

Entrepreneurial Mindset: An Essential Life Skill

It is an orientation, a way of thinking and acting that allows individuals and organizations to navigate uncertainty

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Entrepreneurship education has been in the spotlight for some time now. Following a spirited debate on the teachability of entrepreneurship, the general consensus that has emerged is that entrepreneurial mindset can indeed be taught and cultivated, and that it is imperative to do so. An article in [Entrepreneur India](#) and a recent article in [Harvard Business Review](#) have emphasized the importance of nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset but have also warned against adopting the typical business school approach to bring it into the classroom.

The question then is: What is entrepreneurial mindset and how to instill it in a classroom setting? Entrepreneurial mindset is an orientation, a way of thinking and acting that allows individuals and organizations to navigate uncertainty. Uncertainty is not just about an unknown future. The future by definition is always unknown. Rather, it is about operating in an environment where the future is 'unknowable'. As entrepreneurs rethink and reimagine the world, they tread a path that hasn't been trodden before, and therefore, they operate in the realm of uncertainty. In other words, they don't know and 'cannot' predict what's around the corner. An entrepreneurial mindset prepares individuals to deal with uncertainty. Such a mindset is an essential life skill in today's uncertain business environment that is experiencing unprecedented disruptions in technology, regulation and socio-economic structures.

Turning to the question of how to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset in a classroom setting, I offer some insights from a course we launched at the Indian Institute of Management-Bangalore (IIMB) five years ago. Titled "Entrepreneurial Mindset and Action", the course builds on three pillars.

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An effectual approach: In an environment where uncertainty reigns supreme, the future cannot be predicted. Therefore, the best laid plans can go awry. So, how should one operate in such an environment? Professor Saras Sarasvathy's [effectual approach](#) provides a way forward. The idea is quite simple – do not try to predict what cannot be predicted; instead, focus on what is within your control, take actions to make progress and course correct as the future unfolds. The effectual approach can be summarized thus - control and shape the future, rather than predict and plan for it. This sharply contrasts with the planning approach that has been espoused by business school curricula over the years. Therefore, it requires a conscious effort to equip students with this complementary approach.

Toolkit for rapid experimentation: Students also need to be familiar with the tools needed to operate in uncertainty. This is where the lean method and the associated set of tools - lean canvas, rapid experimentation with minimally viable products (MVP) and timely pivoting – come in handy. They teach students to be systematic yet flexible, allowing them to learn from small experiments and make suitable adjustments to their course of action. They also teach them to fail fast and fail cheap.

Experiential learning: The final pillar focuses on allowing students to apply the effectual approach and the lean toolkit in a safe environment where the repercussions of failure are limited. Students come up with a venture idea and move it towards a potential business opportunity using the concepts and tools learned in the classroom. It is through this lived experience that they come to recognize the utility of an entrepreneurial mindset. It gives them the confidence to embark on an entrepreneurial journey and equips them with the tools to increase their odds of success.

An entrepreneurial mindset helps different people in different ways. For some, it provides the foundation and confidence to start their own business venture. Khet Singh co-founded ClaimBuddy in his second year as an MBA student at IIM-Bangalore. ClaimBuddy provides a one-stop solution for health insurance claim assistance for patients and hospitals. The venture has raised seed funding from Titan Capital and others. Khet says, “To learn about people building businesses from scratch, to executing an actual business as a part of the course project, helped me to take the plunge to start my own venture during my second year and pursue it full time post my MBA”.

For others, it equips them to excel in their corporate jobs. Anuj Trehan, Senior Principal at Accenture Ventures finds entrepreneurial mindset indispensable to be successful in the corporate world. He says “While I have had my share of ups and downs in my professional journey, having an entrepreneurial mindset has enabled me to deliver value for my organizations as well as build a rewarding career for myself. In particular, having an eye on the big vision while continuously learning, and being a ‘hustler’ to go out there and craft new opportunities, are critical to thrive in an ambiguous world and the times that we are living in”.

To sum it up, entrepreneurial mindset is for everyone. It is an essential life skill in today’s highly uncertain business world.