



VIA University College - Leadership and Governance

VIA University College Denmark was formed in 2008 as a merger between 6 established education and research centres. VIA is a highly applied university, with established links to the public and private sectors and a range of education programmes covering traditional and emerging professions. Although a new organisation in its current form, VIA continues a long tradition of high standard education in Denmark with several programmes that are more than 100 years old. It is proud of its legacy in shaping and developing Denmark's internationally recognised welfare society.¹ Since 2012, it has developed and been teaching entrepreneurship courses across campus. This case summarises VIA's progress from formation in 2008 to 2014 and describes the leadership approach to future development.

Innovative Features

Leadership and Governance

- The higher education institution is a driving force for entrepreneurship development in the wider regional and social environment
- The faculties and units within the higher education institution have autonomy to act.
- The higher education institution has a model for coordinating and integrating entrepreneurial activities at all levels across the institution.

¹ Source: <https://en.via.dk/about-via>

- There is commitment at a high level to implementing the entrepreneurial strategy.
- Entrepreneurship is a major part of the university strategy.

Entrepreneurship is part of the strategy

VIA's current mission is to develop and offer profession-oriented educational programmes and knowledge of high quality in learning and educational environments in order for educational opportunities, production of knowledge and communication to benefit and challenge society's needs - locally as well as globally.²

Entrepreneurship is positioned within VIA as innovation and responsiveness. This is a core strategic theme and a repeatedly articulated value. Internally, innovation and responsiveness are used interchangeably with entrepreneurship to describe VIA's vision. Innovation has been chosen as the overarching positioning for enterprise within VIA because it has high appeal across all disciplines, including those who see entrepreneurship as being 'all about business and making a profit'.

Within VIA, entrepreneurship is described in terms of agility and flexible responsive empowerment for both staff and students. VIA has a future-oriented and flexible approach to developing the organisation.

In 2008, when VIA was formed, its strategy statement was: 'we can plan the future.' There were around 120 specific goals, broken down into further objectives over 45 programmes in 25 different locations. This approach was very project management-oriented and required complex systems to control the high diversity of programmes and culture embedded in the organisation. The limitations soon became obvious in an environment where high levels of uncertainty and unpredictability abounded.

Since 2010, the approach to strategy has changed. The focus is now on strategic intention and overall direction and values, including the development of innovative ways to cope with and benefit from change.

VIA has a performance agreement with the ministry, which includes entrepreneurship objectives. This agreement is set for a three-year period and reviewed annually.

Strategy is communicated throughout the organisation to staff and students using

² Source: Shaping future professionals together – Strategy 2021- 2025

stories to show what is wanted in the future. The focus is on creating culture and values that will support flexibility, trust and collaboration. Stakeholders at all levels are encouraged to be proactive in finding solutions to challenges in line with organisational values and to turn these into local action plans. In alignment with the values of high autonomy and empowerment, VIA is making 'delivering the strategy' an attractive part of everyday life for staff and students.

VIA has developed a common language and understanding as to the relevance of entrepreneurship through the organisation. This has expanded from 'starting companies' to now recognising the importance of individual mind-sets and creating an organisational culture of innovation.



There is commitment at a high level to implementing the entrepreneurial strategy

A wide range of stakeholders were represented and consulted at board level. The current board comprises 15 members with representation from partners in public and private sectors, municipalities and regions, Danish universities, a Norwegian University, two current students and two university employees. The board meets approximately six times per year.³

Every year the performance agreement between VIA and the ministry is reviewed. This includes entrepreneurship objectives and the development and delivery of a leadership programme.

The higher education institution has a model for coordinating and integrating entrepreneurial activities at all levels across the institution

VIA has a history of being a practical applied institution and working with other applied universities. It is a research-informed rather than research-led institution with experience and success in creating practical value in the wider community.⁴

The integration of entrepreneurial activities across the institution is supported by the active creation of clear institutional values for innovation and entrepreneurship and creating space (time and culture) in which staff can be flexible, try new things and test

³ Source: <https://en.via.dk/about-via/board-and-directors>

⁴ Source: <https://en.via.dk/research/pedagogy-and-education/professional-education>

ideas.

VIA has established a policy and culture of collaboration, internally between campuses and disciplines, and externally with public and private sector organisations.

The faculties and units have autonomy to act

The desire to create an institution where there is autonomy at all levels has been clearly stated. VIA has learnt that trying to simplify the organisation through the creation of rules is counter productive.

From an education perspective, VIA has a culture where students are responsible for their own learning, and staff are there to support but not to control.

Top management has been willing to live with open questions and has made it acceptable for middle management to adopt the same approach. This creates an environment where it is acceptable to 'not know' the answers.

Staff have been supported in recruiting resources from existing programmes and encouraged to develop internal talent, not just to buy in external resources and expertise.

The home-grown approach cuts through silos of expertise and attitudes of 'it's not my problem' and defensiveness. There is a spirit of 'it is our opportunity/challenge, and we solve it together.'

The higher education institution is a driving force for entrepreneurship development in the wider regional, social and community environment

Due to the highly applied and collaborative nature of VIA education programmes and dissertation projects, there are strong links with external institutions. This gives VIA a track record of providing new solutions and value to the external community.

In the autumn of 2011, a European Social Fund project was launched in the Central Denmark Region and the seven municipalities in which VIA has its campuses. VIA further supplements this project with its own funding.

Senior staff and faculty members publicly support entrepreneurship in the wider community and use this to create a unified approach across its disciplines, including Health Science, Education, Technology and Business, Continuing Education, Creative Industries.

Results/Achievements

It isn't clear whether there are real structural barriers to delivering a culture of flexibility and innovation, or whether the real challenge is the development of the mind-set of individuals to accept, live with and work with uncertainty. It is anticipated that staff development may be more important than the development of procedures and systems. The leadership pipeline needs further development. VIA shows the willingness to learn from its mistakes and from the mistakes of others e.g. recognition that building detailed systems to control diversity wasn't an effective organisational practice. VIA has decided to live with different definitions of entrepreneurship in order to bring all subject disciplines into the entrepreneurial development of the organisation. At this point there is no formal reward or acknowledgement for staff being more entrepreneurial. The term entrepreneurship carries a strongly business-oriented meaning in some disciplines e.g. nurses and kindergarten teachers. This can raise resistance for those who see their field as driven by human need and 'nothing to do with starting companies'. In this situation, the term 'Social entrepreneurship' can be useful.

[3]

Source URL: <https://heinnovate.eu/en/resource/university-college-leadership-and-governance>

Links

[1] <http://www.viauc.com/>

[3] <https://heinnovate.eu/en/printpdf/node/190>