Entrepreneur Interview Report (Assignment 2)
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Introduction

This report focuses on an interview conducted with C., an entrepreneur born in Italy and now working in Switzerland, whose entrepreneurial ideas focus on dealing with issues related to youth unemployment and difficulty in entering the job market. To respect C.'s privacy, all personal data has been removed from this report, including names, locations, company names, and more.

Studies and first steps

As most entrepreneurs' careers, C.'s did not choose to become an entrepreneur after waking up in her bed one day. She graduated twice, once in Trento with a master in European and International Studies and then in London, with a master in Culture Policy and Management. However, finding a job as soon as possible proved to be harder than expected. Moreover, C. found same-company working opportunities (e.g., a 9/5 job with several years of contract, or a permanent one within the public administration) to be stale and terrifying, as most young entrants in the job market do – namely, people from the late Millennial and early gen Z generation. Incidentally, people from the Millennial generation change jobs three times as often as the older workforce does (Adkins, 2016). This is projected to grow as more and more people from Generation Z graduate and enter the market.

Within this confusing and ever-changing situation, C. first started her career with a "regular" job. However, this proved soon to be unsatisfying. The experience prompted C. to re-assess her life plan, and to explore more versatile and flexible work opportunities. During her second Master's in London, she had the opportunity to develop a mockup for an assignment. This mockup consisted in a platform for young students, in which users could playfully build skills such as self-awareness, team working, entrepreneurial thinking, and more. She therefore sought to investigate more into issues affecting young students, especially during the last years of compulsory education. Her previous experience in school tutoring with students proved beneficial in this, being a more discreet and calmer environment in which students' problem can be assessed more clearly.

At this point, C. decided to shift her focus on issues related to the Italian (and European) education system. C. noticed, within the ever-increasing youth unemployment, a rise in mental health illnesses within people entering the job market (Linkiesta.it, 2018). She therefore sought to address this issue, in the hope of preventing the very same problem she went through in the previous years. As her research progressed, she noticed a pattern of commonplace problems plaguing secondary schools in Italy.

Indeed, teaching methods are often outdated, focusing more on bulk studying and raw contents (especially non-professional schools such as *Liceo Scientifico* or *Liceo Classico*). This usually gives little to no place for modern and innovative educational solutions, which usually are more focused on instilling forward-thinking methodologies. For example, soft skills such as team-working are usually all but neglected by both teachers and students, leaving a dreadful gap that is hard to fill once young students complete their studies and enter the job market.

The beginning of the journey

With all being said, C. decided to concretely implement a new product fixing this problem – or better, a sum of problems encompassing youth unemployment. The mockup previously presented during her master's was adapted into an online platform, which was to be monetized by making it available to education institutes. After consulting with Italian schools and starting a feasibility study, she created a first prototype of the idea. C. was then accepted into a startup incubator, and in the following year and a half she kept developing the idea while organizing demonstrative workshops between Switzerland and Italy.

During this first experience, C. bumped into several hindrances that ultimately made this first idea fail. Firstly, her move to Switzerland forced her to rebuild her network of people, schools, and companies from scratch. This caused some major slowdowns in the development of the project, as C. first tried to contact Swiss schools without much success. C. therefore decided to focus back on the Italian market, in which her network was stronger and built on years of inter-personal relationships.

Secondly, the Italian and Swiss schools themselves – which C. tried to contact – were often averse to change. Indeed, most responses C. received were either negative or blank, and positive responses usually implied months and months of waiting before anything concrete would be even planned. Indeed, this is an issue again plaguing most Italian schools, which often happen to be very close-minded. Proposals from outside entities are often ignored or delayed, typically for economic reasons or lack of personnel.

Finally, the feasibility study itself was harder and longer than expected. Lacking the raw economic power institutions such as private schools, companies or foundations may have, it took C. a full year before completing the feasibility study. Moreover, most of the work was done by her alone. In this field, domain experts are often essential for successfully carrying out such a study. However, given the situation, this could have not been possible. Ultimately, this meant months and months without revenue – even after being accepted in the startup incubator and winning prizes, C. felt that either she had to go no-profit and rely on public funds, or switch business model.

Changing paths and recent history

Switching business model implied, at this point, observing the problem from different and alternative points of view. She noticed how, in the context of youth unemployment, companies found it difficult to adapt to the needs of the younger working generation, often being held captive by working ideas and standards set even 30 or 40 years ago. For example, nowadays turnover is a major issue for companies [insert quote from article]. As said before, new job entrants often change jobs multiple times over the span of just a few years. This causes severe economic issues in companies, which are then forced to spend money and time to properly replace the leaving workforce. Turnover is additionally worsened by aging personnel leaving for retirement, enlarging the human resource hole within companies.

C. therefore decided to focus on the problem from both sides: the student and the company one. In order to narrow the gap between university and the job market, C.'s work in the last has been focused on creating a new platform encompassing support for both companies and graduating students. The goal shifted to tackling issues that may arise during both job recruiting and job research. For examples, workshops are organized encompassing creativity development, collaboration, and critical thinking. For companies, the focus is more on meeting demands from young workers, such as leveraging work-life balance, adapting to diversity, inclusion and managing environmental impact.

Conclusion

To conclude, C.'s experience has been anything but easy. Entrepreneurship is not a foregone journey: setbacks will be encountered and will have a significant impact, and only by making mistakes, falling and standing back up one can realize her or his goals. Especially in Italy, entrepreneurship provides a significant number of challenges, with most of them being linked to a persisting, hard-to-change mindset tracing back to decades ago. In Italy, the taxation system is still cumbersome for freelancers, and getting started often proves challenging. Paper works requiring dozens of signatures often do slow down or even halt projects, lengthening the time needed for a business idea to be effectively deployed on the market. Job demand is still rooted for permanent positions, which young workers often despise. To worsen, the public administration workforce in Italy is the oldest within Europe (Il Foglio, 2017). The result is that once the oldest workers go into retirement there will be even bigger gaps for work positions within the PA, but in the meantime applications to these jobs will be harder and harder. In turn, this causes more and more economic instability and psychological problems in the younger workforce, effectively starting a never-ending loop.

Nevertheless, C. steadily continued through her journey no matter the uncertainties and the roadblocks she encountered. C. still strongly believes that worldwide education will need to adapt to the entrepreneurial mindset sooner or later, willing or not. As the world shifts towards globalization, driven by flexible and often-changed jobs and with loads of opportunities hidden behind tons of information, fixing education at the root and inspiring young adults and children on working methods of the future could a very profitable and reasonable approach at the problem.

References

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