

Experimenting Application of Futures Foresight Knowledge to Business Idea Creation in an Educational Setting in Sports Business

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Aim

Organizations in all fields of economic activity – sports business included - depend on new opportunity recognition and exploitation. To succeed they need a flow of new ideas (products, services, business models). Advances in technology and business models send waves of creative disruption, and the winners at the marketplace can turn these discontinuities into advantage.

This research aimed at testing the combination of futures foresight-based knowledge of change drivers in sports industry (Saukkonen & Lundén, 2017) and fast-paced idea generation. The aim of the research was to see if; 1) feeding in data from earlier research (“future context”) impacts the quantity of the ideas generated 2) if the amount of contextual data impacts the ideation output 3) find areas of further development and studies on the idea generation for sports business.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Various studies have discussed the arrangements leading to enhancement in the quantity and quality of ideas created in innovation processes. The proponents of the “quantity view” stress the high uncertainty related to innovation processes. Thus it is more likely to find the one groundbreaking idea from a vast pool of ideas that was created with an open approach (Thanasopon et al., 2016). On the other hand, quality of ideas may be increased if the individuals and teams involved with ideation are given relevant contextual data to support their process (Nicolettou et al., 2016; Bellantuno et al., 2013; Girotra et al., 2010). This kind of data-informed ideation means supporting the process with data that describes the current state of things or short-term past. Contextualization can also refer to knowledge of potential future states of things, acquired by use of futures foresight methods i.e. anticipation. Linsey et al, 2011 link the idea quantity and quality to the organization of the ideation tasks and events. Hybrid form of ideation (or Bounded Ideation Theory) is seen as a process that combines the benefits of intellect of an individual and team dynamics and thus works better than solely individual or team-based efforts.

Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

The research experiment was conducted as an 1,5 hour ideation sprint inside the undergraduate course of Sports Marketing with a multicultural group of students. Researchers gave an overview of the target of the session and explained the technical issues of the experiment. The group of 30 students was divided to 6 teams by the researchers randomly, and each team was given the same task but with different data to start with. The researchers used as a context future-related data surging from an earlier study (Saukkonen & Lunden, 2016) that identified 6 core trends affecting the Sports Business in Finland at a 10 year interval. Two of those trends and Future Radar illustrations - potential impacts of those trends in Technological, Organizational and Personal level (TOP) - were used in the ideation experiments.

For each of the two trends 3 different types of groups were appointed. The first group started creating with no other support than the statement of the trend and a blank poster base where to place their ideas with post-it stickers. The second group got the trend statement and the poster base with readymade segments for TOP spheres. The third group had in their use the full Future Radar with trend statement and potential impacts as well as poster base readily segmented for TOP. The researchers measured the accumulation of ideas at 10, 20 and 35 minutes intervals. Aim was to know if data-informed ideation supports or hinders creativity and speed of the process. Post-analysis also included analyzing the issue area (T, O or P) that ideas touched.

Results and Discussion

The results show that fast ideation process can be highly productive in what comes to quantity of ideas. The results indicate that giving mere structure to placed sets process pace and productivity down. However, concerning both trends the groups that were given most contextual support in addition to structure created more ideas than less supported groups. Quality of the ideas (their business value) was not directly in scope. However, the participants had the opportunity to keep the best ideas to themselves (and they are not yet protected) and just mark them to posters as “idea X”. The groups with less context ae created more of these unique (perceived high quality) ideas than the highly data-informed groups.

Conclusion and Implications

This exploratory study proposes there is underlying potential in applying futures foresight into ideation and innovation processes for new business creation in sports. Future work should develop the process so that right choices of data-informed process vs open innovation can be done. Elaboration and analysis of ideas to study the idea quality is a development step required for full assessment of the process.

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