



BeyondScale: Testbed for improving the use and usefulness of HEInnovate

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Introduction

Based on the experiences of the partners in the BeyondScale project we have drawn up a number of recommendations on how the use and usability of the HEInnovate tool can be enhanced. However, before going into the lessons learned we have to reaffirm the opinion of the BeyondScale project partners that, as a self-reflection tool, HEInnovate is already a **very useful instrument** to support HEIs in identifying their strengths and weaknesses in the area of entrepreneurship and innovation.

The HEInnovate self-assessment statements are often the **start of a discussion** – the start of a *learning journey* – around the experiences and ways in which HEIs can become more entrepreneurial and transform themselves while undertaking this journey.

In order to learn about the ways in which this transformation can take place, the users of the HEInnovate tool can get inspiration from the rich database of case studies and user experiences that is made available through the HEInnovate website. However, the experiences of BeyondScale partners in making use of these HEInnovate resources (i.e. the self-assessment statements, the case studies) suggested that a number of **additions and enhancements to the tool** can be made. We will now present these in the form of a number of challenges. For each of the challenges we will present a way of addressing it, based on the experiences in the BeyondScale project. In other words, BeyondScale can be seen as a *testbed* for finding ways of improving the HEInnovate tool.



Challenge 1: Translate awareness into action

One of the biggest lessons learned during the BeyondScale project is that HEIs often find it challenging to choose the actions to undertake when they wish to move from the current state they are in towards becoming a more entrepreneurial institution. The HEIs that have done a self-assessment realize that there are many actions that might be considered and that there are many examples of HEIs in the world that in one or another have managed to implement some of them. However, as shown from our literature review on the topic of Introducing Entrepreneurial Teaching & Learning in HEIs, there are several interventions, actions and strategies to consider and choosing the one that works for the institution is a great challenge.

Addressing this challenge is not a simple task, as each HEI in a way is unique, in the sense of being situated in a particular context and already having some experience in terms of embedding entrepreneurship in the activities (education, research, engagement) and support structures of the institution. In some parts of their institution the HEI already may have reached a particular level of entrepreneurial characteristics, while other parts (say, faculties, departments) may not. Therefore, a first step is building awareness of the state the institution is in – and for that HEInnovate is a useful instrument.

Starting a discussion in the institution on what steps to undertake could easily lead to a debate where too many options and interventions are suggested. Certainly, when the discussion would start from the full set of (eight) HEInnovate dimensions. To prevent this overload of dimensions and issues to consider, it pays to **select one HEInnovate dimension** (or two at most) and to sometimes go even further and select a particular course of action to achieve a goal – thus **focussing on one particular set of interventions**.

The BeyondScale partners found the choice for one dimension one of the most important pieces of advice when embarking on their organisational change project (say, their inbound, or outbound activity). This focus can help the stakeholders involved in the transformation process remain motivated and continue participating in the project, as they see a clear road ahead of them and they stay focused on the goals of project. It prevents the organisational change project from drowning in ambitions. A clear focus also makes it easier to align the activities undertaken in the project with the needs and demands of the stakeholders (e.g., the students, or the businesses and other external partners of the HEI).

Getting this clear focus on the HEInnovate dimension to concentrate on and the interventions to consider, however, requires that the institutions first **learn about the demands of their stakeholders**. Another important lesson learned in the BeyondScale project is that it pays off to make an investment in engaging the stakeholders in a focused debate on what they perceive to be the value proposition that the HEI can make in addressing their needs. This debate can be organised by means of a workshop where the value proposition canvas is placed in the centre. The **Value Proposition Canvas** distinguishes the pains perceived by the stakeholders, and it provides a structured debate on the ways these pains can be relieved, the gains that can be provided by the HEIs (i.e. their products and services), along with ways this can be done (by means of the gain creators). The value proposition canvas was well-received by the HEIs in the BeyondScale project – it helped structure the debate with their stakeholders involved in the (inbound and outbound) projects and it served as the start of an action plan, with inputs from the different partners in the project.

The preparation of such a workshop that makes use of the value proposition canvas is crucial. From the BeyondScale experience we learned that it helps to first collect the opinions and experiences of the different stakeholders and participants in the workshop. This can be done using the self-assessment statements provided by HEInnovate. However, the statements are not always easy for users to react to.

Firstly, because the HEInnovate self-reflection statements make use of terminology and concepts that are not always clear to the uninitiated (say, outsider). In particular, representatives from external stakeholder parties (e.g., business, non-profit sector) do not have the required profound prior information on the higher education institution to answer a statement let alone the *time* to invest in finding that information. This can lead to a high level of non-response, unreliable responses, or ‘not applicable’ responses.

Secondly, the statements relate to the HEI as a whole, while the respondent may not have the full picture and only be aware of her/his particular department or unit in the HEI. The statements are seen as too broad and not tailored to the individual institution. Despite of this, the statements are inspiring for the organisers of a value proposition workshop – the statements can be seen as the start of the process of collecting information.

Thirdly, the statements are all in the shape of closed questions (requiring answers on a five-point scale), which is a challenging is there is no real benchmark. Scoring a ‘five’ on a statement would actually require a comparative case – an ideal case. But that does not always exist, so interpreting a score awarded is difficult.

The BeyondScale partners, therefore, in their preparation for the Value Canvas workshop discussions added their own questions to the HEInnovate questionnaire, often deciding to include more ‘open questions’, where information is sought on actual pains, gains and how (and why!) to address them. In particular, these additional questions were meant to collect information on practices and experiences related to their selected HEInnovate dimension. Often, this more qualitative information was found to be more useful than quantitative scores on a five-point scale given by survey participants. Without inviting the survey participants to articulate wishes, desires, pains, gains, ideas etc., one just gets a snapshot of the institution’s present status (as perceived) and does not garner ideas for future development.

All of this leads to the recommendation that the HEInnovate tool can (and should) be made more flexible and useful for HEIs by means of **adding questions and statements** that are more tailored to the issue at hand and the particular stakeholder groups where information and opinions are to be found. In some cases, statements may also be deleted if they are felt to be less relevant for the issue (e.g., dimension and intervention) at hand. One should understand that the goal of HEInnovate is to start a discussion/dialogue in the HEI to initiate change processes. Whatever makes this goal become more within reach may need to be added to the tool. This also includes **adding clarifications** of terms (e.g. entrepreneurship) and examples to the HEInnovate tool.



Challenge 2: Identifying the relevant resources from the HEInnovate case studies, user stories and guidance notes

The BeyondScale partners often found it challenging to make sense of the large set of materials that was suggested to them after having completed the HEInnovate self-assessment questionnaire. They were often overwhelmed with the abundance of case studies, user stories, guidance notes, videos and other digital resources on the HEInnovate website.

Making the relevant selection from these resources is a tremendous challenge for leaders, policymakers, and advisors in higher education institutions. There is no simple or single best practice, because the differences between HEIs are quite large in terms of their degrees of freedom (autonomy; legal provisions), their experience (or maturity) in entrepreneurial activity, the culture

and attitudes of their (academic & support) staff in the various disciplines, and – finally – their (managerial) capacity (i.e. expertise and resources).

The HEInnovate website currently provides a search menu with filters and the opportunity to search for keywords and expressions in the documents, so that users are provided with those documents that best match their information needs. However, for some users, accessing knowledge in this way is time-consuming, as they must sequentially study a set of case studies and extract the information they are after. Also, users interested in the practical interventions that may be considered when implementing change processes will have to make a considerable effort to identify the possible interventions and decide on which interventions are relevant for them.

To address this challenge, the accompanying research that took place alongside the BeyondScale project made an effort to unlock the existing academic and HEInnovate resource base on entrepreneurship in higher education. And introduced the idea of ‘**Inspiration fiches**’, as a new tool to support action plans in higher education institutions. The fiches (akin to cards) provide a condensed overview of possible interventions, potential barriers and other aspects related to the change processes in higher education. They are more easily accessible to managers and practitioners in higher education who seek inspiration on how to push forward the entrepreneurial agenda in their institutions.

The inspiration fiches were made to enhance the usefulness of the HEInnovate self-assessment tool, and support HEIs in deciding on an action plan that responds to the challenges that were identified by the institutions. The fiches condense knowledge into information-rich and inspiring keywords for some of the essential features of institutional change processes. The fiches present the essential features of a change process within one of the HEInnovate dimensions (e.g., Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning). They present (1) the typical *challenges* that motivate HEIs to engage in the selected HEInnovate dimension, (2) the typical *interventions* used by HEIs to respond to these challenges, (3) the *inputs and resources* HEIs employed to implement the interventions, and (4) the *barriers* that HEIs had to overcome during the change process, along with the *solutions* to overcome them. Thus, the Inspiration Fiches support the search process for HEIs that are starting on a transformation journey towards becoming more entrepreneurial in a particular HEInnovate dimension.

In addition, the BeyondScale partners felt there was little information available on the HEInnovate platform on the topic of social entrepreneurship. It was felt that there was a large focus on for profit entrepreneurship instead of initiatives and issues that involved working with (or for) the not-for-profit sector. To address this shortage, the accompanying research in BeyondScale produced an Inspiration fiche dedicated in particular to **social entrepreneurship** and the so-called Third Sector. This particular type of entrepreneurship may be added to the HEInnovate tool – either as a separate HEInnovate dimension or as part of its dimension ‘Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs’.



Challenge 3: Learning from others

When having to decide on the actions to undertake for making the entrepreneurial transformation and what to keep in mind in terms of potential obstacles and facilitators to consider, it always makes sense to learn from other experiences. As mentioned above, for this, one can make use of the experiences of other HEIs, or of the academic literature and resources made available through the HEInnovate platform. However, for the BeyondScale partners one of the most valuable experiences was to be able to learn from other HEIs that are in the same situation and that are also interested in change processes. However, it is not only learning *from* others, but in particular learning *with* others. Exchanging experiences with other HEIs is seen as very valuable. Although such interaction these days can take place on-line, and can be enriched by tools such as Mural, there is an advantage of real in-person, face-to-face conversations. The Covid situation made this difficult, but despite this, the BeyondScale partners managed to start discussing common interests and approaches on the on-line platforms (Teams, Zoom).

A lesson learned is that trust between partners and knowing about each other's background and interests is conducive to the information exchange. Knowing the profile of your partners then is a good starting point. Such a profile can be made available on-line – using the digital tools and examples that are ever-present these days. As part of BeyondScale, a **Digi Buddy system** was constructed – as a pilot to test out how representatives from HEIs could be assisted in finding other HEIs (say, buddies) with which they can exchange information, experiences and discuss potential actions to undertake when trying to become more entrepreneurial. The Digi Buddy tool so far was tested only on the selected set of BeyondScale partners, and further enhancements may be made to the tool before it can be scaled-up.



Challenge 4: Assessing progress on the transformation journey

All BeyondScale partners were involved in their own inbound and outbound change projects. They started with applying the HEInnovate self-assessment tool (including additional questions) and then proceeded with a Value Proposition workshop and the actions agreed after that. In further workshops and activities, the interventions suggested in the VP workshop were followed up.

One of the biggest challenges in this transformation exercise was to keep all interested stakeholders motivated, deliver on the agreed plans and make sure sufficient progress was made. Projects always are confronted with unexpected events (e.g., Covid), which call for further action, investing additional resources (e.g., time of staff). Having a sufficiently detailed project plan is always a *sine qua non*, and this usually is in place. However, the project leaders in charge of institutional change projects such as the ones undertaken as part of BeyondScale often found it difficult to assess the extent to which their actions had contributed to the wished-for objectives or whether the project was on track.

Checking progress and assessing impact of institutional change processes is a big challenge in HEIs. This is also one of the reasons that in the HEInnovate resource base (e.g., its case studies) there are relatively few materials devoted to the HEInnovate dimension of *Measuring Impact*.

Addressing this challenge was also something that the BeyondScale partners found difficult. As part of the BeyondScale activities, a suggestion was made to make use of tailor-made indicators and qualitative assessments for assessing where the project is and whether it has made a difference. A short **guidance note on indicators** was made available to the BeyondScale partners to inspire their use of potential progress indicators and their possible application. The BeyondScale partners were encouraged to use this guidance note to measure progress and performance in their follow-up workshops. However, many partners were quite hesitant to use the indicators, because of the work involved and the unfamiliarity with the subject. The time period for the projects in many cases also was too short to already expect very clear outcomes.

Disclaimer:

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.