What I learned from I&E 352

Final Reflection

To me, the most important and heavily emphasized topic within the class was the concept of ‘jobs to be done’. At its base level, we associate every product with the job it performs, and a products value is directly correlated to its ability to do its chosen job. This speaks to me because although it is a simple concept, bringing it into reality requires a combination of self-awareness, problem recognition, and most importantly a fundamental understanding of your customers. I believe the most effective way to combine all three is through quick and agile consumer testing, like what is recommended to succeed within the Harvard food truck simulation. We went over multiple examples of companies who varied in their ability to carry this out, on one extreme being is Segway. An innovation which was regarded by its founder as potentially revolutionary with regards to travel, quickly became unsuccessful because they did not realize that with transport most customers want simplicity. On the opposite end of the spectrum we have Bob Moesta and his Detroit housing company. After gaining information from his consumers, he was able to make a crucial acknowledgement that he was not in the business of new-home construction but rather in “the business of moving lives”. By adapting to the new information obtained, Bob’s housing company experienced great success and was able to grow business by almost 75%.

Although what the Detroit housing company emulates all aspects of identifying the job to be done, I believe that the most effective way to identify and validate a customer need is through the development of a minimum viable product (MVP). By developing a minimum viable product, one can obtain quick customer feedback, which can possibly reveal insights which can easily be overlooked by founders. This is especially useful because many founders spend time attempting to develop the perfect solution, yet when it is presented for consumer testing key problems are revealed. Through rapid cycles of MVP testing, founders can identify key problems with their initial solutions while also obtaining the consumers perspective of the job to be done. This information allows for pivoting, which as shown by the Detroit housing company can lead to great success if executed properly.

Secondary to the identification of jobs to be done, the second most important thing I learned from this course is the concept of effective team building. By analyzing Google’s project Aristotle, we learned that the most effective teams are ones with high psychological safety, because they are more likely to present and utilize the diverse ideas provided by their teammates. This applies not only on the corporate level, but within all environments, whether it is a professional athletic team or a group of friends Pictionary, psychological safety corresponds with improved performance. An example of this psychological safety exhibiting itself happened during my case study groups initial meeting for the Milkshakes and More assignment. We were tasked with opening our meeting by stating where the most interesting place our current shoes have been, which not only removed the awkward tension but also allowed for us to learn more about each other. In doing this, we were then more open to conversation while completing the assignment, and each of us was able to contribute to our final product. With regards to leading teams, we learned through our readings that there through research there has been no observed set personality type for an entrepreneur, however there are trends in the behaviors and actions of entrepreneurs which are of more importance. By paying attention to these behaviors, one can better understand why entrepreneurs are successful in what they do, and ideally apply those skills within their own lives. This is one reason why I greatly enjoyed the mentor pairing within this course, as I was able to learn a variety of life lessons within my two mentor talks which could have taken me years to learn on my own.

Ethical culture within entrepreneurship is in my opinion more important than the bottom line because the ethics of a self-designed venture is a direct reflection of your sense of morality. Without the desire or intention to provide a social good, not only is the scope of a projects job to be done decreased, but it also invites speculation into the true intentions of the initial product. A perfect example of this within our class was the Envirofit Case study, which showed how a simple change of perspective can provide a completely different reaction to a product. Although I personally believe that the initial founders meant well in their development of a low cost reduced emission stove, they inadvertently exploited consumers by offering them a product which was unnecessary to solve the initial job to be done. Within innovation the ethics of a venture is always of importance, and although at times it is difficult to determine, it is important that founders are cognizant of where which side of the line their product falls within.

In completing this course, I have seen my career interests adapt and I have begun to plan for a change within my future educational experiences at Duke. I greatly enjoyed learning about the business strategies used within the entrepreneurial world, and I hope to find more courses in the future which focus on these topics, because I see them becoming extremely useful life skills to develop. This summer I had planned on fulfilling an internship position at Edwards Lifesciences as a Manufacturing Engineer, however with all the uncertainty going around I am not sure as to whether it will still be an option come summertime. However, after taking this course, I believe I am better prepared to develop my own projects and ideas to explore in the case that I am not able to capture this growth opportunity. Finally, I plan on making a more conscious effort to connect with the people around me. The emphasis on network building within the course, the readings, and from my mentors have motivated me to reach out to faculty and friends with whom I want to be close with. From this outreach, I hope to develop a board of advisors of professors and students who can help assist me as I continue my college journey. Overall, this course has provided me with countless nuggets of useful information, and I would just like to thank you Kathie also with Kayako and Jeel for making this one of my most memorable classes yet!