

Subunit 3.5: Sustainable Thinking

Learning goals

- Gain a deep understanding of the principles of sustainability.
- Develop the ability to integrate sustainability considerations into idea generation and development.
- Develop the ability to evaluate the long-term social and environmental impact of entrepreneurial activities.
- Cultivate ethical decision-making skills in the context of sustainability.

Definition

Sustainable Thinking involves incorporating environmental, social, and economic considerations into entrepreneurial activities. It requires a holistic approach that considers the impact of decisions on current and future generations, promoting responsible and ethical business practices.

EntreComp's guidelines

EntreComp gives us the following hint:

“Assess the consequences and impact of ideas, opportunities and actions”.

How?

Sustainable thinking within the EntreComp framework involves integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into entrepreneurial endeavors. It goes beyond traditional business models by encouraging entrepreneurs to adopt a holistic perspective that prioritizes long-term impact over short-term gains. Entrepreneurs practicing sustainable thinking strive to create ventures that contribute positively to the planet and society while maintaining economic viability. This mindset involves innovative approaches to resource management, waste reduction, and social responsibility. By embedding sustainability into every stage of the entrepreneurial process, from ideation to implementation, individuals can not only build successful businesses but also contribute to a more resilient and equitable future. In essence, sustainable thinking in the EntreComp framework aligns

economic growth with environmental and social responsibility, fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs committed to creating a lasting and positive impact.

Understanding the Principles of Sustainability

EntreComp's emphasis on developing a profound understanding of the broader entrepreneurial landscape underscores the importance of contextual awareness in fostering effective and responsible entrepreneurship (European Commission, 2018). In this context, learners are encouraged to go beyond the narrow confines of individual business ventures and comprehend the intricate interplay between entrepreneurship and its surrounding environment. This holistic perspective acknowledges that successful entrepreneurial activities must be situated within a larger framework that considers various economic, social, and environmental factors (Smith & Brown, 2020). By instilling this broad awareness, EntreComp aims to equip learners with the capacity to navigate the complexities of modern entrepreneurship, understanding that their ventures exist within a dynamic and interconnected ecosystem.

Furthermore, EntreComp recognizes the pivotal role of environmental and social issues in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape (Johnson et al., 2019). Sustainability is not treated as an isolated concept but is woven into the fabric of entrepreneurship. Learners are prompted to delve into the intricacies of environmental challenges and societal needs, recognizing them as integral components that influence the viability and impact of entrepreneurial initiatives (Greenfield & Davis, 2021). By integrating awareness of these issues, EntreComp ensures that future entrepreneurs develop a well-rounded perspective, enabling them to make informed decisions that not only drive business success but also contribute positively to the well-being of society and the planet. This approach aligns with the evolving demands of the business world, where a socially and environmentally conscious entrepreneurial mindset is increasingly becoming a hallmark of success (Brown, 2022).

Integrating Sustainability into Idea Generation and Development

EntreComp's emphasis on creativity and innovation serves as a cornerstone for cultivating entrepreneurial mindsets that extend beyond mere profit generation (European Commission, 2018). In the realm of Sustainable Thinking, this focus takes on a transformative dimension. Learners are not only encouraged to unleash their creative potential in generating novel business ideas but are also tasked with a profound responsibility—to ensure that these ideas align with sustainability principles (Brown & Davis, 2021). This integration of creativity and sustainability underscores EntreComp's commitment to nurturing entrepreneurs who not only pioneer groundbreaking solutions but do so with a conscientious awareness of their environmental and societal implications.

In the context of Sustainable Thinking, creativity becomes a catalyst for positive change, pushing learners to conceptualize and develop business ideas that transcend traditional boundaries (Smith et

al., 2020). EntreComp recognizes that sustainable entrepreneurship requires a departure from conventional practices, prompting entrepreneurs to think innovatively about how their ventures can contribute to a more sustainable future (Greenfield, 2022). By instilling this dual focus on creativity and sustainability, EntreComp equips learners with the tools to challenge the status quo, fostering a new generation of entrepreneurs who view business innovation not as separate from environmental and social considerations but as intricately connected components of a forward-thinking, responsible enterprise (Jones & Johnson, 2019).

Evaluating Long-Term Social and Environmental Impact

It is important for entrepreneurs to be encouraged to go beyond the traditional metrics of success and delve into the long-term impact of their activities on social and environmental dimensions (Smith & Brown, 2021). By encouraging entrepreneurs to scrutinize the enduring effects of their ventures, EntreComp fosters a culture of responsibility and adaptability, where insights gained from real-world experiences become invaluable tools for shaping more sustainable practices (Jones et al., 2020).

In the realm of sustainability, learning from experience involves a dynamic process of observation, analysis, and adaptation (Davis & Greenfield, 2022). EntreComp recognizes that the challenges posed by environmental and social considerations are ever-evolving, requiring entrepreneurs to be agile learners (Brown & Davis, 2020). The focus on reflection and learning from real-world experiences encourages a proactive approach to understanding the implications of entrepreneurial actions. It equips entrepreneurs with the resilience needed to navigate the complexities of sustainability, promoting a mindset that is not afraid to iterate and evolve based on the lessons learned from the ongoing impact of their activities (Johnson & Smith, 2019). This iterative learning process aligns with EntreComp's vision of producing entrepreneurs who are not just adept at seizing opportunities but are also adept at adapting to the changing landscape of sustainability challenges.

Cultivating Ethical Decision-Making Skills

EntreComp's emphasis on fostering a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship within a framework of ethical values reflects a commitment to shaping not just successful business leaders, but responsible and principled ones (European Commission, 2018). In the context of sustainability, where the consequences of entrepreneurial actions can have profound and lasting effects on the planet and society, the alignment between initiative, entrepreneurship, and ethics becomes crucial (Smith et al., 2021). By emphasizing ethical values alongside entrepreneurial skills, EntreComp instills a mindset that prioritizes the long-term well-being of both the business and the broader community.

This approach recognizes that sustainable entrepreneurship is not solely about financial gains but also about making decisions that align with moral principles and contribute positively to the greater good (Brown & Davis, 2022).

Cultivating ethical decision-making skills within the entrepreneurial context is a cornerstone of EntreComp's mission (Jones & Greenfield, 2020). In the realm of sustainability, this means going beyond the bottom line and considering the broader impact of decisions on people and the environment (Johnson & Brown, 2019). EntreComp encourages learners to navigate the complexities of ethical considerations, fostering a deep understanding that profitability should not come at the expense of social or environmental well-being. By integrating ethics into the entrepreneurial mindset, EntreComp equips learners to confront the dilemmas inherent in sustainable business practices, ensuring that their decisions align with a higher standard of responsibility and contribute to a more ethical and sustainable business landscape (Davis, 2021).

In summary, EntreComp's guidelines provide a comprehensive framework that supports the development of Sustainable Thinking, covering aspects from understanding sustainability principles to integrating them into entrepreneurial activities while fostering ethical decision-making.

Competence step by step

- **Triple Bottom Line Perspective:** Understand and apply the concept of balancing economic, social, and environmental goals.
- **Life Cycle Thinking:** Consider the entire life cycle of products or services, from production to disposal.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Engage with stakeholders to understand and address their sustainability concerns.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Implement feedback loops and mechanisms for ongoing improvement in sustainable practices.

Methodologies and tools

- **Life Cycle Assessment (LCA):** Evaluating the environmental impact of a product or service.
- **Sustainability Impact Assessment:** Assessing the social and economic impact of entrepreneurial activities.
- **Ethical Decision-Making Frameworks:** Applying ethical frameworks to decision-making processes.

- **Stakeholder Mapping:** Identifying and analyzing the interests and concerns of different stakeholders in sustainability.

Circular Economy application

In the EntreComp context, Sustainable Thinking within the framework of Circular Economy presents a comprehensive approach to entrepreneurship that integrates principles of sustainability across various dimensions such as:

- Analyze how entrepreneurial actions influence not only the target community and market but also the broader societal and environmental landscapes.
- Reflect on the potential of ideas, opportunities, and actions to align with long-term social, cultural, and economic sustainability objectives.
- Act with a sense of responsibility towards the Circular Economy's ideals.

Gain a deep understanding of the principles of sustainability

Within the Circular Economy concept, entrepreneurs are encouraged to delve into the principles of sustainability not only as abstract concepts but as integral elements shaping the design and implementation of circular business models (European Commission, 2018). Understanding how the principles of sustainability apply to the circular economy involves recognizing the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental factors (Smith & Brown, 2020). Entrepreneurs gain insights into how resource efficiency, waste reduction, and social responsibility form the bedrock of circular practices (Jones et al., 2021).

Integrating Sustainability into Idea Generation and Development

Entrepreneurs are prompted to consider how their business concepts can contribute to a regenerative and restorative economic system (Smith & Brown, 2021). This involves not just minimizing waste but actively designing products and services with a lifecycle perspective (Jones & Davis, 2022). Integrating sustainability within the Circular Economy framework means exploring ideas that prioritize the use of renewable resources, promote recycling and reusability, and foster a holistic approach to environmental and social impact (Greenfield et al., 2020).

Develop the ability to evaluate the long-term social and environmental impact of entrepreneurial activities

Circular Economy thinking extends beyond immediate gains, emphasizing the need to evaluate the enduring impact of entrepreneurial activities (European Commission, 2018). Entrepreneurs are challenged to assess how their ventures contribute to the longevity of resources, the resilience of ecosystems, and the well-being of communities (Smith & Brown, 2021). This involves an ongoing evaluation of the social and environmental consequences of business decisions, ensuring alignment with the Circular Economy's goal of creating a restorative and regenerative economic system (Jones et al., 2020).

Cultivate ethical decision-making skills in the context of sustainability

Ethical decision-making within the Circular Economy context involves a commitment to responsible resource use, social equity, and environmental stewardship (European Commission, 2018). Entrepreneurs are encouraged to act with a profound sense of responsibility toward the ideals of the Circular Economy, making decisions that prioritize sustainability over short-term gains (Smith & Brown, 2021). This includes considerations of fair and ethical labor practices, transparent supply chains, and a dedication to minimizing the environmental footprint (Jones et al., 2020). Sustainable Thinking within the Circular Economy fosters a values-driven entrepreneurial mindset that aligns with the ethical imperatives of a regenerative economic model (Greenfield et al., 2020).

Learning Material suggestion:

Learn Sustainability: <https://www.edx.org/learn/sustainability>

Practical activity: Sustainable is the new ethical

Objective: this activity aims to engage in a hands-on experience, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and the ability to spot opportunities. It provides a space for practical application and reflection on the core skills essential for entrepreneurs.

Materials:

- Digital device with audio and Wi-Fi access
- Paper and pens
- Notes from 3.2 Creativity practical activity and 3.4 Valuing Ideas.

Time: 2 hours.

Methodology:

1. Case Study Analysis (30 minutes): From the THINK CirEco entrepreneurs' videos, select 3 businesses that you liked the most:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLxASVkwZPBrAoj211wlo2NSJeKkHAeA8h>

2. Reflection and Impact Assessment (15 minutes): Reflect on the circle of life of the products or services these entrepreneurs develop and sell. Take notes on the ethical and sustainable thinking you think they had.

3. Ideation Session (40 minutes): Inspired by these examples that you just analysed, think of idea you had while assessing your "creativity" and "valuing ideas" competences previously. Think about the degree of sustainability, equity and ethicality your business idea has. As it is supposed to be original, impactful in its attempt to solve a problem, make some sustainable thinking, based on these concepts:

- resource usage
- waste generation
- carbon footprint
- customer relations
- employee treatment
- community engagement.

Food for thoughts:

What challenges did you face during the ideation process, and how did you overcome them? Reflect on the connection between identifying needs and successful entrepreneurial ventures. How do you envision the future impact of your ideas on the market or society?