



APPLICATION OF A CASE STUDY APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING ENTREPRENEURSHIP THROUGH STUDIES BY PORTUGUESE SMES PELCOR AND YDREAMS

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summary

It is assumed that it is important to include real cases in entrepreneurship education methodologies as a way of bringing schools and students closer to business realities and the challenges that are posed in the real world to entrepreneurs. However, in the teaching-learning of entrepreneurship, teachers are often challenged to find reliable and organized data on real cases in the national context, which is due to several reasons. On the one hand, successful companies show an understandable reluctance to divulge detailed information about their path, on the other hand, there is still no common practice on the part of researchers and teachers to systematically write articles in the form of real cases with applications pedagogical.

Key words: Case study, SMEs, entrepreneurship teaching-learning, participatory methodologies

Introduction

The advantages of employing role-play activities based on case-studies in entrepreneurship courses have been amply described in the literature. (Hytti and Nieminen, 2013; North, 2006; Shephard 2004). Likewise narrative approaches have been shown to be effective in changing perceptions and attitudes of actors in business and research contexts (Cooper et al. 2004; Era & Carswell, 2000; Czarniawska, 2000; Denning, 2007). With the exception of the International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation which features a case-study in each issue along with teaching points for classroom use, there are relatively few resources available to instructors on entrepreneurship courses that would allow them to employ real-world examples in their teaching.

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Application of a Case Study Approach to Teaching and Learning Entrepreneurship Through Studies by Portuguese SMEs PELCOR and YDREAMS.

This paper presents case-studies of two Portuguese SMEs, Pelcor (Carvalho and Williams 2014) and YDreams (Williams and Figueiredo, 2014a, 2014b), with suggestions as to how they can be incorporated in entrepreneurship courses by using narrative and role-play activities to help develop student perceptions of the factors involved in the strategic decisions which confront entrepreneurs in SMEs.

Pelcor

Objectives

The main aims of this teaching case are concerned with:

- Demonstrating the evolution of a family business and entrepreneurial growth in the context of innovation and creativity critical to entrepreneurship education in business schools;
- Analyzing the importance of the opportunity nexus in small business;
- Highlighting the power of entrepreneurial marketing and brand development via internationalization;
- Strategic decision making concerning marketing when a family-based SME aims to internationalize

Background

The Correia family business began 30 years ago with a cork factory named Novacortiça, SA, in Sao Brás de Alportel, a region in the south of Portugal. This factory makes champagne corks for many of the finest vintners in France and Spain. It has been the life work of three generations of the Correia family, the most recent being Sandra Correia, granddaughter of the founder. In 1995, when she was 23 years old, she joined the family business after completing a degree in Communication from the Institute of Business in Lisbon, Portugal. She spent six years learning the processes used to produce cork stoppers and marketing them to vintners. Along the way she established a laboratory to insure quality control.

At the beginning of 21st century the cork industry was in crisis due to competition from substitute products. To react to this crisis, Nova Cork established an agreement with two partners from French and Spain in 2000, which committed them to exclusively supplying corks to French champagne producers Moët et Chandon. In anticipation of the enthusiasm of the new

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millennium, Moët et Chandon placed a large order for corks estimating significant growth in champagne sales. However demand did not meet expectation, which led to a decline in the demand for cork.

Subsequently the Correia family then found itself once again facing a difficult financial situation which was complicated by the fact that it now had an excess of raw material and could not channel this surplus to its traditional markets.

Sandra Correia noted that Novacortiça had excess raw material that represented costs to the company and she identified this surplus as an opportunity to monetize the leftover cork by using it to produce fashion accessories. This plan assumed particular importance when Nova Cortiça found itself facing serious challenges due to changes in the wine cork market.

In 2003 when Sandra Correia received an invitation to participate in a trade fair in Spain organized by the Portuguese Association of Entrepreneurial Women she arrived there with a new product, an umbrella made from cork. This accessory was so well received that it was decided to launch a new brand, which she named Pelcor. The brand name Pelcor is taken from the Portuguese words for skin (skin) and cork (cork) which helps to bring out the idea that cork can compete with leather as a stylish material in a variety of contexts. It built on the success of the cork umbrella by partnering with a number of fashion designers to develop limited edition fashion accessories and in its marketing placed a strong emphasis on the novel “cork skin” concept which helped reposition cork as fabric-like material which was associated with a collection of products which consumers would perceive as sophisticated, contemporary, eco-friendly and innovative.

Strategic decisions

An important early decision was to focus marketing in Portugal on establishing Pelcor products at the high-end of the fashion-accessory market. It soon became an iconic brand, which was frequently used to represent Portuguese products in international events, such as the NATO

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Summit in Lisbon (2010) or as a gift to international personalities, such as President Barack Obama, American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

From early on, Ms Correia was aware of the importance of internationalization: “My main goal for Pelcor, is to become the leader in the export of Portuguese fashion accessories. A brand recognized worldwide, in terms of the area of fashion, as a Portuguese brand. ” She used the cachet acquired from the links with high profile international visitors to Portugal to advance the case that “From a cork umbrella to an iPad sleeve, this merchandise goes anywhere!”. Actually translating such aspirations into practice are not easy but here we can see where another important strategic decision gave fruit: the firm opted to contract a high-profile US public relations firm to promote its products and this paid off when in 2010 New York's prestigious museum MoMa (Museum of Modern Art) presented the Pelcor collection in an exhibition called "Cork Your Style". The brand rapidly achieved international visibility and nowadays is well positioned in many markets, with representation in several countries in Europe as well as in Japan, China, Macau, Canada, USA and Saudi Arabia. Today exports represent over 30% of its production. The firm's preferred sales channel is through retailers, but they do also offer online distribution and provide smart phone apps to support this.

Roleplay

This case lends itself to a role-play approach, placing students as active first-person participants (Hytti & Nieminen 2013). The following outline describes one way of approaching this.

The tutor poses the following scenario to students and gets them working in groups to propose possible strategies, which they then report back. The authors would suggest that when presenting both case studies that the names of the firms are not used initially to reduce the possibility of students researching that current company history on their mobile devices and short-circuit their involvement in the role-play activity.

What would you do in this situation?

Your family firm has been growing cork to supply wine bottlers for 3 decades and is currently facing some challenges:

- Cork oak plantations take 30 years before the trees provide cork that can be harvested.

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After the groups have reported back, the students read the Pelcor case study and comment on how the strategy followed corresponded or not to their own proposals. If this study is being used with Portuguese students they are likely to quickly opt for the fashion accessory option as they will be familiar with some of the products - in this case the instructor gets them to focus on how and where to market the products.

Possible follow-up assignments:

- Research recent R&D advances on cork as a material and comment on the future of cork as a commodity and its potential for entrepreneurs.

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- Prepare and present a case-study from your national context which you think is a good example of female entrepreneurship / internationalization / family business innovation / traditional product innovation

In a later class, the tutor may present choose to discuss significant advances arising from R&D in the cork sector such as the cork recycling process, the helix twist wine cork and a cork expansion procedure linked to in the Appendix. The team who developed the process for expanding cork with microwaves were finalists in the 2013 European Inventor Awards. Each of these innovations has been developed by the Amorim group, market leader in the cork industry. Amorim itself also evolved from a family business which began operating in Portugal back in the 19th century.

YDreams

Background

When Gary Hamel's consultancy firm Strategos (2009) polled 186 CEOs and senior figures in leading Portuguese companies to gather data on which international and national firms they considered to be the most innovative, the results were awaited with interest. The Portuguese company with the highest vote was YDreams, a start-up created in 2000 when a group of engineers from a successful university research department at a Lisbon university (Universidade Nova de Lisboa) felt the need to move from a university to an entrepreneurial context . YDreams has since had considerable national and international success in the areas of interactive spaces.

The key engineers in this start-up were originally in the field of Environmental Engineering and Information Technology, and their Environmental Systems Analysis Group (GASA) was known for its pioneering work in a field that has since become dominated by Google Maps. In 2000, frustrated by the limitations encountered within the academic system, they effectively set aside the projects they had been working on and dedicated themselves to an entrepreneurial start-up. Their YDreams company has since come to enjoy considerable international success in the interactive space and ubiquitous computing sectors (<http://www.ydreams.com/>). With an initial investment of 50 thousand euros in 2000, by 2010 the firm reportedly had an annual turnover of over 9 million euros and its clients have included Vodafone, NOKIA, JC Decaux Airport, Siemens, Alcatel, Endemol and the BBC. CEO Antonio Câmara won the prestigious Pessoa Prize in 2006 (COTEC, 2005) for his entrepreneurial achievements and the company has won a number of international awards including the Industrial Design Society of America Gold Award for Interactive Environments in 2004, and an Auggie (Augmented Reality Award) in 2010.

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Procedure

Following Felder and Brent (2003), we consider a jigsaw activity approach to be appropriate here - one where groups of participants are supplied with different information and need to come to a consensus in a role-play. One possible application is to use a 2-stage approach. First focusing on YDreams strategy in 2000 and distributing the information contained in a Porter 5 Forces analysis to one group of students while other receive the PESTLE analysis (Williams and Figueiredo 2014a). The different groups then prepare and role-play a board meeting where they come together to plan company strategy over the next 10 years. After instructor-facilitated feedback between the groups, the students learn what the real company options were during that period (Williams and Figueiredo 2014a, 2014b).

The second stage again involves 2 groups in a jigsaw activity role-playing a board meeting and in this case participants are supplied with different parts of the SWOT analysis data for the company's globalization in 2010, and similarly come to agreement on strategy options. Once again this is followed by discussion of the real company choices and their outcomes (Williams and Figueiredo 2014a).

Discussion of the application of case-studies

Although the authors have used such case-studies in their teaching we have not been able to collect adequate data to establish definitely that this approach has improved student learning. Obtaining credible quantitative data to measure the effect of teaching innovation on student test-scores and retention rates is generally accepted to be problematic when based on small samples like we are working with (Prince 2004; Wankat et al., 2002). Nevertheless, we would agree with Prince (2004) that meta-analysis of the results of the introduction of active learning activities such as these, does provide convincing empirical support for the learning benefits of their use.

Conclusions

In this paper the authors contribute to addressing a common problem faced by instructors involved with the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship: the shortage of data to support the pedagogical use of case-studies. We present studies of two Portuguese SMEs, Pelcor and YDreams and suggest ways by which these studies can be used in a classroom context by using narrative and role-play activities to help develop student perceptions of the factors involved in the strategic decisions which confront entrepreneurs in SMEs.

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Appendix

Pelcor

CaseStudyCork.fv_BW19July.docxwww.pelcor.pt/en/

http://upmagazine-tap.com/en/pt_artigos/pelcor-2/

<http://www.treehugger.com/style/cork-your-style-with-momas-new-in-store-accessories-photos.html>

Cork recycling:

<http://recork.org/>

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mary-orlin/dont-be-a-cork-dork-recyc_b_851826.html#s267640title=Anthropologie_windows_with

Cork expansion technique (European Inventor Award):

<http://www.epo.org/learning-events/european-inventor/finalists/2013/velez/feature.html>

Helix wine cork innovation:

<http://www.wineanorak.com/wineblog/wine-science/helix-a-new-cork-based-closure-solution/comment-page-1>

<http://packaging.drinks-business-review.com/news/amorim-oi-introduce-new-cork-glass-wine-packaging-solution-helix-in-europe-180613>

Delfin anti cork-taint process:

<http://apcor.pt/artigo/412.htm>