

Regional Innovation Policies and SMEs
Maison Franco-Japonaise 2010, February 3-4

Entrepreneurship Education in Japan

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- ‘Entrepreneurship Education’ is becoming popular in Japan from primary and secondary education to tertiary education
 - primary and secondary schools’ programs are increasingly sophisticated and involve a growing number of stakeholders outside of the schools themselves: other schools, community, region
 - programs in tertiary schools are integrated in MBA, EMBA and MOT courses and lead to the creation of incubators and practical large scale projects linked to regional development

Drivers of the Perceived Need for Entrepreneurship Education

Perception (right or wrong) that Japan is 'missing the boat' of globalization:

- 'Big Champions' stuck into 'innovation trap' or/and unable to leverage their technological and management expertise on world markets
- World class 'Small champions' are suffering from ageing top management. Even those in high tech/high growth industries have a relatively low profitability because they have difficulties to leverage competitive advantage outside of manufacturing

- Shortage of innovative ventures: few innovative new companies emerged during the last 30 years taking advantage of the ICT revolution and there is little prospect of significant changes in the short-term : Where are the Japanese Google, Cisco or Microsoft of the future ?
- In large companies and in SMEs: difficulties remain to undertake breakthrough innovation
- University spin-offs: they are mostly unprofitable and suffering from poor management. Many may have specific knowledge and technologies but have problems to combine their intellectual assets with others in order to put products on the market

- Perception than one of the reasons explaining the situation is the lack of 'entrepreneurial spirit' in a broad sense in Japanese society
- The discussion centers on two separated but related issues:

How can Japan develop more innovators ?

How can it nurture, encourage and keep in Japan the innovators it already has ?

Idea that Education System is one of the problems and Part of the Solution

- Education system considered as ill-adapted to what is perceived as necessary to develop innovation: acceptance of risk and failure, self-reliance, initiative-taking: the educational system discourage movement in unconventional directions, and does not encourage open inquiry and challenge against authority
- The image of entrepreneurship as a socially acceptable professional model is (at best) moderate. The image of greed, fast money, individualism associated to social irresponsibility is still attached to the concept
- Surveys indicate that a much lower percentage of young Japanese people declare to be interested in creating or working in a new venture than in the United States, South-Korea, China and a number of European countries
- Japan is close to the bottom of the table on entrepreneurial activities, for example in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor survey

- Everybody in Japan agrees that reforms of the education system must emphasize dynamic processes of learning and commitment but there is a large discrepancy about what should be done in public, business and academic circles:
 - there is no agreement on the ideals and objectives of the reforms of the education system
 - the debate is on about what could be the most appropriate policy and what could be the role of the main stakeholders in the reforms

Reforms of the educational System Paralleling Changes in the Business system

- Since the 1980s, there was a shift from standardized education to 'choice, discretion and diversity' at the primary, junior and high schools levels
- And changes at the level of universities to boost scientific research and promote relationships between universities and the business world

- On the one hand, for some critics the reforms are a failure: it did lead to a decline in the quality of education, notably in mathematics and science
- The reforms are said to have reduced the time to study without fulfilling its objective of fostering freedom of thought, initiatives and risk-taking behavior and self-reliance among children

- On the other hand, many reformers maintain that Japan must adopt much more radical reforms:
 - The active questioning of authority must be incorporated into the school curriculum itself
 - An environment where orthodox knowledge is openly challenged and where new ideas are encouraged is indispensable in freeing imagination and fostering innovative thinking
 - The reforms are not a complete success because too many compromises have been done: initiatives have been diluted and their impact diminished

The terms of the debate on entrepreneurship education

- Should entrepreneurship be taught in schools at all ? Opinion range from usefulness to pointlessness and even dangerousness

But if yes:

- What should be taught ? How should it be taught ? By whom ? What would be the objectives ? How would the result be assessed ? What does it imply in term of changes in the curriculum, training of the teachers, learning burden, cost, etc ?

Definition of Entrepreneurship Education

- Entrepreneurship education refers to the pedagogic processes involved in the entrepreneurial activities behaviors and mindsets **from the point of insight and creativity at the outset to innovation and progress when fully implemented**

- Integrative learning involves intentional learning characterized by the **individual student's ability** to make **deep level connections** between the process of academic learning, reflective self-awareness, **personal development and experiential learning** in a range of practical contexts

- There is a growing awareness that **entrepreneurial creativity** and its realization in practice requires precisely this integrative approach since **it needs a mixture of knowledge and understanding, interpersonal skills and competences and various thinking styles and behaviors in order to be successful**

- The characteristics associated with successful entrepreneurial activity can be categorized in terms of the **entrepreneur as catalyst, opportunist and manager**
- The growing recognition and demand for entrepreneurship education is therefore motivated by the increasing need for these characteristics

The Terms of the Debate on Entrepreneurship Education

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) and the Ministry of Science, Education and Technology (MEXT) advocate entrepreneurship education in a broader sense going beyond start-up type of entrepreneurship

It should encompass all dimensions of self-reliance, risk-taking, curiosity that everybody should develop in our society as a business creator, salaried person, housewife or any other activities

- In business term, entrepreneurship is not limited to small companies: attitudes and behavior that is attached to it, should pervade management of all types of organizations
- The ‘Silicon Valley model’ of entrepreneurship is just one model among others, and may not be the most appropriate to Japanese society and economy

- There is a need to replace entrepreneurship in its socio-economic context: community and regional development – social roles of entrepreneurship – support of both opportunity and necessity-types of entrepreneurship
- This is a point of view that is in line with Peter Drucker's argument: entrepreneurial spirit should be embedded in all parts of society. It is linked to the image of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs in society at large

At the level of primary and secondary education there is a debate on the appropriateness of entrepreneurship education:

- Fear of potential negative effect on schooling results: overcrowding of the curriculum

- Positive effects are not obvious: difficult to assess through standard examinations

- The connotation of money, greed and individualism may be perceived negatively by some parents and teachers
- Entrepreneurship education is resource intensive in terms of academic and support staff: new competencies are required from teachers
- It goes against the strong tendency in Japanese schools to compartmentalize learning rather than integrating the benefits, knowledge, understanding that students can gain in different situations and from different sources

As a conclusion in a system completely driven by entrance examination concerns, entrepreneurship education is considered as expensive, cumbersome because it requires **significant changes in the teaching habits and a reconsideration of evaluation systems, and its impact is difficult to appraise**

Several approaches are feasible:

- **those engaging the students through integrative and reflective learning:** inputs from practitioners – engagement from the teachers and learners are expected – number of students involved is generally small because mentoring and group work are not conducive to large blocks lectures – it requires more learning time to be effective and new evaluation methods

In most schools it is difficult for the time being to convince the parents and educators to make the long-term investment

- The second approach largely based on lectures does not suppose a strong engagement from the teachers and learners – it does not require new specific curriculum – it does not require much learning time – it can accommodate a larger number of students – it is less costly

It is generally more acceptable by staff, parents and students

Japanese primary and secondary schools try to conciliate the two approaches:

- Programs are devised to **combine the strength of learner engagement with large-scale impact** in term of student numbers
- They are **integrated in existing curricula** in a discrete manner: no or little increase on the learning burden and no specific comprehensive retraining of the teachers

- In most schools entrepreneurship concepts are linked to society welfare in general: the dimension of social responsibility is strongly emphasized in all practical applications
- External interventions are often quite limited as a result of time and budgetary constraints

There is also a debate on the purpose and practicality of the entrepreneurship education programs in universities

- Visible achievements such as qualifications and certifications are considered as necessary, especially in a time of rising unemployment of young graduates

- Reforms of the education system must focus on what actually works

The central objective is not entrepreneurial creativity and effective problem solving or on the actual innovation of new concepts in practice, although the situation is changing with the growing role of the incubators, and the larger involvement in local development projects

Most programmes fall in-between:

- entrepreneurial creativity and problem solving
- innovation and practice

- Very few universities have a comprehensive programs fully devoted to entrepreneurship, although the number is growing
- In most leading public and private universities entrepreneurial education is **part of courses taught in MBA and MOT programs** at graduate level and **career and personal development programs** at undergraduate level

- Identifiable areas of focus are taught and learnt in modules such as finance and accounting, marketing, HRM, business policy and planning
- It often involves significant levels of group work and non-examination based work with guest speakers and case studies analysis
- As in primary and secondary education levels: **emphasis is put on the point that entrepreneurship education cannot be separated from corporate governance, compliance, social responsibility and business ethics**

- Collaboration with the public and private sector provides useful material for students to learn in middle ground
- New assessment methods are developed to evaluate student's work

Conclusion

Most Japanese schools at all levels are still looking for the best formula

On the whole it is still difficult to measure the impact of the entrepreneurship programs that have been put in place

Entrepreneurship education is only one aspect of the laying of foundations for a new education paradigm but it is an important one because it could be the trigger of deeper and broader reforms of the education system