

“Aspiring for entrepreneurship excellence with innovative training methodologies: The cases of PREMIO & ENTER Projects”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “PREMIO” project gathers ten participants from four European countries, who put their resources together to create a favorable environment for student training so that they are better equipped in their efforts to create a new enterprise, over a period of two years. This is achieved with use of best practices and the mastery of the most advanced enterprise management methods. A highly specialized and customised training plan will be developed to prepare the future entrepreneurs for the challenge to create and manage a business in its different dimensions.

The main objective of the PREMIO (*PRIZE*) project is to aid in the development and individual promotion of entrepreneurs, from the initial phase of the motivation and idea, through the first steps of formation of the company until it is established and operated. These entrepreneurs will be stakeholders from Higher Education, final

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year students, professors and researchers that intend to transpose their research work to the market. This objective will be reached by the definition and implementation of a training/mentoring model that departs from personalized sequential workshops subordinated to subjects like Company, Business-plan Creation, Innovation, Financing, Marketing and Intellectual Property Rights, Internationalization and Localization, Project Management that will support the business ideas of the trainees. Each trainee-entrepreneur will propose a business idea as a result of this stage. The best ideas will receive a prize (PREMIO) that corresponds to the incubation of the company in very favourable conditions in the project partners (Science & Technology Parks).

ENTER Project (Entrepreneurship Enhancement and Reinforcement) has similar objectives, but it mainly addressed to entrepreneurs based in Science & Technology Parks and it is not related with academics. It uses a methodology which is close to the methodology of PREMIO.

INTRODUCTION

In a global economy where enterprise sustainability and employability is uncertain, the task of successful creating a new enterprise requires the best knowledge, application of good practices and the mastery of the most advanced methodologies in enterprise management and development. In this context, it becomes essential to develop abilities and skills and to deliver tools, adequate to the necessities of these entrepreneurs. This was recognised by the European Commission in the Report on the Implementation of the Entrepreneurship Action Plan (Commission Staff Working Paper SEC (2006) 1132), that generated a remarkable set of Good Practices.

Higher Education could be the ideal environment for nesting highly advanced technological and scientific entrepreneurship. However this is not the case and the existing initiatives to develop entrepreneurship in this context, except for some, rare, exemplary cases, have not produced the expected results, mainly because of relatively low motivation amongst students, teachers and researchers but also due to

social, cultural and legal barriers. An effective training and mentoring strategy of the entrepreneurs during the whole process of launching of the company is thus essential. Thus each entrepreneur must receive training and motivational counselling in a first phase and on enterprise aspects in a second phase, including the efficient use of Information and Communication Technologies of Information to be able to compete in the global e-business market.

According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, (GEM, 2006), there is a continuous growth of the population aged 18 - 64 years old that is involved in early stage entrepreneurial activity in Greece. However, a significant part of it is still driven by necessity motives. There are some issues which seem to need support for example there is a growing belief that business opportunities are rare Greece, due to the non supportive business environment, financing a new business is difficult because the mechanisms are not well developed and the financial institutions do not take the risk, Greek potential entrepreneurs have strong fear of failure and banks are not support people with failure history, the education system does not encourage entrepreneurship in general and courses related to entrepreneurship have only recently been introduced into university programs and finally there is an ambivalent attitude of the Greek society towards entrepreneurship: Greeks consider starting a business a socially acceptable and desirable career choice, while at the same time they detest disparities in income levels. They are confident about their knowledge and skills, while at the same time they have strong fear of failure.

The Communication from the Commission COM(2006) 33, recognizes that there is a need to create a more favourable climate for entrepreneurship, based on an integrated policy with a view to not only changing the mindset but also improving the skills of Europeans and removing obstacles to the start-up transfer and growth of business. In addition, it recognizes that since Europeans are reluctant to take up opportunities of self employment and entrepreneurial activities, cultural aspects need to be taken into account. One of the recommendations is to foster entrepreneurship in higher education by integration of entrepreneurship as an important part of the

curriculum, spread across different subjects and courses, and encourage students to take entrepreneurship courses. Combining entrepreneurial mindsets and competence with excellence in scientific and technical studies should enable students and researchers to better commercialize their ideas and new technologies developed.

PREMIO and ENTER projects are supported by the EC in the framework of the Education and Culture, Lifelong Learning Programme. Their goal is to stimulate entrepreneurship and create an entrepreneurial culture in the academic institutions (PREMIO).

The partners of PREMIO project are:

1. TECMAIA, Science & Technology Park of Maia, Portugal: Project Coordinator
2. ISMAIA, Portugal
3. MAIAINNOVA, Portugal
4. APCT, Portugal
5. UEM, Romania
6. ACTIVITY, Romania
7. TEKNIKAULIKOOL, Estonia
8. EML, Estonia
9. FORTH/SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY PARK OF CRETE, Greece
10. Technical University of Crete, Greece

The total budget of PREMIO is 410.796,00 € and the duration of the project is 2 years (Jan.1, 2008 – Dec. 31, 2009).

The partners of ENTER project are:

1. TECMAIA, Science & Technology Park of Maia, Portugal: Project Coordinator
2. MAIEUTICA, Portugal
3. MAIAINNOVA, Portugal
4. Managing Company, Science & Technology Park of Crete, Greece
5. Technical Institute, Chamber of Heraklion, Greece
6. CREDER, France

7. CRED, France
8. IPA, Romania

The total budget of ENTER is 568756 € and the duration of the project is 2 years (Jan.1, 2008 – Dec. 31, 2009).

BASIC CONCEPT

The main objective of the PREMIO (*PRIZE*) project is to aid in the development and individual promotion of entrepreneurs, from the initial phase of the motivation and idea, through the first steps of formation of the company until it is established. These entrepreneurs will be stakeholders from Higher Education, final year students, professors and researchers that intend to transpose their research work to the market. This objective will be reached by the definition and implementation of a training/mentoring model that departs from personalized sequential workshops subordinated to subjects like Company, Business-plan Creation, Innovation, Financing, Marketing and Intellectual Property Rights, Internationalization and Localization, Project Management that will support the business ideas of the trainees. Each trainee-entrepreneur will propose a business idea as a result of this stage. The best ideas will receive a prize (PREMIO) that corresponds to the incubation of the company in very favourable conditions in the project partners (Science & Technology Parks).

The project “ENTER” addresses the issue of developing an entrepreneurial culture among candidates from different educational backgrounds (level III, IV, and other diverse education and training backgrounds) in a transnational perspective.

The strategies to be implemented focus on:

- The creation of a realistic, competitive and sustainable learning environment, through e-learning, that will promote a specific entrepreneurial training/counseling programme offering an integrated guidance to entrepreneurs from the early stage of motivation and idea generation through

the personalized support in implementing business projects and nurturing recently created companies in incubators;

- The reinforcement of the success rate of start-ups by motivating the stakeholders and putting them in contact with the enterprise world;
- The promotion of the interaction between public and private operators such as universities, R&D institutions, development agencies, Science and Technology Parks and enterprise associations so that it can contribute to a successful transition between conception and establishment phases.
- The exploitation of a European approach from the moment of creation of the companies.

IMPLEMENTATION

Training and Mentoring methodology

The training course is divided in two main phases:

1. *Training*

The training is based in a blended-learning format which is run mainly online with a few hours for attending sessions over a 5 months period (225 hours). It will be mainly interactive as most part of time is dedicated to activities run by the trainees either individually or in group and it will also include self-assessment.

The course will focus on issues like Company, Communication, Marketing, Finance, Business Plan, Innovation Management, Intellectual Property Rights, Project Management and Internationalization.

In the process of learning, the up-to-date learning tools are fully employed: e-learning platform, interactive multimedia content, simulation, digital repository, instant messaging, forum and video conference. These tools will allow a virtual environment that will promote the enterprise context experience from the very beginning.

2. *Mentoring*

During the training period a Business Plan will be elaborated by the trainees and the 40 best Business Plans (in all countries together) will pass to the individual mentoring phase in a pre-incubation structure. The individual mentoring will be granted by national and international experts through a virtual learning community. The experts' pool will interact with the future entrepreneurs mainly through ICT tools that promote the access to digital interactive contents, developing this way an innovative mentoring model.

Therefore a few projects will be accompanied through the whole process of the business implementation / company creation from December 2008 to December 2009. The most successful candidates will start companies that will be hosted for incubation in the local Science and Technology Parks.

Entrepreneurship Courses

By integrating a transnational entrepreneurship training course and a mentoring model with the participation of European specialists, the project is foreseen as an efficient solution to motivate, train and support entrepreneurs.

Participation in the training course is free, but depends on a selection process.

Training courses are based on a blended regime, with attending (20%) and online (80%) components.

Within this course the participants will have the opportunity to:

1. Improve, develop and implement their business project;
2. Learn management contents using a "hands on" approach;
3. Understand the processes of problem solving and how to implement a new project;
4. Be involved in a highly interactivity and international learning process;

5. Contact with highly qualified professionals and organizations and learn from their experience;

6. Receive the award that will highlight the best projects and individual performances.

Target group

Project PREMIO training course is targeted to all University students, professors and researchers from Portugal, Estonia, Romania and Greece, wishing to transform an innovative idea into a spin off or start up enterprise.

The course of the ENTER Project is open to everyone that wants to develop an innovative business idea, mainly oriented to technical services. Vocational trainees (level 3 and 4) are particularly targeted.

The course will help develop the key competences that will give the trainees the necessary understanding of the management process. It will also enhance the trainees' capacity to use their skills in concrete situations and will promote the self confidence they need to turn their ideas into realistic and feasible projects

Course goals

The entrepreneurship course seeks to stimulate the possibility and potential for transformation of an idea into business in individuals with creative and innovative capacity, by teaching them how to:

- Make dreams and ideas into reality;
- Innovate and take risks;
- Know and understand the world of business, its concepts and practices;
- Recognize and interpret needs and problems, and
- Design and imagine solutions.

METHODOLOGY – PEDAGOGICAL & TRAINING MODEL

The training and mentoring model includes the development of materials and pedagogical strategies for the subjects presented below. The development of these contents will be done in a distributed way by all partners in a unique language (EN). There will be a common structure of the contents that will be associated to national specific contents (legislation, culture etc). Afterwards, the contents will be translated into the partner's own language.

The subjects are the following:

- a. Enterprise
- b. Business Planning
- c. Innovation
- d. Financing
- e. Marketing
- f. Intellectual Property Management
- g. Internationalisation and localisation

The training model of PREMIO is shown in the following figure:



Fig. 1 Training model, PREMIO Project

For practical reasons the training modules will be organized into two courses of 100 hours of student work each, the following way:

Course 1: Enterprise, Financing, Marketing and internationalization;

Course 2: Business Plan, Innovation management, Project planning and Intellectual property management.

In a holistic perspective, the complete programme, including the formal assessment moments, and expected soft skills, is schematized in the following fig. 2:

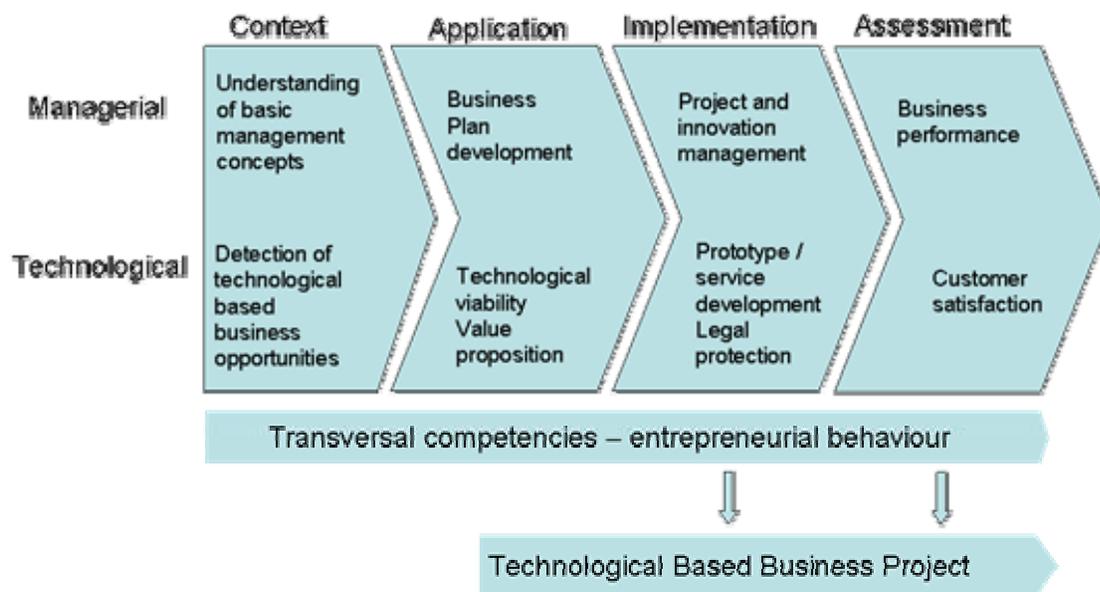


Fig. 2. Schematic representation of the model

CONCLUSIONS

Entrepreneurship is one of the factors that stimulate economic growth, in particular in high income countries. There is a need to create a favourable environment, change mindset, improve skills and remove obstacles in the EU countries, in order to promote entrepreneurship, in particular within young people and in the academic and research environment as well.

PREMIO and ENTER projects are initiatives to support the creation of the necessary environment and improve skills of people in order to understand the basics of

entrepreneurship and to start new business. The partners expect that with the necessary support, which include training and mentoring, they will achieve to support the people who interested to participate, to make their ideas into reality.

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