means that there need to be an assortment of roles while supporting these students. This implies that the traditional teacher, who is most times not capable of fulfilling all these rolls, can't educate entrepreneurship well enough. The soft support model helps to discuss about these rolls and to construct an education system for entrepreneurship.

This paper will help to incorporate personal development into entrepreneurship education. For this reason this paper gives an overview of the field of soft supporting, especially for starting entrepreneurship. This overview helps to discuss about this topic and to decide what elements are needed for entrepreneurship education. It also gives an overview (leading to a taxonomy) of a field where there is much confusion, struggle and diversity in the definitions and terms being used and very little known about cooperation between these fields.

### **Introduction**

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education is seen as an important engine for economic growth. (Minniti and Lévesque, 2010, Thurik and Wennekers, 2004, Zalan and Lewis, 2010) Also policy makers are consequently interested in this field. Raposo and Paco (2011) reported

also an important connection between entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial activity. Apparently there seems to be consensus among policymakers, academics, researchers and economists that entrepreneurship education is probably the one of the best ways to contribute to economic growth. (Khan, 2011, Audretsch, 2004)

A lot of programs, developed by the government, universities and other public and private organizations, are stimulating entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship, but the way they are supporting is very diverse. (Ratinho et al., 2010, Bruneel et al., 2012, Vanderstraeten et al., 2012) It is possible to stimulate entrepreneurship with all kinds of support. For instance there is governmental support by taxes (reduction), subsidies, infrastructure, buildings etc. This type of support I call hard support. Another way of support is more focusing on the person, the entrepreneur; the soft support. As Zalan and Lewis (2010) for example say; one of the key factors in stimulating entrepreneurship is the person; the entrepreneur. This means that (personal) education in entrepreneurship is helping economic growth. Also Raposo and Páco (2011) acknowledge that supporting the person (the entrepreneur) is as one of the key factors in stimulating entrepreneurship. This support is also a main factor in avoiding failure. (Parsa, 2005) This kind of soft support is known under various terms; coaching, mentoring, supervision, guiding, training, teaching, counseling, moderating, advising, etc. This also is the main stream in educational settings and should thereby be important for entrepreneurship education.

The different ways and terms of behavior at soft support often a battlefield of spelling out the differences and building walls around a term to avoid infection of other terms. That's why in this paper the different ways of personal support is being put into a scheme. This scheme helps to put the various terms into perspective. Adding another definition to those that already are being used wouldn't be very helpful. This scheme is more focusing on the corresponding elements and not so on the differences. Having done this, the development of entrepreneurship education, and more the discussion about it, can be done according to this scheme.

The questions in this paper focus on the qualities of people and teams needed for entrepreneurship education. Different kinds of people can give different sorts of soft support. To make sure that the person (the entrepreneur) is stimulated not only one element or in one direction, different kinds of support would be fruitful.

## **Background**

The discipline of mentoring and coaching already has a long history. The first known is in Homer's *Odyssey* where Ulysses as king of Ithaca, left to make war on the Trojans. He entrusts his son Telemachus and his wife Penelope to his friend Mentor. (Robinson, 1984) During that period Telemachus had grown in wisdom and could function independently. Mentor guided him in this transition. (Baroness, 1995) Also the ancient Greeks used coaching and mentoring to teach protégées. Known names are Socrates, Plato. Where Socrates is named as Plato's mentor, teacher etcetera. (Garvey et al., 2009, St-Jean and Audet, 2009)

Also in the last century coaching evolved, from counselors and therapists in the 1930s-50s, executive- and business coaching in the 1960s-80s, where also sports coaching became more psychological, until the 1990s and later, where coaching became more professional and evidence based. (Brock, 2012, Grant and Cavanagh, 2004) This evolution came along with all kinds of definitions of, for example coaching and mentoring. There is some similarity on these definitions but there is no generally acknowledged definition and also a growing variety in sorts of coaching like coaching, executive coaching, business coaching, life coaching. (Hamlin

et al., 2009) In total they collated 36 definitions of coaching. And Haggard et al. (2010) found about 40 different definitions of mentoring.

In today's practice coaching and mentoring is often used with a wide range of theories and methodologies like executive coaching, business coaching, consulting, counseling, human resource management, training, psychology, therapy, teaching, advising, sponsoring (Greene and Grant, 2003, Ives, 2008, Sperry, 2008, Levinson, 1978, Feldman, 2005) This is also clear when we look at the literature of coaching, mentoring, etcetera. In this paper all these kinds of support are collected under the name 'Soft Support'

### **Literature about soft support**

There has been some research on soft support in a business environment, but most of what has been published about this field in a business setting is about business support or supporting (executive) managers.-(Bernardez et al., 2007, Devins and Gold, 2000, St-Jean and Audet, 2009) Since the start of this century the literature about coaching did explode. In the more than 50 years between 1937 and 1994 there were almost as many papers and PhD dissertations as there were in 3 years between 2000 and 2003. (Grant and Cavanagh, 2004) This makes it clear that the interest of this subject is growing but still young. Spence (2007) argues that the adoption of evidence-based coaching needed to prevent the disintegration into faddism and extremism. Most researchers see similar principles in soft support; developmental interactions. (D'Abate et al., 2003, Abiddin, 2006) Still most of literature about this is written about the differences of coaching and mentoring or other forms of soft support. Shrewsbury and Health Libraries (Law et al., 2010) describes 26 papers and books that are about that difference. But there are much more papers describing the differences. (Goldberg, 2010, Hoepfner, 2006, Coll and Raghavan, 2011)

Although some of them also try to find similarity. (Klofsten and Öberg, 2008, Hahn, 2008) or use that interchangeably. (Jones et al., 2009) Clutterbuck (2008) says that when each group is trying to defend its own territory and trying to lad-grab by defining the terms, confusion about this is becoming more and more. He also concludes that this makes it more difficult to clarify the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring. That's why it is interesting to make a construct that can combine different ways of soft support without falling into the trap of definitions. D'Abate et al. (2003) already made an attempt to do this, when she makes some matrixes to understand the state of the literature. But in the end she concludes that the findings can be used to form more complete and sound definitions of developmental interactions constructs. But she also advises to review the matrices and that is less about the construct's name and more about the characteristics that are used to describe the construct.

### **Modeling the soft support**

To give a look at the different elements that are used to describe support of personal development or soft support we see some directions that are used more often. Soft support can be done in a more or less directive way.(Hamlin et al., 2009) The coach can have different roles in the interaction; from sounding board related to mental health services (Berman and Bradt, 2006) to an adviser related to decision making. (Drucker, 2005) In general the support can focus on development of the individual or on the resolution of problems. (Wise and Voss, 2002)

A (support)session can also have different focusses. Cavanagh (2006) argues that expert knowledge is critical to coaching, which implies that the coach can also advise or guide. While Stober and Grant (2006) state that asking the right questions is what coaches should prefer; which implies a more free session, although they also say both approaches lay on a continuum and do not exclude each other. This multifaceted role of the coach is also

recognized by Forde et al. (2012) who finds out that in coaching, expertise should be set aside while on the other hand professional experience is being privileged.

This leads to two elements for soft support; Role and Agenda. (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006) Where the role is giving direction or goal to a support relation, which differs from skill or business oriented to personal development and the agenda which is the way a supporter acts during a session, which differs from a fixed or directive way to a free or non-directive way. This can also be combined with the coaching behavior model of Haan and Burger (2007) and Heron (2001), and also with Berman and Bradt (2006), Ives (2008) and D'Abate et al. (2003). Also Clutterbuck (1998) describes a continuum of who is in control of a coaching session and who determines what is discussed.

In table 1 this coaching behavior is shown, where on the horizontal axis is the role, from skills or business oriented to individual development and on the vertical axis is the agenda, from fixed or directive to free or non-directive support. Although there are four behaviors shown, the behavior is a continuum on the two axes and can also be diverted into more behavior, like Jenkins (2007) shows.

**Table 1**

**Soft support behavior**

		Role	
		Skills / organization oriented	Personal development
Agenda	Fixed/Directive	Problem solving / Challenging	Focus on insight / Liberating
	Free/Non-directive	Solution oriented / Clarifying	Personal focus / Empowering

In this table, challenging is a confronting and directive support by providing feedback, discuss about the excuses and defenses in order to stimulate self-reflection. This will help to solve the problem that is been experienced. Liberating is also confronting and directive but now by active listening and then describing and summarizing the feelings and emotions, to provide other perspectives. It is directed to diminish psychological barriers. Clarifying is more supportive, non-directive way of support, by transferring knowledge and presenting other perspectives and interpretations. This support is done to avoid double meanings which helps to answer questions. Empowering is a support behavior by showing trust, appreciation and commitment in order to improve the confidence of the supported. This is very depending on the person that is supported.

When using table 1, a lot of rolls of soft support can be categorized. Where the coaching definitions are most times focusing on the personal development, teaching is most times focusing on skills of a person to be capable of functioning in an organization and mentoring is most times also focusing on skills but then in a more specific problem. An adviser then focuses most times only on the solution of a problem and intervision is focusing on insight.

**Soft support in entrepreneurship education**

Effective coaches often do tell they educate their clients. They share their mental models, and tell them things when the answer eludes the client and also spend a lot of time asking. (Cavanagh, 2006) And also Griffinths and Campbell (2009) explains that learning is inherently recognized in the process of coaching. A good coach can switch roles and can have different approaches but they also have a dominant approach. (Pouls, 2011)

To find out more about the influence that people (can) play in the education of entrepreneurship we are looking at the role that people (teachers) play in education. It is known that educating entrepreneurs needs different methods and need to be taught entrepreneurially. (Fayolle, 2006, Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes, 2012) One of the differences is that a teacher should be like a fellow learner/facilitator instead of leading or guiding and being dominant. (Gibb, 1996) That's where terms like personal development, (action) learning and tutoring are showing up. Walter and Dohse (2012) indicate that education methods, like active modes, are (positively) influencing the entrepreneurial education. This is also supported by Neck and Greene (2011) as they conclude that the education structure requires a new approach based on action and practice. Whereas Mathews (2007) argues that constructivism lends to learning that is action-based where learners construe or make interpretations of their world through interactions in the real world. Besides that entrepreneurship needs other skills or competences. (Binks et al., 2006, Groen et al., 2002, Kutzhanova et al., 2009, Leitch et al., 2012)

Knowing this gives an idea of the rolls a teacher should play when he or she teaches entrepreneurship. These rolls are the same as for soft support. That's not so strange because teaching is all about personal development, although teaching entrepreneurship is more that. (Mathews, 2007) The contribution of entrepreneurial education also grows from personal development in the beginning, to more problem solving when students have grown in what they want; from enterprise awareness, entrepreneurial mindset, capability to overall effectiveness. (QAA, 2012) However this is not a linear process but it's more iterative. This grow from personal development to problem solving means that you need to have different rolls all over the education process. Abiddin and Turiman (2009) recognizes these: Teacher, Mentor, Adviser, Guidance, Coach, Role model and Counselor.

### **Questions, challenges and problem to be asked and addressed**

What has been shown before is that soft support makes use of a great variety of terms, depending on the researcher and field of the research. What they do, can be addressed to a limited number of dimensions. The dimension of facilitating or guiding is very prominent and is also quit distinctive to what is been used in education. Where a (traditional) teacher is most times guiding the student, a (student-)mentor or coach is more facilitating the student and helping with the personal development. Entrepreneurial attitude is seen as distinctive between undergraduates minored in entrepreneurship and non-entrepreneur undergraduates. (Shariff and Saud, 2009) The used variables; innovation, achievement, self-esteem and personal control, are also recognized in by the Grant and Cavanagh (2004) in their behavior outcomes of graduates; opportunity recognition, problem solving, taking action, managing autonomously, personal awareness, and networking and communication. Traditionally business schools have problems in educating these elements. (Furr, 2011, Sarasvathy, 2009, Hammer, 2012) So we could conclude that teaching entrepreneurship is more about personal development and entrepreneurial attitude than business schools are used to do. (Brand et al., 2007) Which brings up the question:

- ***Is “entrepreneurial attitude” the missing part for entrepreneurship education?***

The entrepreneurial education however is moderated by the regional context. (Walter and Dohse, 2012) This also has its influence on the education of attitude, where Lindsay (2005) argues that culture needs to be included in entrepreneurial attitude training. So entrepreneurship education, and specially the attitude element, can't be generalized in different cultures. This means that educating the entrepreneurial attitude needs knowledge

about the personal culture; so should be designed personally. Does this mean that everyone that should be trained in entrepreneurship should be taught individually, at least for the attitude element? Or could we generalize culture so far that we can find, and group, similar entrepreneurs? This brings up the question:

- ***How can an entrepreneurial attitude be taught?***

Leitch et al. (2012) conclude that entrepreneurship education can have impact on individual level and organizational level. This means that educating entrepreneurship needs all kind of rolls of soft support. Where some of the training programs and business schools focus on developing the business (Gibb, 2007, Binks et al., 2006) most have a more multi-dimensional approach. (Khan, 2011, Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes, 2012, Grant and Cavanagh, 2004, Lambalgen et al., 2012) Also in the newest business incubators, participants make more use of personal development service. (Bruneel et al., 2012) There seems to be consensus about the importance of personal development in entrepreneurship. So the question is perhaps not IF entrepreneurship should contain both aspects but more if personal development has the same importance as knowledge. Which brings up the question:

- ***Can entrepreneurship education focus on teaching, or should personal development have the same importance?***

As shown before entrepreneurship education needs different directions of soft support; the personal development and the business orientation. Where personal development is focusing on insight and personality this looks a lot like the mentoring program (coaching) of schools. Developing skills which is focusing on the business is more focusing on problems and solutions. This has a lot of familiarity with the traditional teaching programs. (Gibb, 1996) The question is if both approaches should be done by the same person, which makes is easier for the student or it be done by different persons where the quality of both approaches is better and the strengthen training? This brings up the question:

- ***Should the mentoring program and the teaching program for entrepreneurial education be in the same hand for the best results or are they so diverse that a supporter (teacher, mentor) can't do both and should be done by different persons?***

### **Implications**

Most of the designs of entrepreneurship education is business oriented; focusing on business plans, finance, marketing, etc., while the importance of the personal approach is known as very important. (Gustafsson-Pesonen and Remes, 2012) This paper helps to discuss about how to incorporate personal development into entrepreneurship education. When using the different directions of soft support, you can see that teaching or training is one element of that soft support. The presented model of soft support can be very helpful to recognize the different directions of supporting entrepreneurs. The questions will help to think about the way entrepreneurship education should be designed. That are the elements that are needed for entrepreneurship education and how they should work together. For research it also gives an overview of a field (coaching, mentoring, consulting, teaching) where there is much confusion and diversity in the definitions and terms being used. Using this model will help to connect the research that is done and will be done in this field, without adding another definition that only will divert the fields further.

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