



# Youth Entrepreneurship Policy Academy



Workshop #4: Inspiring young entrepreneurs  
with role models

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# Who are entrepreneurial role models?

- People who can **inspire, stimulate** and **encourage** others to pursue entrepreneurship
- They tend to be passionate about their entrepreneurial activities, have valuable experience and insights, and can serve as an **example of success** that encourages others to follow a similar career path



# Why is it important to showcase role models for young entrepreneurs?

- Lack of familiarity with entrepreneurship
  - Can lead to **negative attitudes** about entrepreneurship
  - Can negatively affect their self-perceptions about the **desirability** and **feasibility** of starting a business
- Increase **awareness** and **understanding** of entrepreneurship
- Play a critical role in shaping **entrepreneurial motivation** and **intention** among youth by showing entrepreneurship as a potential career path



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# Evidence finds role models to be impactful for young people

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- Greater **awareness** and more **realistic perceptions** about entrepreneurship as a career choice
- Help youth to **overcome negative social attitudes** to business creation
- Facilitate **learning** and **skill development**

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- Limited representation of success women entrepreneurs as role models is particularly **detrimental to young girls**
  - Fewer opportunities to interact with role models that resemble themselves
- Knowing a failed entrepreneur can lead to a greater “fear of failure” and lower start-up rates
  - Influenced by local environments and sectors that have high business turnover

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# What are governments doing?



1. Awareness raising campaigns to foster entrepreneurial spirit
  - About **70%** of EU Member States have youth-targeted entrepreneurship awareness raising campaigns
2. Formal education facilitate **teachers** serving as role models
3. Entrepreneurship training programmes help show role models through **trainers, coaches** and **mentors**
4. Networks can link young entrepreneurs with older, successful entrepreneurs who can serve as role models
5. Business competitions (e.g. **Youth Start-Up Competition**) can spotlight successful (young) entrepreneurs who can serve as role models for others

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# Thank you!

## Any questions?



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# Questions for discussion

- What is the “typical” entrepreneurial role model for young people today and how do young people tend to find their entrepreneurial role models?
- What is the influence of media in shaping entrepreneurial role models? How beneficial and/or impactful are celebrity entrepreneurs for young people?
- How can youth entrepreneurship support schemes make better use of role models (i.e. outreach, success stories, speaker series events, mentorship)? How can these programmes measure the impact of role models on young entrepreneurs (i.e. what metrics or indicators should be used)?
- Consider sharing your own experience with role models and their impact on your career path.



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# “Learning by example: The importance of role models for youth entrepreneurship

Professor Ulla Hytti  
Department of Management and Entrepreneurship  
University of Turku

11th September





# Role models matter...

- **Role models matter for entrepreneurship** (Bosma et al., 2012)
  - Role identification is important => entrepreneurs and their role models resemble each other (gender, sector, nationality)
  - Role models are often those close by => 'next door examples vs icons' (family, persons with whom one interacts with)
  - Role models compensate for lack of experience (learning by example)
    - other functions are important - learning by support, increasing entrepreneurial self-efficacy and inspiration/motivation
- **Parental role models are important** (Hoffmann et al., 2015)
  - Intentions, skills and abilities
  - Main explanation why entrepreneurship runs in the family? (vs. genetic explanation)

- Role models are associated with a stage in the entrepreneurial journey (Zozimo et al., 2017)
  - Pre-start up: unplanned learning interactions with a wide range of role models
  - Post-start up: purposeful and linked to personal or business challenges
  - 'learning about oneself, about the business, about relationships and small business management' (p. 906)

# When guest speakers can become 'anti-role models'

- Use of guest speakers as role models in education
- .... “*although **entrepreneurs were positioned as role models for all** students, through performances of masculine entrepreneurial identities with certain kinds of special talents and social divisions between groups (i.e., female entrepreneurs, wageworkers, and researchers in ivory towers), it was apparent that **not all university students are entrepreneurial types***” (Komulainen et al., 2020, p. 214)



# Peers – a community for becoming role models

- Role of entrepreneurship societies (clubs) in forming an entrepreneurial identity
- *ES members construct and regulate collective entrepreneurial identity based on a shared narrative of entrepreneurship and the affective state of **positive energy and thinking**, i.e. “**positive buzz**.” Being entrepreneurial was constructed as having the right kind of mentality to cope with uncertain and rapidly changing working life and to break free of old moulds of working. The shared narrative was coherent, and **critical reflection on the values or risks of entrepreneurship was mainly silenced.*** (Siivonen et al., 2020, p. 521)



# Contexts matter, too

- Rural context is not only an external condition but whether and how youth see themselves and their local environments enabling entrepreneurial behaviour (Pukkinen et al., 2024)
  - Rural youth – activities and role models stemming from the local contexts
  - Rural context – offering opportunities for extracurricular entrepreneurship activities (a small but tight network of actors: teachers, businesses, customers..)
  - An opportunity for formal education to tighten co-operation with rural actors (and role models)

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