

Universities, Entrepreneurship and Regional Networks Chances for a Welfare

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship has been recognized as an engine of both growth and economic development. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) account for 99,8% of all businesses in Europe and their role in the economic growth and job creation has been recognized at the regional, national and European level. This leads the policy makers at all levels to look for measures enhancing the firm creation activity and in the same time they have to harmonize with Universities Curricula. In the Information Era network is a current tool that build bridges and develop business and people's knowledge.

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1. Introduction

Communication² is necessary for every interaction. We communicate with each other all day. Working together can provide us with a wider audience, more political strength and more knowledge and experience. Therefore we need communication, and we need to improve it all the time. Communication and networking go together. The meaning of the word 'networking' may not be very clear at first, but it is something we all do. Networking is making contacts, maintaining contacts and using contacts. For all of these forms of communication networking is important.

2. Networking

The term "network" can refer to any interconnected group or system. Networks connect everyone to everyone, contrary to hierarchies, which do not; rather they create formal channels of communication and authority. Networks operate informally with few rules, they depend on trust.

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² <http://www.unitedagainstracism.org/pages/info10.htm>.

They are formed because people need one another to reach common goals. Mutual help, assistance, and reciprocity are common to all functioning networks, which are not only self organizing but also self-regulating. Networking is the most powerful way to build professional relationships, actively foster contacts and disseminate information. Networks¹ can actively contribute to strengthening the communication power on the territory and thus helping to close the gap between EU Institutions and the people by improving the communications flow among the different bodies.

In general, a network does not work if you wait for others to take action, even if they have promised to do so. You need to **take the initiative**. You will have to keep taking the initiative for a while. You will have to GIVE a long time before you can RECEIVE.

Networking functions only partially on a rational level. Part of the communication is based on **personal and emotional relationships**. While it is not totally impossible to work with people you dislike, it is much easier to build a network with people you like. Be aware of your own emotional response to people.

Every country from EU has one or more managing authorities or organizations that are responsible for distributing information on activities within the various EU programmes. The information officers in these organizations are easy to identify, and they have a clear remit and access to central information and communications from the EU. Creating a national communicators network is therefore an important stage in providing integrated and consistent information about the Structural Funds and the EU. Such a network can, for example, consist of representatives from all the Operational Programmes within one country during a programming period.

Participation in the network can be compulsory or voluntary, depending on the organizational arrangements in a given country. The practice shows that usually participants cover their own travel and subsistence expenses, whereas the institution organizing the meeting covers the organizational costs, including the venue, refreshments or possible experts' fees.

¹ **INFORM network** is open to EU communication officers who want to *inform* others about their experiences with the *information* on the ERDF, Cohesion Fund and EU Cohesion Policy, who want to be *informed* about inspiring ideas and communication projects developed in other Member States or regions, who want to meet other communication officers and learn from each other in formal and *informal* ways. It is coordinated by the Information and Communication unit of the European Commission's Directorate General for Regional Policy.

The network aims to foster the exchange of good ideas, learning from the experiences of others and creating common tools, where needed. Its composition is two-fold: the core group comprises one representative per Member State, usually from the central body responsible for coordinating ERDF/Cohesion Policy. The core group's key tasks involve conveying information about publicity and communication activities in the Member States as well as sharing the latest communication tools and exchanging information gathered from meetings held with the national networks of communication officers in each country. The general group includes communication officers from the ERDF and Cohesion Fund programmes.

How to Build a Good Network

1. **Giving information:** Start with giving information about your own activities, your own organization by *building a mailing list and mailing regularly*, using e-mail and news groups or a web site, sending out invitations for your activities.
2. **Showing interest:** Phone around regularly, visit activities of other people and organizations, send them a post card when you feel like it, try to remember personal interests.
3. **Organizing meeting points:** To build a good network you need to meet people personally, do not wait until you meet them accidentally but invite them to a conference, organize a seminar or a social gathering.
4. **Common actions/activities:** The best way to get to know people is to work with them, the network links are strengthened and you are stronger as a result. You should be sure to involve people in ALL stages of the project, from planning stage to the evaluation.

3. Information is the Heart of Structural Funds Programs

Applicants and beneficiaries (e.g. public authorities, SMS, NGO etc) need guidance in order to submit good quality projects and to implement their projects in line with the regulatory obligations. The dissemination of information and the transparency of programmes is a vital element of an Operational Programme activity. As a result, the contractual partnership (Ionescu & Toders, 2007, p. 111) between managing authorities and beneficiaries is a close-knit relationship as it affects the very success of the programme. Two-way communication here is a strong priority: beneficiaries need to understand what can and cannot be done with the Structural Funds co-financing and programme managers require information on the programme's progress to make strategic decisions.

To be effective, communication must be centered around the beneficiaries' needs, taking into account their degree of familiarity with regional policy jargon and procedures. It is widely acknowledged that beneficiaries and project implementers often ignore their information and publicity obligations and lack the necessary resources, skills and experience to design and implement their publicity measures. Since beneficiaries have a binding obligation to publish the Structural Fund contribution to their activities, it is essential for Managing Authorities. One effective way of doing this is by *building a network relationship* between the appointed Managing Authority Information Officer and the information officers of the beneficiaries. With *the establishment of an effective channel for dialogue and interaction*, a Managing Authority can ultimately ensure compliance and consistent communication by beneficiaries.

The detailed requirements have been addressed by Articles 2 to 10 of the Commission Regulation 1828/2006¹. These articles encompass the spirit of the Legislation which is to inform the public, create a positive identity and ultimately to make them aware of activities and keep them up to date on the policies of the European Union. Transparency could be the cornerstone of any EU activity as it is imperative for the successful use of the funds. Therefore it is obligatory to publish the list of beneficiaries. By doing so this removes any veil of mystery about the destination of funding and makes it clear to all citizens that the EU can deliver positively to their locality be it in the form of a new motorway or additional childcare places.

Articles 2 to 10 stipulate precisely the responsibilities that rest with Managing Authorities in relation to information and publicity measures, while also detailing the correct use of the EU emblem on billboards, plaques and other information materials. Beneficiaries also have a special role to play in this process. They can and should show through their projects, developed with the cohesion policy assistance, that the European Union is indeed present around us and supports the regions' economic development and improves people's lives. By fulfilling their responsibilities as laid out in these articles, the Managing Authorities and other responsible bodies can go a long way in ensuring that the success of EU structural funds is properly communicated in their respective regions.

The following principles justify the need to involve the regional and local authorities in the formulation of European policies:

- **Openness**

Improved information and ownership of the Community's policy position are needed. Since they are democratically elected and close to the ground, the regional and local authorities are well placed to provide the citizen with information.

- **Participation**

The White Paper on governance affirms the need for the European and national associations of regional and local authorities to be involved with due regard for the institutional architecture of the Union and the Member States' internal organization.

- **Coherence**

The Commission acknowledges the need for better assessment of the impact at regional and local level of Community policies in areas such as transport, energy and the environment. Analyzing the impact of measures proposed at Community level will contribute to informing the different actors of the effects of these measures and guide them in their implementation tasks.

¹ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2006/l_371/l_37120061227en00010163.pdf.

- **Effectiveness**

Some Community policies are implemented and/or have the greatest effect at regional and local level. Local government authorities are ideally placed therefore to assess the coherence and effectiveness of Community policies.

The purpose of national regional aid is to support investment and job creation and encourage firms to set up new establishments in Europe's most disadvantaged regions. In order to support economic development in these regions during the period 2007-2013, these guidelines introduce criteria to assess the compatibility of national regional aid with the internal market under Article 87(3)(a) and (c) of the Treaty establishing the European Community (EC).

4. Business Networking¹

Business networking is leveraging your business and personal connections to bring you a regular supply of new business. The concept sounds simple, doesn't it? Don't let that fool you, though. Because it involves relationship building, it can be a deceptively complex process. Think about it. How many people do you know? How many of these people truly understand what you do? How many of these folks have directed prospects to you as referrals? And how many of those referrals have actually turned into business?

Business networking is much more than showing up at networking functions, shaking a lot of hands and collecting a bunch of cards. ***Networking for business growth must be strategic and focused.*** Not everyone you meet can help move your business forward--but everything you do can be driven by the intention to grow your business. You have total control over whom you meet, where you meet them and how you develop and leverage relationships for mutual benefit.

Networking your business means you have to be proactive. The core of networking is doing something specific each week that is focused on networking for business growth. Make a plan, focus and be consistent. When you understand exactly what business networking is and step up to the challenge, you'll find avenues of opportunity that you may have otherwise never discovered, and you will be making an invaluable investment in the steady growth of your business"².

Networking is about interacting with people and engaging them for mutual benefit. It can help you establish a new business or grow an existing one. You can also use networking as a tool for finding investors, customers, staff, suppliers and business partners with minimal cost to your business. We can network face-to-face

¹ <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/196758>.

² <http://www.business.qld.gov.au/business/running/managing-business-relationships/networking-in-business>.

at social events, conferences and through industry associations. You can also network online, through sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook. The more ways you can network, the more your business will benefit. It's common for people to feel apprehensive about networking, but it's a skill you can develop with practice. The more networking you do, the easier it will become. If you own a small business, networking can be an inexpensive way to promote your business. Through networking, you can discover new opportunities, build your customer base and find new suppliers and staff. You may also find investors and business partners. Networking is particularly important if you're running a home business because it can connect you with peers and help you overcome potential issues associated with being isolated.

Networking options are broad and continually changing. You may need to research networking trends to work out which ones best suit your business. Once you begin networking, it's likely you'll start to receive invitations to more events from people you meet. Before you know it, your networking group will be growing. Joining networking groups will give you a chance to meet people from a wide range of small- to medium-sized businesses. Contact your industry association and business contacts or search online to find out a networking group that suits you. Connecting with your industry online will help you keep up to date with events. You can also sign up to online newsletters from industry associations and other businesses and receive regular updates about events and opportunities.

Networking through friends and family can be a great way to establish strong business relationships. You might meet someone who could be useful for your business or someone whose business you can help, at a social event. If you develop a rapport with them and exchange contact details, you can follow up with them later. It's a good idea to make networking a regular part of running your business. Plan your networking activities and devote a certain amount of time and money to them. Spending money on networking can be more effective than spending it on advertising, as it is more personal and targeted. Effective business networking is the linking together of individuals who, through trust and relationship building, become walking, talking advertisements for one another.

5. Universities Networks

“Universities exist for a simple yet profound reason: to create new knowledge through research and discovery and to pass on knowledge to the next generation. It is also the duty of every university to prepare its students to become engaged and contributing citizens. In the 21st century, this task takes on new meaning”¹. The great compression of our world—a consequence of the spread of technology and

¹ <http://www.nyu.edu/global/the-global-network-university.html>.

information, the interdependence of economies, the transnational nature of major human challenges, and an increasing embrace of diversity—will only accelerate. We already see evidence of the emergence of a set of global "idea capitals," magnets for talents and creativity. Under the umbrella of Arts and Science, the Global Liberal Studies Program¹ merges liberal studies curriculum with experiential learning and an intensive intellectual experience abroad. The Business and Political Economy Program² at the Leonard N. Stern School of Business combines course work in business, politics, and economics with integrated study at NYU campuses in three of the world's most important global marketplaces—New York, London, and Shanghai.

6. Conclusions

Working with networks as being part of them we can interact with very diverse people that can inspire us to develop our activity in a more efficient way. A regional network that has in its structure universities and entrepreneurs could provide good working places and efficient jobs.

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