

Article

Modern learning, teaching, and assessment methods of education, based on Team academy method at Vilnius Business College

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Abstract. The need to integrate theory and practice, to connect them into the real entrepreneurial world is the most important aim of education. To equip students with the skills so that they would be able to solve problems and provide solutions. Within the framework of the 21st century learning paradigm, the mission of Vilnius Business College (VBC) is to offer students new approaches to learning experiences by employing active methods of student involvement into their learning processes. It is possible to achieve all this only through a student's active engagement into business reality, applying simulations, employing shared effort and active teamwork while searching for links among different phenomena of applied business. The main idea is how to facilitate the acquisition of hands-on experience in business organization and project management in the studies. *Team academy* methodology as educational innovation helps to implement entrepreneurial skills align personal and develop team experience in reflection to with market needs.

Keywords: team academy; coaching; team; entrepreneurship; action-based learning.

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Introduction

Within the framework of the “21st century learning paradigm”, the mission of Vilnius Business College (VBC) is to offer students new approaches to learning experiences by employing active methods of student involvement into their learning processes. In practice this means the following: the VBC takes the matters of quality of studies very seriously and provides opportunities to students to actively participate in collectively creating the content of professional education. This allows students to feel greater responsibility for the progress made in studies as well as for their success in business. All this is possible to achieve only through a student's active engagement while searching for links among different phenomena of reality, shared effort, and active teamwork.

Team academy (or *Tiimiakatemia*) is an international brand and a learning community of over 6000 users of the learning methods, and currently there are approximately 850 teampreneurs studying in different Team Academies in Finland, Spain, Hungary, United Kingdom, Netherlands, France, and Brazil [1]. *Tiimiakatemia Learning Network* was established in 2012 as a network for *Tiimiakatemia* coaches around the world. The internationalization has most cases simply started by visiting *Tiimiakatemia* in Jyväskylä, which was launched by Johannes Partanen in 1993 with a bulletin board message in Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences: “Do you want to go on a trip around the world and learn some marketing on the side? Come to class 147 at 3 p.m. to hear more!” [1]

Team academy found its way to VBC in 2019 and it was first tried out in the study programme of *Business Management and Marketing*. The advantage of the *Team academy* methodology as an educational innovation is that it facilitates the acquisition of hands-on experience in business organization and project management; thus, the students' capability of adjusting their practical steps in business to the ever-changing reality becomes smoother and less painful. Besides, this methodology empowers students as they get ready to work in a team and evaluate their peers as well as their own role and input into the jointly produced product and, what is even more important, accept responsibility for the outcomes of their teamwork. This kind

of approach signals the cardinal change from student as a passive recipient of knowledge to an active agent in the processes of studies.

This work is devoted to: i) presenting management education in the context of learning in the team setting and principles; ii) applying new way of assessment and learning in the formal education; iii) showing the diversity of approaches that exist within the *Team academy* method.

1. *Team academy* – innovative learning

More modern approaches assume that entrepreneurship can only be achieved by trying, experimenting, and learning about one's own experience [1]. This is because according to newer approaches motivating students to become and / or think as entrepreneurs is key [2].

Action-based learning is based on real life experience [3, p.35]. The *Team academy* model is based on a fundamental belief that management is learnt by being in business. In contrast to many educational institutions' attempts to simulate workplaces to render the student experience more 'real', the *Team academy* turns the institution into a workplace where education is an integral output. To realize this, learners create and run real businesses. The fact that these are fully owned and controlled by the students themselves [4].

Methodology came to the VBC due to partnership links with our foreign colleagues, namely, in Finland. This is how they described their experience with this new methodology from the very beginning. The starting point of a small-size revolution in higher education began in 1993 with the invitation placed on the noticeboard: “Would you like to go on a round-the-world trip and learn some marketing on the way?” It happened at the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JAMK), in a small town in central Finland. The chief protagonist of the note was Johannes Partanen, a maverick marketing lecturer with a passion for making difference, who was driven by the need for a new learning model to better engage his students in the processes of university education. The model of education started then, and is still being used today, turned the traditional bachelor studies model on its head [5]. Without habitual

classrooms, neither strictly scheduled lectures nor exams the programme started with replacing classrooms by open offices, and lecturing teachers by mentors and team coaches. The students of the programme had to start with practical work from the very start: they were to create and take up managing real companies, which they afterwards supplemented by theory in their educational ‘journey’.

The educational process itself entirely adopted the experiential learning model based upon David Kolb’s theory of experiential learning [6, p.48] and thus combined the two separate worlds of business and education. The model, institutionally developed and adapted by Partanen, was based upon the tenet that ‘experiences obtained through practice and experimentation nourish our thoughts and specify the issues we read about in books, resulting in more effective learning’ [4]. This has become the basis for the creation of the *Team academy* methodology, a three-and-a-half-year bachelor programme of 210 ECTS. [7]

By operating as a tertiary degree, the central component of *Team academy* is the Teamcompany which is the most important learning tool. Students create their company in the second semester and spend the rest of their time in the university working to make the company a success. “Teampreneurship is a new international trend in growth entrepreneurship”, - the founder of Tiimiakatemia, teaching councilor Joannes Partanen said [5].

2. The Method

The focus is placed on team learning and team coaching. Team – together everyone achieves more. The Team consists of 15-25 members with long term relationships (three years of studies) and is split into sub-groups that do projects (project groups). Each team has its own team coach who works with the team on long term basis. Coaching is needed mainly in team’s training sessions. Generally, the teams could be titled as the vehicle for learning together [8]. It is a combination of doing (applying theory into practice) and acquiring knowledge (reading).

Team academy as a method is divided into three areas: 1) training – team learning; 2) reading learning by reading; submitting the written book reflection; 3) practice – learning by doing. It happens in project work – from social project to business case.

One of the most outstanding elements of the *Team academy* case is the rigour that underpins the education process, with detailed processes and methodologies supporting the learning pathways of Teampreneurs. Three mechanisms support the Teampreneurs along their “learning path”: 1) training sessions; 2) reading; 3) projects.

Training sessions. They take place two times per week, 90 minutes per session. Mainly it is dialogue and open conversations. The topics are the issues important to the team: projects, planning, brainstorming, problems, etc. They can be pre-planned, or the session can be run with open-ended agenda. Team coach facilitates the session. Every session starts with check in (opening setting) and finishes with check out (feedback on session).

Reading. At *Team academy* an important part of personal development is conditioned by reading books. We value book reading as it is a well-known and proved competent habit for successful entrepreneurs.

Reading is a part of the leaning culture for an individual and team development. It helps to better express themselves, reflect and find solutions to their ideas. Reflection essays play an important role as they are done in writing and allows the student to express

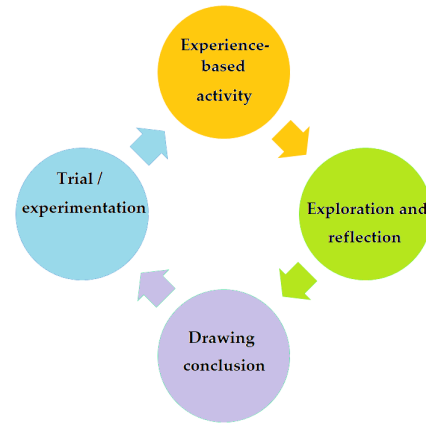


Fig. 1. Kolb’s circle of experiential learning. Adapted according to Ref.[6, p.128].

oneself individually on paper. For example: “Who moved my Cheese” by Spencer Johnson [9]. A parable about two little people and two mice in a maze, searching for cheese, where each character represents a different attitude towards change, with cheese being what we consider success. Students read the book, come to the coaching session, and give his or her review and main ideas that others may apply. Next time reading a book he or she writes an essay, a personal reflection on the book – the insight, the learning, the practical side, and conclusions.

Projects. Projects are presented for two purposes: to create the learning environment (for studies and developing individual’s competency) as well as to create the ways of making business (for team companies). Teampreneurs undertake work through their Teamcompanies by acquiring clients, negotiating project details, and signing contracts followed by executing the project themselves. The proceeds from their projects can be utilized by Teamcompanies in a manner they see fit from reinvesting the income to paying out salaries [10].

In projects, the Experiential Learning (expressed in terms of Cycle of Kolb [6], see Fig. 1) is applied through following factors: i) a concrete experience; ii) a reflective observation; iii) abstract conceptualization which is reflection that promotes a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept; iv) active experimentation whereby the learner applies the new knowledge.

A 24-hrs challenge is all about solving a problem from a real client within 24 hours. It is a team effort in which you work for 24 hours on the challenge presented, come up with the best solution possible and present this to the client and the community.

3. Coaching

Coaching takes place in team training sessions, not lectures. It must be combined with doing (applying theory in practice) and acquiring knowledge (reading). Coaching is the art of facilitating the performance, learning and development of another (Downey’s definition of Coach) [10].

Tiimiakatemia Global’s definition of a Professional team coach is an expert professional who has the knowledge, skills, mindset, and experience to the development of individuals, teams, and communities. Coach is a training and learning development specialist who can build and guide teams both for working and learning purposes [11].

Table 1. Principal questions of learning contract according to Cuningagham [13] and *Motorola* [14] formulations..

Cuningagham formulations		<i>Motorola</i> formulations	
1.	Where have I been (History)?	1.	What went well?
2.	Where am I now (Present)?	2.	What didn't go so well?
3.	Where do I want to get to (Future)?	3.	What did I (or we) learn?
4.	How shall I get there (Methods)?	4.	What will I (or we) do better next time?
5.	How shall I know if I've arrived (Measures)?		

Therefore, lecturers at the VBC are called coaches as they hold the space, facilitate learning of a coaching session. Each session starts with check in (to set the ground for the session) and finishes with check out (to sum up the session to act, to reflect, to commit, to review, etc.) questions.

Key areas of input propelling the *Team academy* methodology [12] include team coaches and spirit.

Team coaches. The team coaches perform the role of mentors who support student teams and individuals through their educational pathway as well as their practical stages of concept development. Their salary is paid by the College. The coaches have entrepreneurship and business experience.

The Spirit. The *Team academy* spirit is a much-valued commodity and involves special characteristics built during the time spent on the *Team academy* programme. Some of the key characteristics are presented as follows: a strong sense of community, appreciation of learning by doing and a firm trust in the value of the process itself during chaos. One could say that the spirit of *Team academy* is a value 'code' for 'teampreneurs'. It is also a description of a positive, excited, and youthful atmosphere prevailing among the team members.

4. Learning contract and agreements

Learning contract is committing, personal learning plan [12]. By using it the learner explores his/her learning path from the perspectives of past, current moment and future. These explorations are crafted into an action plan with goals and means to get to them. The principal questions of a learning contract are presented in Table 1. Two formulations are possible: Cuningagham formulation [13, p.345] as well as *Motorola* formulation [14].

The studies at the VBC are conducted on the co-operative basis between the student and coach. The coach will provide with guidance on the subject studied (the content, structure of the course, and feedback on progress made).

Agreements are the shared ground rules and comes as the team contract. Students agree on the important things together such as: responsibilities, leadership, working hours, assistance, resolving conflicts, breaking the rules, reward. [15, p.64-65]

Knowing yourself is the basis of management and feedback process helps to make improvement and grow. In *Team academy* it has been called as *Motorola* principle [14] which consists of four questions reflected after major project, case or task accomplished - see Table 1.

USA company *Motorola* used these questions in its project reports. *Motorola*-style feedback is used daily at *Team academy* process. The questions are simple and work in all kinds of situations: in the end of a training session, in the end of a project, in the end of the academic year, etc.

Strategic session. One of the specialties of this study programme is that newly joined students gather for the strategic session outside the campus at the beginning of every month of a semester. The content is provided by the coaches and second year students. Logistics,

venue, and organizational matters are delegated to manage to the first-year students. In this way they start to access the team development stages, learn to communicate, plan, execute and manage the event. During the session they start to reflect on their skillset, get to know each other and establish the bond.

Team roles and profiles. A simple questionnaire is used to define each individual team role and working preference. Every *Team academy*'s student test him/herself by using Belbin's team role test [15, p.43].

5. Realization of *Team academy* at VBC

Open Office Space. It is a 100 m² open space on the VBC premises in Vilnius. Facilities and equipment include the provision of internal furniture and educational equipment as well as other materials that are made available by the VBC.

Student teams. Suitable size for the coach to hold a coaching space and learning is for minimal of 20 students. Students form teams of 4-6 persons to establish a legal entity, called *Small partnership* (lith. *Mažoji bendrija*, MB). They meet each other regularly and coaching sessions are held twice per week with duration of 90 minutes.

Ideas for team activity. Strategic session at the beginning of a first year, goals setting, learning contract formulation, social project initiatives, innovation or other thematic day, book discussions, 24 hours challenge, marketing projects, reviews on ongoing key activities, presentation and pitches, mentoring of others, presenting self outside the campus, assessment on company progress, evaluation of the personal, team and company development, company visits, quest lectures and hands on experience, shadowing, fundraising campaigns.

Implementation and realization of ideas. A coach keeps track on student progress during the coaching session. The deliverable and goals are presented at the beginning of each semester. Goals are targeted to develop competences not limited to: a) ability to act as a team member in learning; b) team leadership skills; c) team entrepreneurial spirit. Assessment is held and based: number of books the student has read, team activities and roles taken, money earned per team. Every semester has different amount to be earned starting from €500 per team and number of clients served.

Issues for team and for coaches. Setting the rules for teams lies under students' belt, therefore, to keep commitments for their agreements requires constant review. Facing time management and priorities challenges need to be addressed and learnt most of the times. Motivation being a key for continuous development is crucial. Therefore, attendance to each coaching session is mandatory, it helps to track progress, facilitate learning dialogues, brainstorm ideas, find solutions when everyone is on the same page. A coach shall be flexible, adaptable, problem and conflict facilitator. It requires open and bold approach towards students' behaviour and attitudes. Coaches are here to develop students team spirit entrepreneurial mindset.

6. Assessment

There is a further assessment done on the individual basis which has the teampreneurs reflect on their own learning journey and their own personal mastery achieved. This process takes place between the teampreneur (student) and the team coach every six months and is exercised through the following tools: reflection on the Learning contract, the Learning log, the Reading literature programme and ‘the ‘Skill Profile’ [16]

Every semester 360-degree evaluation is performed due to the assessments of the student, the coach, and the peers. European Qualifications Framework (EQF) [17] sets certain learning outcomes to all bachelor’s programs in the European Union, including “advanced knowledge” and “demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialized field of work or study” [16]. It also includes competence-based learning outcomes, such as “taking responsibility for decision-making” and “managing complex technical or professional activities” [16]. And the curriculum with *Team academy* method, despite being competence-based, encompasses all that and more.

7. Future potential

The success of the programme helps to ensure its sustainability. This is evidenced by high employment rates of students who study via the *Team academy* methodology, by high rates of teampreneurs who go onto starting their own companies, and by high international recognition and expansion of the *Team academy* programme.

The rapid change in the global job landscape means that the con-

cept of work is also changing to a similar degree. As noted by the *Team academy* management staff, increasingly, workers require the ability to navigate their own employment path necessitating the development of entrepreneurial thinking and acting.

Conclusions

Conclusion that is reminded to *Team academy* student: “You don’t take action; action takes you” – The Silent Coach. [18] Therefore, “if you really want to see the future of management education, you should see *Team academy*”, Peter Senge said [19].

To sum up, the objective of the present was how to facilitate the acquisition of hands-on experience in business organization and project management in the studies using *Team academy* method.

First, management education in the context of learning in the team setting and principles is possible and needed for the formal education. Second, competence based learning and hands-on experience using specific tools such as check in, check out principles, *Motorola* techniques, entrepreneurial, problem-solving thinking, lead to guide towards real business company approach. Third, assessment is based on the results including reviews from self, peers (team goal) and coaches helps to be included in the process, to share accountability and foster engagement.

Abbreviations

VBC	-	Vilnius Business College
EQF	-	European Qualifications Framework
JAMK	-	Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences

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