ICT-MEDIATED INTRAPRENEURSHIP OUTLINE, THE ERASMUS+ INTRA-NET PROJECT

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Abstract

People need intrapreneurs to turn good ideas into successful reality. Thus, intrapreneurial attitudes have been proven to lead to organisations’ success. While an increasing number of scholars have examined and further demonstrated the benefits of intrapreneurship for large organisations, small enterprises and even start-ups, there is little research on how to promote intrapreneurship within an organisation. Thus, this article which is based on the Erasmus+ Intranet project (www.intra-net.org). This is an explanatory study which qualitatively and quantitatively explores firstly how to promote intrapreneurship within enterprises by promoting the acquisition of soft skills, competencies and intrapreneurial attitudes of the employees. And secondly, explores the internal culture of organisations, that is principles of innovative organisations and strategies, providing 6 tenets that an organisation must follow in order to provide a proper and intrapreneurial-triggering environment. In the Intra-net project then, based on those conditions, we propose ICT-based activities that could help to increase competitiveness, foster innovation and improve the quality of the teams.

Keywords: intrapreneurship, soft skills, intrapreneurial culture, strategies, innovation.

1 INTRODUCTION TO INTRAPRENEURSHIP

The present century has brought profound and significant changes for organisations and industries throughout the world, forcing them to carefully examine their purpose and to design strategies in order to optimise production. This demands a new way of working and organising that differs from the traditional, which did not have to compete in a global market. Nowadays, entrepreneurs, CEOs, and managers remain receptive to innovation, new approaches and risk-taking attitudes.

This increasingly competitive and global business world as well as the eagerness for innovating resulted in the birth of the intrapreneurship concept. The term first appeared in Gifford Pinchot’s white paper titled *Intra-corporate entrepreneurship* and eventually, it was coined by the author in 1978. Initially, it was understood as a subset of the concept *corporate entrepreneurship*. In this regard, Gifford states that *intrapreneurs are employees who do for corporate innovation what an entrepreneur does for his or her start-up*” (Gifford Pinchot, 2017) (1). Thus, intrapreneurship is mainly associated with the spirit of entrepreneurship within an ongoing organization.

The figure of the entrepreneur has long been a field of interest among researchers, unlike intrapreneur which has been gaining interest among business world in recent years. The study of entrepreneurship has been mainly associated with two generic fields: the economics and organization aspects of the operation and the psychology of it, i.e. leaving secure employment and undertaking risks (2). Thus, despite the close resemblance between entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship, those concepts portray different ideas.

The intrapreneur is the person who does not only establish new entrepreneurial risks but also acts as a visionary and a bellwether (3). Hence, intrapreneurs think as owners focusing on exploring new fields and seeking for the success of the company. Likewise, this new breed of employee gathers a set of attributes that are gained after years of solid experience or can also be learnt informally. Soft skills such as independence, creativity, flexibility, risk-taking, commitment to innovation, problem-solving and a growth-driven attitude have been proven to be essential for developing an intrapreneur personality (in the same sense that those skills are related to entrepreneurship). Additionally, intrapreneurs expect their performance within the organisation to be positively rewarded.
Despite the fact that the entrepreneur takes and initial risk providing a business location and a product, the intrapreneur is considered to have a more difficult job (4). Because of their position within the organisation hierarchy, intrapreneurs cannot only depend on their initiative but they also have to seek sponsorship, especially in the face of internal criticism or adversity. Intrapreneurs might come up with innovative ideas but they still need to report to their superior.

Most literature on intrapreneurship concentrates on how intrapreneurship is related to the economic profits of the businesses. However, there is little research on how to promote and increase intrapreneurship within organisations. Organisations tend to follow a hierarchical structure to take decisions and are likely to discourage risks or accept ideas that are beyond the conventional practices. Nevertheless, some enterprises are aware of the importance of a service-oriented approach to their business ventures and are already conscious of the advantages of intrapreneurship.

Previous research on intrapreneurship already demonstrated the value of intrapreneurs towards the success of organisations and also set the characteristics of intrapreneurs. In Intrapreneurship: a comparative structural equation model modelling study, two models are applied to test the relationships among environment, organisational characteristics, intrapreneurship, and performance across the USA and Slovenia. The findings proved the beneficial effects of intrapreneurs on organisations (5). Similarly, in Employee satisfaction, intrapreneurship and firm growth: a model, Antonic’s findings also supported that “relationships between employee satisfaction and intrapreneurship are directly linked to the growth of a company” (6). In The Effect of intrapreneurship on corporate performance, Augusto considers autonomy as a major characteristic for intrapreneurs and demonstrates the importance of qualitative measures of performance (4). Also, the paper Intrapreneur: An Entrepreneur within a Company measures the concept of intrapreneurship and identifies pieces of knowledge, skills, and abilities of successful intrapreneurs (7). In the following sections we will explore the traits of intrapreneurs and the organisations’ culture to promote intrapreneurship.

2 CONTEXT AND AIMS

The current research has been based on an Erasmus+ KA2 project co financed by the European Union titled Intranet: Intrapreneurship net-playbook with reference 2018-1-ES01-KA204-050708. The project was carried out in cooperation with the following European partners: Akademia im Jana Długosza W Czestochowie (Polonia), Stitching Prime (Netherlands), Gospodarska Zbornica Slovenije Center za Poslovno Usposabljanje (Slovenia) and Trebag Ltd (Hungary).

Due to the educational character of this Erasmus+ projects, Intranet is intended to promote intrapreneurship through educational processes by means of the creation of activities that could be further applied in organisations to increase staff skills and competences. Additionally, it will facilitate the innovation, knowledge, collaboration, and quality, among others, (or any other key issue to be defined later) inside organisations. Those activities could be also applied to schools, business courses, academies or any other training environment outside organisations.

This paper attempts firstly to guide organisations in understanding the concept of intrapreneurship and the soft skills related to it and secondly to instruct them how to integrate intrapreneurship into the core of companies. In order to do that, we will provide 6 tenets to promote intrapreneurship within organisations and we will define a series of soft skills and attitudes necessary to develop an intrapreneurship personality within an enterprise. The intrapreneurial skills can be further acquired through the performance of ICT-based activities specifically created in the Intra-net project.

3 METHODOLOGY

The present investigation combines qualitative and quantitative techniques which lead to better contrasted results and gain deeper and detailed insights. Regarding qualitative analysis, the partnership met to set the aims of the study and met a group of 20 business experts to create a focus group (8). The aim of this group was to discuss and analyse intrapreneurship based on their experiences. In order to do that, experts answered questions related to the importance of the culture and structure of organisations, the benefits that intrapreneurship can bring to companies or the measures that can be adapted to promote such intraprenueurial attitude.
As mentioned, quantitative analysis was also carried out. For this purpose, 20 business experts that have extensive expertise in corporate area were surveyed. Also, previous studies on intrapreneurship served as the base for the definition of the research questions, those are: which are the most important qualities for an intrapreneur? and what are the tenets that an organization should adopt to promote intrapreneurship?

In order to carry out the present investigation, analysis of data was conducted from January to February 2019. There were performed 20 questionnaires to a set of experts who did not only had expertise in the business area but also owned an organisation. The results of the analysis are further applicable to the European Union on account of the international character of the investigation subjects.

4 RESULTS

The data gathered in this study will be shown in this section.

4.1 Skills for intrapreneurship

According to Antonia Mohedano and Dolores Garzón intrapreneurs require specific personal and professional characteristics. Garzón proves that intrapreneurs are “employees highly motivated by innovation, continuous improvement and team leaders” (9). Also, intrapreneurs need to convince not only the final stakeholder and target audience, but first they need to prove its validity to the organisation’s management team. Thus, employees need to develop a series of soft skills to be able to communicate with the team, convince the management team and come up with new ideas. In this paper, we established a list of soft based on previous studies and literature on intrapreneurship, specifically dealing with intrapreneurial attitudes and strengths.

The following chart shows the results of the questionnaires performed in which participants had to score a list of soft skills according to their importance and potential useful application for employees within an organisation (intrapreneurship). Additionally, participants were asked to rely on their experience and thinking to answer the questions. Respondents had to score a punctuation that ranged from 5 to 1, being the number 5 to be considered very important and 1 not so important. Results gathered are shown in the following chart:
Figure 1. List of skills and their importance according to business experts.
The results show that leadership, creativity, innovation, systematic view and communicational skills are among the most useful competencies for employees within an organisation. In this sense, organisations need to provide a proper environment that engages the acquisition of such competences.

The following table shows a list of 36 soft skills that have been structured according to the findings of the chart previously shown in this paper. There are 6 main groups (marked in grey) that correspond to the most important intrapreneurial skills according to the survey respondents. Each group comprises 5 soft competencies that are necessary to awake employee’s intrapreneurship side.

### Table 1. List of 36 intrapreneurial skills (in grey, key skill)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th></th>
<th>Resilience</th>
<th></th>
<th>Team building</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Decision making</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Team building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Managing</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Inspiring</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Supervising</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Taking initiative</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Corporate strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Problem analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ambition</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Conflict resolution</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Rule-breaker</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Resourcefulness</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Passionate/Motivation</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Adaptable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Self-awareness</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Organisational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Systemic view</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Training/Helping others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Goal-orientedness</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Knowledge organisation/sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Intuition</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Position empathy/respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Courageous</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Goals alignment/adaptation</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The competences and intrapreneurial skills above stated can be either already possessed by employees or further acquired through the performance of skill-based activities and a fostered intrapreneurship organisational culture. Also, the 36 intrapreneurial skills that are shown in table 2 will be the basis for the creation of the ICT-based activities that will be further developed and explained in the project’s website. (www.intra-net.org).

### 4.2 Six tenets of organisations for fostering intrapreneurship

Frequently, intrapreneurs have been credited as inventors due to the fact that both figures own a creative and risk-taking attitude towards challenges. However, it is more accurate to say that an intrapreneurship is the person that specifically has the ability to develop new processes that can get a certain product to the marketplace by increasing the speed and cost-effectiveness of technology transfer.

Traditional culture inside organisation which used to adhere to strict internal rules is left apart, now it is time to stand up for innovation and new organisational policies (10). The enterprise should develop a culture whereby employees can test their ideas as well as intuitions. Thus, the organisation needs to promote mechanisms for generating and mobilizing ideas that can be integrated into the work practices and employees’ daily lives. In the book titled Intrapreneurship: Managing Ideas Within Your Organisation, Kevin d. Souza states that “The ability to create an environment in which employees believe in the transformative power of their ideas is central to intrapreneurship” (Kevin C. Dsouza, 2011) (11). Hence, the organisation needs to trigger a comfortable environment, so the employees feel free and even eager to contribute with their ideas and are less afraid to take risks.
Taking the abovementioned view into account and in order to pave the way to bring innovation into organisations, the following six tenets have been considered and therefore, we propose to be adopted by any organisation willing to promote intrapreneur attitudes among their staff:

1 Include innovation-friendly management processes. Not to be governed by strict intern working rules and to leave freedom to employees has been proven to be positive in working environments. Giving autonomy and responsibility to employees will lead to a space for creativity and will eventually drive to good results. Thus, employees who are not afraid to try their ideas are likely to contribute to the creative process of organisation favourably. Those processes can take part externally (such as participation in workshops, conferences or courses).

2 Provide resources and financial support to implement new ideas. Not only is vital to create a friendly working environment but also to contribute with financial support or other resources. Indeed, new innovative endeavours cannot be carried out in a proper way, unless the organisation provides the needed resources and assistance. Other resources could be time, friendly spaces, or materials.

3 Acknowledge your employees’ well-developed performances and ideas and learn from failures. As Robert Frost stated, “an idea is a feat of association”. In this sense, ideas can be understood as random thoughts or connections among concepts that come from employees’ minds (7). Thus, ideas are never a safe bet. As a consequence, such thoughts can become either a big success or failing that, a failure. Organisations should reward those employees who are creative, innovative and test new ideas; we should focus on “who?” as much as “what?”. Specifically, good work performances and commitment can be awarded with much leeway, financial benefits or a promotion. However, failures and errors should not be penalised, otherwise motivated employees would get discouraged. In fact, embracing failure can also lead to success. Given a failed attempt, organisations need to evaluate and examine in depth the weak points of a failed idea, this way, they can gain more knowledge and be able to recognise the success of an idea more easily next time.

4 Set an accommodating leadership style. Organisations need to be transformed from within and consequently, managers play a vital role in encouraging employees’ creativity and innovation. Managers are expected to promote employees’ initiatives to explore new opportunities as well as to develop new products and procedures that transform this into profits. Charismatic and enthusiastic leaders influence employees in a positive way, triggering the employees’ willingness to contribute to the organisation’s objectives. Organisation need to set a leadership style and organisational mechanisms that lead to the discovery of opportunities. Similarly, leaders should induce employees to think on their own, develop new ideas and to question the operating rules and systems that no longer avail the organisation’s goals (12).

5 From management perspective and organisation strategy; consider changing the world from a broader perspective. Organisations should promote it as an intrinsic aim, for that purpose innovation and competitiveness are key notions that should be included as a priority within the business aims in order to increase profit and keep growing, but also to consider social benefit and the organisation context. This includes to have an open attitude (e.g. open software or open content) and a corporate responsible development (green attitudes, consider consumer needs, trustful…). A better vision of the world should be included in the innovation approach that leads to a better organisation.

6 Promote a systemic view of the organisation joining organisational aims with personal aims. The company must keep the organisation always valuable for the intrapreneur. If employees identify with the goals and values of the organisation where their work, they are likely to take risks and pursue innovative actions. When employees identify themselves with the aims of the organisations, then “work failures and successes are experienced as personal successes and failures” (13). In this sense, employees must meet individual basic needs to become motivated and to subsequently achieve organisational goals. If personnel feel fulfilled in their work, their intrapreneurial attitude will grow even more.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In this project we aimed to identify 36 soft skills or transversal competences that we consider the most suited for intrapreneurial ICT-based activities. This has been very challenging, as some of the
respondents could not identify them clearly; their main area of expertise was on face-to-face training and in-person team management. We consider that the skills should be re-defined once the activities will be tested in the second phase of the project, even so, we can extract some conclusions useful for any training institution that is interested on intrapreneurship.

Firstly, soft skills and transversal competences are difficult to be taught, and the acquisition by the learner is perceived as a long-term issue, related to learners’ attitudes and motivation. Additionally, there must be a good disposition from the organisation to facilitate intrapreneurial attitudes (as stated by the 6 tenets in the previous section). Training can happen and in this Intra-net.org project we aim to promote this by proposing activities to help learners and staff to increase their awareness about business dynamics, innovation and increase the participants skills for the already stated competencies.

After this research phase, we propose the main competences stated in previous sections to be included in already existing courses or subjects. Soft skills, particularly the ones mentioned in this paper, cannot be taught as hard skills could be, those should be understood as a process within other courses. This way, learners will be able to incorporate habits and attitudes to their daily routines, when trying to find solutions, communicate with their work team, and innovating. Therefore, we consider that proposing ICT-based activities (as this is the second phase of the intra-net.org project) is the next step, and we should make them test how those activities are incorporated to courses in academies, or tasks in a working environment.

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