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Professional Development of Business Students: Vision Creating

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of our study of management education. We discuss the importance of intrinsic motivation identification and creative exercise that can stimulate inner research of the students. Vision creation is a part of strategic management that is incorporated in the management education as a course material and skill development. Personal reflection was used as a method to identify business students' vision for their future development. Our study demonstrates positive effects of the vision creation exercise and several different inspirations and role models for the students' future paths that we elaborate upon and provide future recommendations.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry, reflection, vision, empowerment, management education, student awareness

JEL classification: A22, I30, M10, M14

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Introduction

»If a man knows not what harbor he seeks, any wind is the right wind.«

Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The purpose of the paper is to provide further insight on the growing awareness of the importance of vision creation in management education. In recent years, intrinsic motivation identification and creative exercise (which help in the process of vision creation) gained recognition and as a consequence new questions in the field of management education have arisen. To answer these questions, we need to examine vision creation for individuals who potentially represent future leaders and we need to understand their inner drivers and dynamics. Furthermore, it is important to understand their attitude towards knowledge as knowledge is becoming a critical core asset to sustain competitive advantage and a tool for continuous improvement and innovation (Al-Khouri, 2014).

Taking these circumstances into consideration, this paper focuses on the positive effects of the vision creation exercise and several different aspirations and role models that influence the future path of students. With the participation of students from the Faculty of Economics and Faculty for Health Sciences, University of

Ljubljana, an illustrative sample of personal reflection questionnaires provided the basis for our empirical evidence. Nowadays, higher education institutions face different growing institutional pressures, especially since the financial crisis highlighted the need to educate future (business) leaders who engage with issues beyond a profit imperative (Snelson-Powell, Grosvold & Millington, 2016) and the authors argue that vision creation in management education can have an important part in providing a response to the existing pressures.

The paper consists of two parts. The first part includes desk research in which we utilized existing papers discussing topics such as vision, personal visions, vision creation, knowledge, strategic management and leadership. The second part contains personal reflection as a research methodology along with the results and discussion of the empirical research. The paper concludes with lessons learned, limitations of the research and suggestions for further research ideas.

Theoretical background

Vision, which is derived from Latin language and means »to see« (Almog-Bareket, 2012), can be defined in different ways. It is »An attractive, ideal future that is credible yet not readily attainable« (Daft et al., 2008, p. 587). It provides direction the organization will pursue, clarifies a set of ideals, articulates a sense of purpose, as well as defines organizational uniqueness (Berson et al., 2001). Vision articulates what an organization aspires to be, in order to enthuse, gain commitment and stretch organizational performance (Johnson et al., 2009). Good vision statements define ambitious, yet achievable future states (Hill et al., 2007) to motivate its members and stimulate change.

The process of vision creation and gaining commitment consists of four phases: (1) becoming informed, (2) visiting the future and record it, (3) creating the story and (4) vision deployment (Levin, 2000). Organizational vision, a vivid picture of its future that should be directed inward and outward (Almog-Bareket, 2012) sets high-level goals to inspire actions. Without a vision, an organization only reacts to environmental events. Strategic vision may encompass (1) cognitive part in terms of focusing on outcomes and means for its achievement, as well as (2) affective component directly draws on target's personal values and beliefs, therefore affecting its motivation (Boal et al., 2000).

Good vision combines passion, knowledge, experience and boldness (Levin, 2000) and it should also combine seven attributes, namely it should characterize brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability, and desirability (Baum et al., 1988 in Haque et al., 2016; Kantabutra, 2009; 2010; Haque et al., 2016). In addition, Nutt and Backoff (1997, in Boal et al., 2000) propose four main criteria for good vision design, namely (1) possibility, in terms of its future orientation and having innovative, unique, inspirational features, to reveal potential opportunities, (2) desirability, in terms drawing on organizational values and culture, (3) actionability, in terms of being doable, and (4) articulation, in terms of crystallizing what is wanted so followers understand and agree.

To further elaborate knowledge as part of good vision and an integral part of the development of future leaders, Davenport & Prusak (2000) argue that knowledge is closely linked to doing and implies know-how and understanding. Individuals possess knowledge and it is a product of their experience, and encompasses the norms by which they evaluate new inputs from their surroundings. In general there are two types of knowledge, explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is formalized and codified (Brown & Duguid, 1998) and is relatively easy to identify, store and retrieve (Wellman, 2009). Tacit knowledge is sometimes referred to as know-how (Brown & Duguid 1998)

and refers to intuitive, hard to define knowledge that is largely experience based. Therefore, tacit knowledge is often context dependent and personal in nature. It is hard to communicate and deeply rooted in action, commitment, and involvement (Nonaka, 1994). Knowledge represents the core of knowledge management, which is defined as a set of practices and processes which are designed to optimize the use of knowledge, to increase allocative efficiency in the area of knowledge production, distribution and use (Asian Productivity Organization, 2013) and today knowledge management is viewed as essential to enhancing the competitive edge of organizations.

Planning approach to strategic management process, as opposed to less structured way to strategy development based on the process of management itself (Dobson et al., 2004), begins with a vision, meanwhile existing organizational mission, goals and strategies serve as key inputs before situation analysis of internal and external environment, often executed by Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats or SWOT analysis, to formulate renewed organizational mission, goals and strategies, which should later be implemented. The strategic management process therefore enables identification of existing gap between current organizational reality and its desired long-term future states to define organizational strategies (Hill et al., 2007). If vision is effectively communicated via multiple channels it positively affects organizational readiness for change and growth (Baum et al., 1988 in Haque et al., 2016; Kantabutra, 2009; 2010; Haque et al., 2016). Shared vision also improves service efforts and job satisfaction (Testa, 1999).

However organizational visions start with leaders' personal visions (Crossan et al., 2008, in Yoeli et al., 2010), as responsibility for defining and sharing organizational vision is on leaders (Nanus, 1992, in Almog-Bareket, 2012), due to the fact that to achieve change, an individual vision, enthusiasm and commitment are necessary (Atkinson, 1999). Therefore, it is imperative for the business and management students to practice and excel in crafting visions.

Similarly as in organizational terms, vision creation is important also for individuals to develop individual's full potential, especially in the educational settings, for two reasons: (1) it enables students to develop their visions and therefore define their future personal and professional path, and on the other hand, (2) to enhance vision creation skill development, crucial for business field students who will take leadership role and/or participate in strategic management processes tomorrow.

In the time of change and uncertainty students dream of a better future, as they understand that innovation in business and society belongs to dreamers and visionaries (Holtzman et al., 2014). To get appropriate job and build successful career, students need more than just a degree - they need a vision, to articulate what and why they want, and enrol in and complete the appropriate educational programs (Sentz, 2012). *»Personal vision comes from within. It gives meaning to work, and it exists independently of the organization or group we happen to be in«* (Fullan, 1993, p. 14). As showcased in the educational settings of leader development, personal vision statements teaching method also contributes to students' personal growth (Hartman et al., 2015).

Studies show that overall job satisfaction is higher, when people achieve goals which are perceived more difficult (Wiese et al., 2005), as well as when their goals are more specific and clear, compared to vaguely defined goals (Lee et al., 1991, in et al., 2011) therefore the ability to create appropriate personal vision is important for future professionals. As showcased by the longitudinal study of Holtschlag and Masuda (2011) the articulation of challenging and specific student's career visions effect positively on their later job satisfaction and lowers their turnover intentions.

As stated by Palmer (2009, in Holtzman et al., 2014, p. 43): »Our colleges and universities help students examine many dimensions of the external world – history, politics, economics, physical reality; yet we rarely turn the lens inward to help students examine their own lives. This lack of critical inquiry into these personal dimensions of students' lives reflects a multi-levelled fear on the part of academics – the fear of venturing into "subjective territory," saying, "I don't want to go there because I'm not a psychotherapist." But faculty and staff need to find ways of inviting students to examine these inner drivers and dynamics within the classroom and co-curricular activities that lead to greater self-understanding, without which one cannot be said to be well-educated«.

Methodology

The study was conducted on two samples. One sample were 33 students at the course Organization and management in nursing at the Faculty of Health Sciences University of Ljubljana. The second sample were 8 students at the course Management of learning and knowledge at the Faculty of economics University of Ljubljana. The study was conducted during the period of 20th February–6th March 2017. We used the method of qualitative questionnaires with closed and open questions. We analysed the data based on content analysis searching for main themes with subthemes emerging from the gathered data. Our research question was: What visions do students from two faculties hold?

Results

Students at the course Organization and management in nursing at the Faculty of Health Sciences University of Ljubljana expressed that they most value about themselves the following characteristics: 1) self-esteem; 2) engagement; 3) empathy; 4) patience; 5) positivism; 6) ready to help; 7) work ethics; 8) courage; and 9) responsibility.

First associations for nursing students when thinking about role models are: 1) mirror; 2) experiences; 3) parents; 4) expertize; 5) success; and 6) teacher. The visions of nursing students for themselves in 10 years are: 1) becoming a successful nurse; 2) an entrepreneur; and 3) a team manager. The most important values of nursing students are: 1) health; 2) happiness; 3) family; 4) honesty; 5) knowledge; 6) peace; and 7) equality.

Nursing students' values are reflected in their daily decisions by: 1) taking care of others first and then myself; 2) healthy lifestyle; 3) taking time for my family; 4) If I find the money on the floor I take it to the reception; 5) If somebody from my loved ones would get ill I would find the best possible treatment; 6) Relationships are important to me, that is why I talk out the problems and reach compromises; and 7) I set priorities according to my values.

Students at the course Management of learning and knowledge at the Faculty of economics University of Ljubljana expressed that they most value about themselves the following characteristics: 1) honesty; 2) communication skills; 3) persistence; 4) organizing skills; 5) self-confidence; 6) creativity; 7) reliability and 8) openness.

First associations for knowledge management students when thinking about role models are: 1) wise men; 2) success; 3) guidance; 4) parents; and 5) elderly.

The visions of knowledge management students for themselves in 10 years are: 1) in a small company; 2) accounting; 3) family business; and 4) team leader.

The most important values of knowledge management students are: 1) family; 2) work; 3) success; 4) happiness; 5) honesty; and loyalty.

Knowledge management students evaluated on average the specifics of their vision with 6,9 out of 10 and its difficulty on average with 6 out of 10.

Discussion

We can make the following general statements about the participating business and nursing students who filled out the personal reflection questionnaire:

- There is a positive effect of the vision creation exercise and several other different inspirations and role models for the students' future paths.
- The majority of business and nursing students provided answers that they see themselves as potential leaders in their medium-term future.
- One of the most important issues that we managed to address is to activate students and actively involve them in their vision creation process which influences their future paths and to encourage and empower them to discuss about their potential to become future leaders. In the process as a whole, vision creation is an integral part.
- A contradiction emerged as knowledge was neglected in the answers provided by business and nursing students as it represents an important part of good vision creation. Perhaps the absence of a generally known definition about what knowledge is could influence the answers provided by students.
- Our findings have important implications for the future of management education. It should be emphasized that vision creation in management education is important in shaping students in becoming potential future leaders. To encourage students, teaching staff should be inspiring, open and willing to provide feedback to students. In the vision creation process for students, two-way communication is a necessary precondition as often students require some feedback or guidance about their future paths and career potential.

As our personal reflection questionnaire results demonstrated, vision creation exercises and several different inspirations and role models for students' future paths have positive effects and improve their possibilities in becoming future leaders.

As is stated in the description of the nursing department (Faculty of Health Sciences University of Ljubljana, 2017): "Nursing is an allied health profession focusing on the care of individuals, families, and communities so that they may attain, maintain, or recover optimal health and quality of life. Nurses care for individuals throughout their life span in health and illness at all levels of health care. They recognise and meet the patients' needs for nursing care and establish a trusting relationship with their clients and their family members. They are actively involved in health education and health promotion of their clients and families. Their duties encompass also the patient rights advocacy and the support of individuals to promote his or her own well-being, as understood by that individual". Knowledge management is clearly present in the description of managers in nursing, therefore it is vital that students become aware of their future roles already in the phase of their education.

There are some research limitations in our study. Limitations of the study are connected to time and size. First, we only handed out personal reflection questionnaires to students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Ljubljana and Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Ljubljana. Second, our research results are limited to Slovenia, however this suggests the possibilities for further research to be expanded internationally based on existing experiences and to be deepened and broadened. Furthermore, in-depth interviews could be conducted with students to

clarify the meaning of knowledge and to better understand their personal view on the importance of knowledge.

Conclusion

With the help of the results from actual business and nursing students, this paper provided support of the fact that vision creation exercises and other different inspirations and role models for the students' future paths have positive effects. As the personal reflection questionnaire results demonstrated, vision creation is a topic that deserves more recognition and future research in the field of management education. These results also represent a suitable tool to promote and enhance the positive effects of vision creation in management education for students.

Our research should be compared with similar research in other countries and future research should be expanded internationally, and the role of knowledge in the process of vision creation should be analysed more thoroughly.

Our paper contributes to the field of vision creation in management education and should support further promotion of vision creation as a tool with which students can influence their future paths, and help shape the future leaders of tomorrow through management education.

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