

1. INTRODUCTION

As defined in the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2006/962/EC), sense of initiative and entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports individuals, not only in their everyday lives at home and in society, but also in the workplace in being aware of the context of their work and being able to seize opportunities, and is a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by those establishing or contributing to social or commercial activity. This should include awareness of ethical values and promote good governance.

Essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to this competence are the ability to identify available opportunities for personal, professional and/or business activities, including 'bigger picture' issues that provide the context in which people live and work, such as a broad understanding of the workings of the economy, and the opportunities and challenges facing an employer or organization. Individuals should also be aware of the ethical position of enterprises, and how they can be a force for good, for example through fair trade or through social enterprise as the ones that you are starting.

We have studied in the previous modules that there are many skills relate to proactive project management, involving for example the ability to think critically, the willingness to explore, the ability to prioritize, the ability to take decisions, the ability to plan, organize, manage, lead and delegate, analyze, communicate, debrief, evaluate and record, effective representation and negotiation, and the ability to work both as an individual and collaboratively in teams, etc. But the ability to judge and identify one's strengths and weaknesses, and to assess and take risks, is also essential.

An entrepreneurial attitude is characterized by initiative, pro-activity, independence and innovation in personal and social life, as much as at work. It also includes motivation and determination to meet objectives, whether personal goals or aims held in common with others, including at work.

2. DEFINING INITIATIVE

Mary Kay Ash, an American businesswoman said that *"There are three types of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened"*.

Think critically on what you would do in the following situation:

Your manager was due to meet with you and your co-workers to discuss their role in the next product roll-out. Unfortunately, he's been snowed in at an airport on the other side of the country, and his cell phone battery is dead. The deadline is tight, and the team can't afford to waste a day because of his absence.

You were the last person to talk to your boss before he left, and he'd outlined who was going to be doing what on the project.

So, you have two options:

- To take command, and, within an hour, everyone on the team has their preliminary tasks mapped out. If you do it well, several valuable days would be saved and maybe when your boss arrives in the office three days later, he would be impressed and grateful that you took responsibility to get the project moving.
- But you are not sure that you could manage all right and doing wrong could have negative consequences. So maybe it is better to wait.

Would you take initiative? That is, would you make things happen for yourself and for your team? Or, would you wait for someone else to tell you what to do?

People who have initiative and make things happen are highly valued in the entrepreneurship world as well as in the workplace. But what is initiative taking? And how can we develop it? We will try to cover both of these questions in this module.

Concerning *initiative*, or the ability to take initiative for us, Hubbard (1942) said that is doing the right thing without being told, Frese and Fay (2001) define initiative as work behavior characterized by its self-starting nature, its proactive approach, and by being persistent in overcoming difficulties that arise in pursuit of a goal.

Module 5: Ability to take the initiative



So the *ability to take initiative* is showed when we do things without being told, when we find out what we need to know, when we keep going when things get tough and we spot and take advantage of opportunities that others pass by, and also when we act instead of reacting. It is understood that all that behaviors are important to be an entrepreneur.

Most of us have seen initiative in action. Maybe you have seen a young manager who fills her boss's shoes when she is sick and the rest of the team is unsure what to do, or perhaps you have seen a team member proposing a process improvement plan to the executive board.

Initiative has become increasingly important in the entrepreneur life as well as in today's workplace. Entrepreneur profiles are needed not only in own business, but in Organization. They also want entrepreneur employees who can think on their feet and take action without waiting for someone to tell them what to do. This type of flexibility and courage is what pushes teams and organizations to innovate, and to overcome competition, and of course it is also a very important personal quality to entrepreneur an own business, both in a commercial and in a social way.

- **Are successful entrepreneurs born or developed?**

As we are studying, entrepreneurs are some of the most multi-talented and diverse people out there. A successful entrepreneur puts on many different hats at the same time. He or she is a project manager, a risk-taker, an accountant, a marketer, a salesman. And that is not all. In many cases, he or she is also a human-resource manager, a supply-chain manager, a customer-service, a public relation manager, and much more.

An entrepreneur is someone who exercises initiative by organizing a venture to take benefit of an opportunity and, as the decision maker, decides what, how, and how much of a good or service will be produced. A few very important keywords such as 'initiative taking' describe some of the qualities any successful entrepreneur.

The truth is that entrepreneurs need to have a certain set of qualities and characteristics in order to be successful. We would try to describe some of them.

3. QUALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURS

1. Successful entrepreneurs are ambitious.

This means that they “*actively seek out problems*” and have the ambition to fix them. Doing so comes to them as a habit. It is their state-of-mind. Everyone does not have this ambition, and this is one quality that defines an entrepreneur person.

2. Successful entrepreneurs proactively find and seek-out opportunities.

Being an entrepreneur is all about finding potential problems and opportunities, and providing real, tangible solutions to these problems. Thus one of the characteristics that define an entrepreneur is his/her ability to search for potential opportunities.

Identifying or discovering an opportunity comes naturally to them, and it is actually a big part of being an entrepreneur in the first place.

3. Successful entrepreneurs are focused, goal-oriented, disciplined, well-organized and meticulous.

Getting a business running from the ground-up is not easy, and understandably so. The fact is that a small percentage of startups go on to survive beyond the first year and become big businesses, and hence only a small number of entrepreneurs really go on and make it big.

Those who have the discipline to follow their game-plan, and work on achieving their short-term and long-term goals and objectives, they are focused on ensuring that their businesses work, they are entrepreneurs.

4. Successful entrepreneurs are hard workers who love what they do.

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Successful businessmen love what they do. To them, work is not simply 'work', it is their life! Successful entrepreneurs never look at it as their day-jobs their '9 to 5's' or 'something that they do in the day', their business is their life and they work extremely hard to accomplish their goals.

That does not mean that they are "workaholics" or are married to their jobs. Of course an entrepreneur set boundaries, and know how to work hard and work smart.

5. Successful entrepreneurs are not afraid to take risks.

Good entrepreneurs do not fear taking risks, they take them on head-on. They have to take risks every days, it is part of running a business. The thing though about taking risks is that successful entrepreneurs take **calculated** risks, not foolish ones. This means that they weigh the pros and cons, of every decision that they face, take the advantages and disadvantages of every move into consideration, look at all possible outcomes and make a calculated and informed decision taking everything into consideration.

Taking risks is part of the game. However taking calculated risks brings about a positive outcome most of the time, and when it doesn't...

6. Successful entrepreneurs are not afraid to make mistakes, and face failure.

In fact, they understand that it is all a part of the game and they use each and every failure and every mistake that they make as a learning experience. You would be hard- pressed to find even a single entrepreneur who has not made a huge number of mistakes! The truth is that every entrepreneur will end up making mistakes, some small and some big, and will fail numerous times.

But each of these incidents will be a learning experience for a successful entrepreneur, and each of these instances will be an opportunity of him/her to emerge better and stronger.

7. Successful entrepreneurs have a knack for innovation and creativity.

Successful entrepreneurs can usually be identified by their ambition to innovate, this involves developing new ideas, methods, processes, products, services, and above all, new solutions that meet new requirements and provide more value to stakeholders.

Besides, a large part of being successful in business relies upon improvement and positive change, and all good entrepreneurs have the vision to be creative and innovative in order to bring about this sort of change and improvement.

8. Successful entrepreneurs know what it takes to be successful.

They challenge themselves to learn more and do more. They understand that all businesses are affected by certain internal and external factors, some of which are out of their control or beyond their abilities.

They understand these limitations, and either build their own capacity so that they can get what they need, or work with people with different expertise and experience in order to overcome these barriers.

9. Successful entrepreneurs have excellent role models.

These role models are people that they aspire to be, people that they look up to, and people who provide them with inspiration and the guidance that they need to be successful.

A role-model could be anyone, such as someone from within your social circles, friends or family, or a famous personality who they look up to (Steve Jobs, Michael Dell, Richard Branson, Bill Gates all come to mind here and are just a few examples).

Having a role-model, especially if he or she is your mentor too, can really take an entrepreneur to unprecedented heights of success and it could make him truly unstoppable.

10. Successful entrepreneurs are leaders.

Successful entrepreneurs are natural leaders, and possess many leadership qualities. They are good at managing all aspects of their professional and personal lives. They have the ability to make big decisions, and the right decisions.

They can provide guidance and good opinions to others. They have good communication skills. They are people-oriented, and can get a group of people to work towards the attainment of a common goal while getting the best out of them. They are respected by their peers. They are self-motivated.

11. Successful entrepreneurs are competitive and have initiative.

Above all, they put the accomplishment of their goals above everything and anything else, sometimes even if it requires them to do something that displeases them.

4. HOW TO DEVELOP YOUR INITIATIVE

The good news is that initiative is a skill that you can develop. You can do this by following these steps:

1. Develop a Career Plan

Research has shown that people who have a long-term career plan are more likely to take initiative. Professionals who know what they want and where they want to go are far more likely to show initiative at work, especially when the action or decision will help them further their career goals.

Also, make sure that you understand your job, and your team and your organization's purpose, so that you know what you should be achieving. Once you know what you want to achieve, integrate your career goals with your personal goals, so that you have something to work towards.

2. Build Self-Confidence

It can take courage and a strong sense of self to show initiative, especially if you fear that people may disagree with your actions or suggestions.

Set small goals so you can achieve some quick wins. And push yourself to do (positive) things that you'd otherwise be scared to do – this will not only help you build your self-confidence, but it will help you build the courage to accomplish bigger, scarier tasks later on.

Tip:

Some people have a real fear of speaking up of, or of taking any action that's not yet authorized by the leadership team, because they're afraid of failure or rejection.

3. Spot Opportunities and Potential Improvements

People who show initiative often do so by spotting and acting on opportunities that their equals or leaders have not noticed. They are curious about their organization and how it works, and they keep their minds open to new ideas and new possibilities.

You should always be on the lookout for areas in your organization that could use improvement. To spot opportunities and potential improvements, consider the following process:

- What would our customers (internal and external) want us to improve? What could they be doing better if we could help them? How can we improve quality?
- Who else could we help by using our core competence?
- What small problems do we have that could grow into bigger ones?
- What slows our work or makes it more difficult? What do we often fail to achieve? Where do we have bottlenecks? What is frustrating and irritating to people on our team?

Get into the habit of looking for these things, perhaps set a repeating appointment in your diary to remind you to look for them; and, when things go wrong, think about how you can fix them.

4. Sense-Check Your Ideas

Imagine that you have come up with a creative way of breaking through a bottleneck in your customer service process. Before you head straight to your boss with your idea, stop and do some homework. Think about the costs and risks associated with the idea.

Where the cost of the project and the consequences of something going wrong are small, consider going ahead with your idea directly, while keeping your boss "in the loop" (how far you should do this depends on your relationship with your boss). Where risks or costs are more significant, consider preparing a business case and ask for authorization before you go ahead.

You have already shown initiative by coming up with a solution. Make sure that you follow this through by doing your homework on the idea. The more you have researched and considered your ideas, the higher your chances of success will be.

5. Develop Rational Persistence

Persistence is the art of moving forward even when you encounter inertia or difficulty. People who show initiative often encounter difficulties and setbacks along the way, so rational persistence (where you listen to, consider, and appropriately modify your direction depending on other people's input) is essential if you want to achieve what you've set out to do.

When you are persisting with your idea, you'll find things much easier if you learn how to manage changes effectively. This can often make the difference between success and failure for a project. It is also helpful to learn how to open closed minds, since people may already have an opinion on a subject before you even start presenting your idea.

6. Find Balance

While it is important to take initiative, it is just as important to be wise in the way that you use it. In some situations, it can be inappropriate to take initiative, and people who generate too much extra work for other people can upset others.

For instance, you might have worked with a colleague who was "gung-ho" about every idea. He was constantly pushing the team, and your boss, to lead the next project or to implement a new idea. However, some of his ideas were naive, his persistence in taking the initiative often crossed the line into aggressiveness, and perhaps the team felt that he "rocked the boat" too much at a time when other team members were overloaded.

This is why it is so important to learn good decision-making techniques (module 4). The more you enhance these skills, the better you will be at judging when an idea is good, and it is not. This way, you can develop a reputation both for initiative and for good judgment.

An invaluable combination!

You will also want to develop your emotional intelligence skills. It is helpful to know how to read the emotions of others. This sensitivity can help you further decide when to take initiative, and when it is best to let things be.

Key Points

Initiative has become increasingly important in today's entrepreneurship world and workplace. You show initiative when you act without being told what to do, persist in the face of inertia and difficulty, and see your idea through to a successful conclusion.

There are six steps you can take to develop your own initiative:

1. **Develop a career plan.**
2. **Build self-confidence.**
3. **Spot opportunities and potential improvements.**
4. **Sense-check your ideas.**
5. **Develop persistence.**
6. **Find balance.**

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Taking initiative is essentially assuming the risk of a possible failure. When doing so, you put yourself out there and things don't always go as planned. But the alternative is choosing to be inactive.

Love, Life and Work by Elbert Hubbard. Kessinger Publishing, LLC (May 31, 1942)