

Pushing the Boundary of the Triple Helix: An Action Research by a Cultural and Educational Foundation



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1. INTRODUCTION

The most widely accepted model for economic and industry development is the Triple Helix-based approach, which originated in Boston in the 1930s. According to the Triple Helix concept, the university-industry-government relationship is the initiator of innovation and economic development (Etzkowitz, 2003). This concept spread across the US and was adopted by governments in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, which used the dynamic of interactions among these three institutional spheres to develop their industries. Among these three the leading role often rotates, with one sphere serving as the center and the other two playing supporting roles. In a statist regime (Triple Helix I), government is the center driving industry and academia. In a *laissez-faire* regime (Triple Helix II), industry is the initiator, pushing the other two forces. However, a knowledge-based economy demands that university as the major knowledge producer to play more role in industry development, creating a balanced partnership among the three spheres (Triple Helix III) (Etzkowitz & Ranga, 2010).

To a certain extent, the development of cultural and creative industries (CCI) across the world follows the Triple Helix model. In Asia, the governments are the leader of CCI development. In Europe, the academe has the influence to the policy-makers. In Taiwan, the year 2002 marks the beginning of the government's official measures to develop cultural and creative industries. That year the government made CCI one of the ten main projects in its "Challenge 2008" policy, the nation's six-year development plan (Wu, 2002). Since then, the Taiwan government has initiated several action plans to stimulate



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the development of its CCI sectors, just as it did for the information technology (IT) sector, the backbone of the economy, back in the 1960s. Following this initiative, the government established five creative and cultural parks in Taipei, Taichung, Chiayi, Tainan, and Hualien. The promotion of this emerging sector was continued under the Ma's administration in 2008 and again made one of the twelve prioritized public projects to accelerate economic development in the Ma administration's "i-Taiwan 12 projects" (Chung, 2011). Under the Cultural and Creative Industries Development Policy legislated in 2010, 626.97 million USD was allocated to 15 CCI sub-sectors until the end of 2013 (Lin & Wu, 2010). Great efforts were made to position Taiwan as a strong player in the global cultural and creative industries.

The foregoing discussion shows that the major driver of CCI development in Taiwan is the government. The government plays the central role in establishing the policies and infrastructures for players in these industries, who use universities as the suppliers of information, knowledge, and human talent. But are government, industry, and university the only agents behind CCI development? When policies are created and decided by top officials with little involvement from actors in the private sector, what will be the impact on industry? In a post-modern society where the authorities are no longer as dominant as before, is there still a room for a new agent to change the course of CCI development?

This article introduces project initiatives taken by the Sayling Wen Cultural and Educational Foundation¹ (hereinafter SLW Foundation) to demonstrate the role of a non-governmental, non-profit, and non-academic organization (a social agent) in industry development. The SLW Foundation is a non-profit organization established in the memory of the late Mr. Sayling Wen. Wen was the founder of Inventech, a major player in Taiwan's high-tech industry (SWCEF, 2013b). Apart from his role as an entrepreneur, he was an avid reader and writer who put forward the importance of literacy and care to the society. From his principles of 'reading is the source of wisdom'² and 'there is only one kind of people in this world: people who need our care'³, education, innovation, and care have become the basis for the SLW Foundation to empower Taiwanese society and industry through education and culture. The Foundation focuses on the development of human talent to support industry and organizes a wide range of activities to further its causes, from a national writing competition to promote literacy to an international conference to pool recent studies related to service innovation. In 2013, the SLW Foundation conducted two project initiatives to promote CCI development and prepare the human talent necessary to support the industries. The SLW Foundation executed the "Action Plan for Inspiring Young Successors and Executives"⁴ and the "2013 Wise Team Competition"⁵. The former was intended to empower young business successors and executives who would be future business leaders, while the latter was meant to inspire high school and university students, the future workforce, to better understand their personality qualities. With an increasing number of social agents willing to play a role in industry development, these two initiatives may be seen as examples of actions taken by a social agent to support industry development.

2. PROJECT FOR PREPARING THE FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS

With 'education, innovation and care' in mind, the SLW Foundation designed a two-day camp to inspire its participants with visits to CCI businesses. Under the project "Action Plan for Inspiring Young Successors and Executives", the foundation introduces the key concepts of CCI, cultural content and creativity, to conventional industries. The camp provides direct experience, learning, and sharing (to represent 'education'); case presentations and interactive discussions ('innovation'); and inter-industry

¹ 財團法人溫世仁文教基金會

² 「閱讀是深度知識來源」

³ 「世界上只有一種人，就是需要關心的人」

⁴ 文創觀光產業關鍵人士影響計畫

⁵ 2013 WISE 團隊競賽

networking and variety of experiences ('care') that have a positive impact on all participants' businesses. As the foundation believes that high-quality service is the key to industry development, the whole activity was organized with 'service' as its core.

To increase the magnitude of the camp, the SLW Foundation carefully selected the participants, limiting them to second-generation business owners and young executives who will be the successors of the businesses in four industries: CCI, tourism, culinary, and conventional manufacturing. These industries were chosen for their respective competitive advantages: CCI with its power for cultural content and creativity, the tourism and culinary industries for their experiential and service marketing, and conventional manufacturing with its capability for mass production. The mix of these industries was expected to bring diverse perspectives and the opportunities to learn and collaborate with one another. The camp brought participants to six CCI business locations. Each business raised a different issue for the participants to experience and discuss, including CCI service design, CCI branding management, traditional industry in transition to CCI, CCI service experience, CCI product development, CCI service theory, CCI experience through performance, and CCI space re-designing and event organizing.

The pilot project was conducted on 18-19 November 2013 and 28 qualified participants joined the camp. The participants were divided into five groups and each group was joined by one academic mentor and one moderator who led the discussion. The industries which participants belonged to included pure CCI (7 participants), CCI and tourism (5), pure tourism (1), culinary and tourism (2), manufacturing and tourism (2), pure manufacturing (2), conventional manufacturing and culinary (2), and pure culinary (7).

The sequence of each visit was the same. First, the participants experienced the service of the host company. The representative from the host company then introduced the company and its current challenges. This was followed by group discussions led by the mentor and moderator in each group. Mentors led the group discussions based on their expertise, rotating to other groups after each visit to bring meaningful case discussions through the different business dimensions of service innovation, brand positioning, business model, product development, organization development, and CCI application. Mentors played an important role and lent their expertise to stimulate discussions, facilitate critical thinking, and provide different perspectives on the case. Each visit ended with a Q&A session where participants raised questions and made suggestions to the hosts regarding their case presentation.

Post-camp follow-up interviews were conducted to retrieve deeper insights from the participants and the hosts. The results were summarized into three outputs: teaching materials, publication of a special issue comprises of 11 articles from the camp, and videos to be distributed to the camp participants and also to general audiences. The design of the camp (experience-discuss-learn, active contributions, and cross-industry) played a central role in creating meaningful learning experiences for the participants, while moderation and mentoring from academic experts accelerated participant learning. As participants' backgrounds and experiences and mentor expertise contributed to the overall learning experience, a careful selection process for the participants, mentors, and moderators is needed to ensure positive interactions and exchanges during the camp. Through the pilot camp, the SLW Foundation not only introduced the concept of CCI to players from other industries, but also pulled together future business leaders from different industries; creating an alliance that can empower its members by exchanges of resources, information, knowledge, and inter-industry collaboration, further driving CCI development.

3. PROJECT FOR PREPARING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

Another recent project of the Foundation was the “2013 Wise Team Competition” (SWCEF, 2013a). The SLW Foundation fully sponsored this competition-based activity that gathers students of all disciplines, educational levels, age, and nationalities in Taiwan to receive team-building and service innovation training. The foundation upholds the core values of ‘education, innovation and care’ and created challenges for each of the three stages of the competition. The competition provided the opportunity for participants to discover themselves (personality, strengths, capacity, and capability), and to build themselves by serving others (team building).

To register for the competition, participants have to be active students who are enrolled in vocational and high schools, and undergraduate or graduate programs. In this preliminary round, they have to submit resumes that best describe their backgrounds, characters, and skills. Based on the soundness of their resumes, 100 students among the hundreds of applicants were selected to pass to the first round. The first round was Outward Bound Training for team-building. The training was intended to foster the personal growth and social skills of participants by using challenging expeditions in the outdoors. During the three-day training, the participants were randomly assigned to groups and had to face physical and mental challenges as a team. All participants were judged by their individual and team performance. Out of 100 participants, 40 were selected to proceed to the next round. The second round is the Service Innovation Training. The 40 winners from the previous round were equipped with knowledge about service innovation and techniques for creating project proposals. At the end of the camp, the participants were randomly assigned to 8 groups to complete a proposal for the service project. Project proposals were presented in front of the judges in the final round. In the final round, each team was given a total of 15 minutes; 10 minutes to present their ideas and 5 minutes of Q&A with the judges. The format of presentation was free for the group to choose based on their creativity (for example: oral presentations, plays, or movies). The presentation was judged based on the project innovativeness, feasibility, and viability, and also the team’s creativity and ability to handle questions from the judges. The three best teams were selected to receive gold, silver, and bronze medals.

With the mission of ‘building a better person, building a better society’, the competition does not focus on the quality of the final outcome, but rather emphasizes the participants’ learning experience. It provides team-building training, service innovation knowledge, ‘real environments specially designed to resemble real workplace challenges’, and opportunities to work with people from different backgrounds (SWCEF, 2013a). The competition aims for participants to rediscover their strengths, help them to better understand their personalities and capacities, and empowers them with new abilities and experiences in service innovation process. Through this project, the SLW Foundation intends to inspire and increase their potential contributions to the Taiwan’s future workforce.

4. CONCLUSION

According to the Triple Helix concept, the relationship among university, industry, and government is the foundation of innovation and industry development. The Action Plan Project and the Wise Team Competition are examples of initiatives coming from a non-governmental, non-profit, and non-academic organization—a social agent—to promote CCI development and preparing the future workforce (refer to

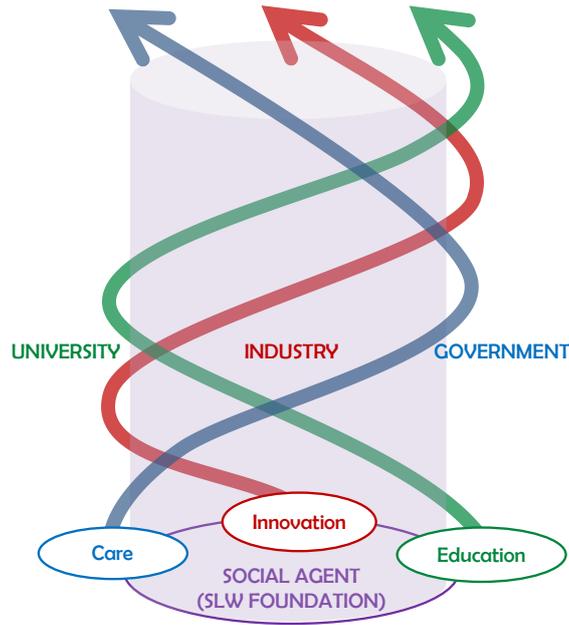


Figure 1. The Triple Helix with the additional role of social agent

Figure 1). Using the bottom-up approach, SLW Foundation designed practical actions to cultivate future talents and assigned specific roles for university, industry, and government to support the process. SLW assigned representatives from the university to act as the knowledge provider and critical thinker who can accelerate the talents' development process, while the active interactions among representatives from the industry can act as the engine of innovation. Moreover, the government can further design the infrastructure, platforms, or policies to support the initiatives. SLW as a social agent reinforces the Triple Helix. It supports the industry development by acting as a neutral facilitator that helps to weave a closer and stronger relationship among university, industry, and government through education, innovation, and care.

These project examples can be treated as pilot projects by the government to create policies and design programs for talent cultivation on a larger scale. These initiatives can be expanded to create a training program for industry development on a national scale. They may also serve as references for improvement of the existing education system. For example, the processes and outcomes of the two projects can be developed into vocational training programs by the educational bureau. At the same time, these projects contribute to the industry by preparing better-quality talent for the workforce.

The case of the SLW Foundation demonstrates the potential role for social agents in acting as an additional stakeholder to push the boundary of the Triple Helix model in industry development. Although these initiatives began as an action research where the final results remain to be seen, we believe that when other foundations take similar actions, they will generate significant momentum that will drive CCI development to a new level.

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