PROMOTING GROWTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH E-MENTORING (SUMMARY)

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SUMMARY

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Principal Topic

Research shows that new innovative operational models promoting growth entrepreneurship created collaboratively by higher education institutions and entrepreneurial organisations are needed (Leppisaari & Tenhunen 2007; EU Green Paper 2003; MOE 2009; Collins, Smith & Hannon 2006). In the eMGE (eMentoring promoting Growth Entrepreneurship) project examined in this article, the aim has been to create a virtual learning environment, which through the application of research, education and coaching and the deployment of e-mentoring will strengthen entrepreneurs’ intentions to grow. Experienced entrepreneurs, mentors, and those in the early stages of their career discussed issues relating to growth intentions online in the Blackboard learning platform. The research question being investigated is: How can e-mentoring strengthen growth entrepreneurship?

Method

One-to-one asynchronous online discussions between fourteen mentor pairs from fourteen broad-based businesses important to the region’s wellbeing were held during October-December 2008. The research data consists of the online discussions, the collective discussion during the final seminar and observations of the project managers, also the researchers. In a discourse space for each pair there were 15 questions arranged under six themes, helping the mentor and entrepreneur to reflect together on challenges and opportunities relating to business growth. The project was implemented applying an educational goal-oriented action research approach and the data was analysed qualitatively.

Results and Implications

The eMGE project provided new entrepreneurial research knowledge on deploying e-mentoring for growth entrepreneurship for the use of higher education institutions, entrepreneurial organisations and educational research. It is evident that an online method independent of time and place in mentoring discussions can assist busy entrepreneurs to share experiences and knowledge in reciprocal learning. Actors committed to the process as part of their own work, with the model not requiring an unreasonable use of time or travel. Our research shows the eMGE model will, from the target group’s perspective, be a relevant, timely and meaningful way to support business skills and growth entrepreneurship. Online mentoring discussions helped entrepreneurs to identify elements and challenges of growth entrepreneurship and plan the next steps towards growth. Identified development challenges include face-to-face orientation training for participants, commitment to regular online interaction and the development of tools to diversify communication modes in the mentoring process.

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