Christoph Viebig: People problems in startups in practice and education

One of the most common problems that lead startups to fail are 'people problems' in the founding team or between founders and early investors. These people problems are the starting point for Christoph Veibigs PhD project, in which he is exploring the motives and decision-making processes of founders in two impactful moments that often lead to relationship problems. Firstly, he wants to better understand the process and antecedents of the first equity split in a startup. Research has shown that the allocation of ownership impacts the team stability as well as the economic performance of the entire company over years. Secondly, he seeks out to scrutinize motives and decision-making processes in founding teams when they choose their first investor(s). This is another high impact decision for startups with strong influences on their future success. While this research primarily speaks to the field of entrepreneurship, Christoph plan to transfer his findings into new pedagogies that aim at educating future entrepreneurs on how to prevent and solve people problems. This part of his research contributes to the field of entrepreneurship education. He plans to develop and evaluate new blended-pedagogies, methods and technologies to develop students' decision-making competences and tacit knowledge on how to solve and prevent people problems in early stage startups. In addition, he analyzes historical sources to look into how entrepreneurship education in general has been taught inside and outside the formal educational system over the last 150 years. This historical part of Christoph's project allows him to contextualize his research within wider economic and societal debates on the development of management and entrepreneurship education in the 21ˢᵗ century.

Technology startups often fail due to non-technological problems. The two most common reasons for failure are (1) badly managed relationship within the founding team, with investors, early hires or other key stakeholders and (2) poorly designed business models. However, technology entrepreneurship education has barely picked up on these two important topics. Both research and education on technology entrepreneurship are primarily concerned with understanding and advancing the technological development. This PhD project seeks out to complement the field of technology entrepreneurship by integrating non-technology problems into research and education. In filling this gap the projects' investigations are two-fold: what to teach technology entrepreneurs regarding people problems and business models as well as pedagogies on how to do that.