



## LoopMe scientific social media tool by Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden



### *The case in summary*

Chalmers University has traditionally fostered entrepreneurial mindsets in students from all fields, aiming to improve their capabilities in practical value creation. In this context, Chalmers researcher Martin Lackéus created LoopMe, a scientific social media platform for action-based learning, developmental leadership, and entrepreneurial research. Teachers (“leaders”) assign practical tasks to students (“loopers”) to carry out and reflect on. Reflections involve written text as well as tags and emojis. This process not only develops entrepreneurial skills in students and professionals, it also creates high-quality datasets for research on how entrepreneurial skills develop and can be developed. The platform has over 20,000 users throughout Europe.

### 1. Learning based on value creation at Chalmers Technical University

Chalmers University of Technology is located in **Gothenburg**, on the south-western coast of Sweden. The University offers education and conducts research in science and technology. It counts approximately 10,000 students as well as 3,000 staff members. Chalmers has 13 departments, including the Department of Technology Management and Economics, which is the centre of entrepreneurial education.<sup>1</sup> Sustainability is the most important focus in Chalmers’ research, education and also daily workflows.<sup>2</sup> Chalmers was one of the first European universities to foster student entrepreneurship and to explicitly aspire to be an international benchmark for entrepreneurship.<sup>3</sup>

Embedded in the overarching goal of sustainability, entrepreneurship and digital transformation are important realms at Chalmers. As regards entrepreneurship, the University encourages an entrepreneurial mindset in all students, independent of their area of study. Chalmers works with **three entrepreneurial building blocks**: 1. Create value for others, after discovering their needs; 2. Generate, develop, and implement ideas and opportunities; 3. Ability and courage to use resources and manage stress. To implement a related entrepreneurial mindset, the University applies a double strategy. Firstly, it incorporates a value creation component in every student’s learning activity. Secondly, it incorporates a student learning component in all value creation activities. This entails integrating real-life components into curricula, also linking entrepreneurship programmes to the University’s technology transfer systems. Important curricular components implementing this strategy are the Venture Creation Programme and the Corporate Entrepreneurship Track.<sup>4</sup>

In this context, Chalmers leverages **digital technologies** to enhance its entrepreneurship approach. A notable role is played by LoopMe, a Scientific Social Media tool for action-based learning, developed by Chalmers researcher Martin Lackéus and his team at the Division of Entrepreneurship and Strategy. LoopMe can be applied for three purposes: action-based learning, leadership, and research. More specifically, the tool can assist in developing entrepreneurial skills, in developmental leadership (i.e.

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.chalmers.se/en/about-chalmers/Working-at-Chalmers/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.chalmers.se/en/about-chalmers/Chalmers-for-a-sustainable-future/Pages/default.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.chalmers.se/en/collaboration/innovation-and-entrepreneurship/Pages/what-entrepreneurship-means-to-us.aspx>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OkasifsSEM>.

development of individual competences to achieve ongoing growth in organisations) and in entrepreneurial research. This case study focusses on how Chalmers employs LoopMe for these three purposes.

## 2. Prospects and barriers to use LoopMe

At Chalmers, six teachers currently employ LoopMe in the Corporate Entrepreneurship Track and in the Venture Creation Track. Both tracks are part of the Master programme in Entrepreneurship and Business Design at Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship and are aimed at providing students with hands-on entrepreneurial experience while still in education.<sup>5</sup> Since practical entrepreneurial experience and academic education are the two fundamental pillars of both tracks, LoopMe acts as a tool to make the most of the combination of these two pillars. Since students learn through practical projects for the majority of the time, the platform allows them to follow their learning process outside of the classroom. So far, 154 students have used LoopMe at Chalmers.

However, LoopMe founders observe a certain reluctance among universities, even in their own institution, to employ the technology. This is because most academic teaching is not action-based, consisting primarily of lectures and seminars. The few Swedish universities using the platform are rather lower-profile institutions, seeking to use interesting didactics to attract new students.

## 3. Action-based entrepreneurial learning with LoopMe

The aim of LoopMe is to bring new methods to entrepreneurship education and research by effectively using digital technologies. According to its creator Martin Lackéus, there is a classical tension between a learning system (a university) on one side and a commercial value creation system (an enterprise) on the other. While education focuses on personal growth and theory, business aims at commercialisation and practise. LoopMe is designed to act as an intermediary to reduce the tension between both silos, creating a tandem of learning and value creation. To achieve this goal, it also collects high quality and quantity data on the development of an entrepreneurial mindset which researchers can use.<sup>6</sup> In an educational setting, only the teacher has access to the complete data sets, although researchers may ask permission to consult them for study purposes. In a business scenario, Martin Lackéus recommends that only a small number of people should have access to the data, in order to ensure a high level of trustworthiness.

LoopMe is the first scientific social media platform designed especially for this purpose. The first version was launched in 2012, while the current fourth version has been available since 2016. Students, teachers, researchers, and practitioners can access the platform in twelve languages, as a smartphone application or at the website <https://www.loopme.io/>. Currently, around 20,000 users apply LoopMe, from schools through universities to municipalities. Most users are in primary, secondary and vocational schools. The reason may be that they are *per se* closer to action-based learning. There is a solid customer base in Sweden and an emerging usage throughout Europe.<sup>7</sup>

LoopMe offers learning groups in which a “leader” manages participants, so-called “loopers”. Leaders are typically teachers or managers, or any other person fulfilling a formal or informal leadership role within the organisation. Loopers are typically students or employees. Every looper receives behavioural tasks and reflection assignments to complete. Participants carry out assignments on real life projects in

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.chalmers.se/en/departments/tme/school-of-entrepreneurship/Pages/SchoolofEntrepreneurship.aspx>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.loopme.io/>.

the offline world and reflect on their endeavours through free written text. Furthermore, they can assign pre-defined tags to categorise their experience. It is also mandatory to include an emoji to convey their related feelings. This feedback system is called a “loop”. The combination of tasks and associated tags is called a “content package”.<sup>8</sup>

**Use case: Duke of York Young Entrepreneur Centre, University of Huddersfield (United Kingdom)**

*The Duke of York Young Entrepreneur Centre at the University of Huddersfield has used LoopMe as an IT tool to follow students’ learning process in real time. The staff sees substantial benefits in using the platform. Firstly, it helped improve their assessment strategy by creating dynamic reports, enhanced by tags and emojis. Secondly, its social media feel is handy and very popular with students. Lastly, student feedback given through LoopMe helped them enhance the quality of the programme. In general, the business start-up advisor observed that quiet students in particular have given much more feedback via the platform than they did in class. The staff personalised LoopMe to include tags indicating which tasks made students more resilient, creative, self-motivated and out of their comfort zone. In this way, LoopMe has made learning processes more transparent and enabled a better course design in Huddersfield.*<sup>9</sup>

**Use case: Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship (Sweden)**

*Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship has been using LoopMe since 2017 to encourage students to reflect on what they learn through action-based parts of the programmes. This continuous reflection process has allowed for a fine-grained self-assessment, which students usually pay less attention to because they focus more on the actual assignments. Since students also receive faster feedback on their tasks, LoopMe has helped to strengthen their relationship with Chalmers’ teachers. Teachers appreciate LoopMe as a way to integrate action-based components into the curricula in a simplified manner, as well as evaluate students’ performance much faster. Furthermore, the close insights into the students’ learning process allow for a more tailor-made and dynamic programme design.*

What constitutes the particular benefit of LoopMe is the flow of reflections and evaluations that participants create. This tracks the process of personal development and organisational growth in a digital way, making learning processes visible. Leaders benefit from large amounts of very detailed data on actual human behaviour and associated emotions, which they can analyse and use as a basis for further actions.<sup>10</sup>

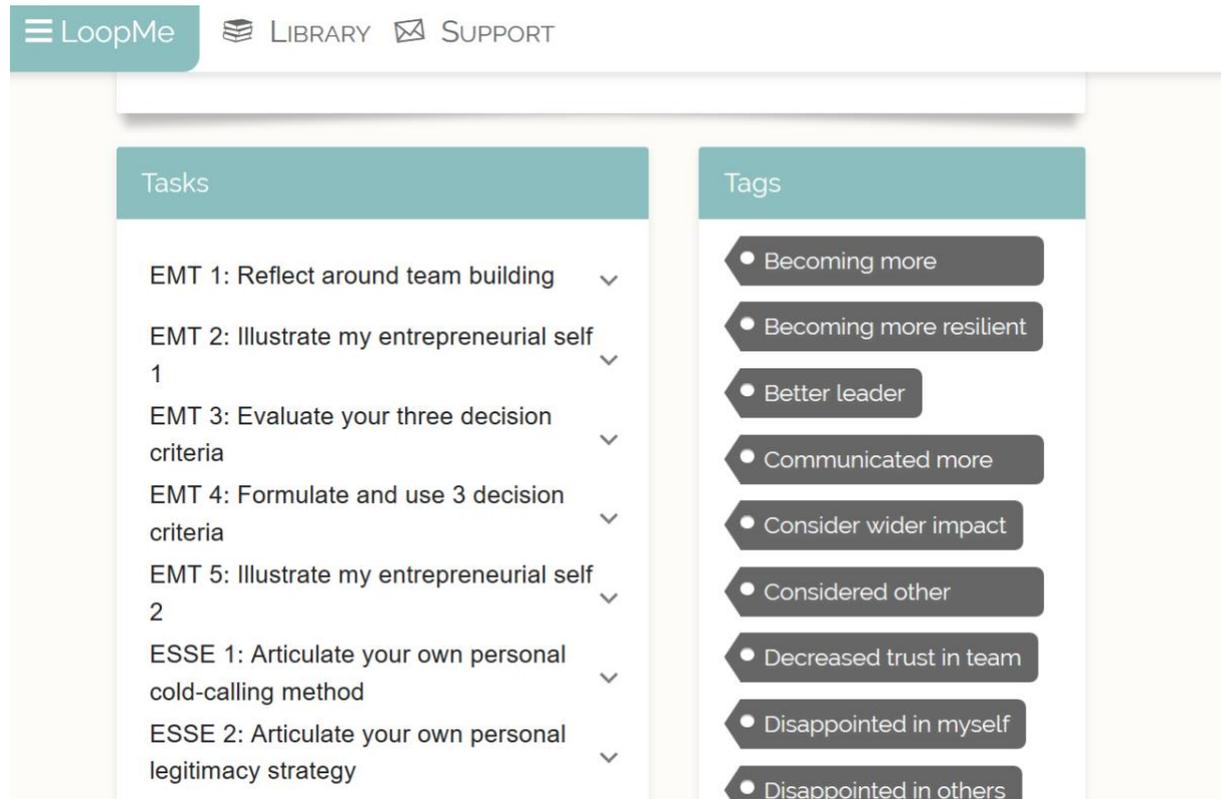
The screenshot in Figure 1 illustrates how a content package for entrepreneurial education could work. Assignments involve theoretical and practical tasks. Task “ESSE 1”, for instance, refers to the demanding endeavour of making cold calls to a potential client. Loopers are asked to reflect on their own strategy when making these calls. The tags indicate expected positive and negative outcomes, such as increased resilience or communication skills, or disappointment with own performance.

<sup>8</sup> Lackéus, Martin (2020).

<sup>9</sup> See <https://www.loopme.io/faster-feedback-in-huddersfield/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

Figure 1: Screenshot of LoopMe content package “Action-based entrepreneurship education”



Source: <https://library.loopme.io/packages/view/5d516e75ef70d4052e2fef44>

#### 4. Developmental Leadership: Applying LoopMe in Chalmers' Corporate Entrepreneurship Track

Chalmers employs LoopMe in its Corporate Entrepreneurship Track, where first-time Master students develop an innovative early-stage idea in an existing corporation. The track involves three phases: idea evaluation, venture creation and project realisation. Students work on tasks related to five entrepreneurial topics: sales, strategy, organisation, finance, and leadership. An industry mentor and a Chalmers mentor support the students.<sup>11</sup>

Each of the five topics connects to an overarching research question, which is the basis for the tasks the teacher assigns to students. In 2019, for instance, the research question in Sales asked how to build strong relationships that help foster entrepreneurship projects. Each question aims to develop an entrepreneurial skill. By employing the different features of LoopMe, the leader aims to encourage these skills in a **three-step process**:

- Firstly, students carry out a challenging task connected to the research question. In the Sales example, this could be making cold calls to potential customers. The task initiates a learning process.
- Secondly, the participant's personal perception of the experience indicates his or her learning process. For instance, when carrying out cold calls, the students might feel anxious. Through the related writing assignment (see Exhibit 1), the learners reflect on their experience and feelings.

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.chalmers.se/en/departments/tme/school-of-entrepreneurship/Pages/Corporate-Entrepreneurship-.aspx> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGzVADxdnVk>.

- Thirdly, after the task is over, they will feel a lasting effect, that ideally translates into an entrepreneurial skill. In the example, this might be better soft skills and enhanced confidence in calling customers.<sup>12</sup>

In this way, every reflection the students submit via a loop in the app connects to an activity carried out in a real corporation. The tool enables Chalmers to rigorously collect empirical data on how the students learn entrepreneurial skills. On average, there are twelve students in each Corporate Entrepreneurship class, which results in 180 to 500 submitted reflections throughout the course. In the individual courses, students write down their results in Master thesis reports.<sup>13</sup> Over the years, this enables Chalmers to build high quality and quantity data sets, which can be the basis for improving curricular and teaching methods as well as for entrepreneurial research.

Thus, LoopMe fosters deep reflections in students and helps them develop an entrepreneurial mindset.

**Corporations** or public entities can employ the tool to develop leadership skills, since the reflection mechanisms can be employed to a variety of different topics. Team leaders can follow their employees' development while going through certain tasks and capture decisive moments that enhance their performance.<sup>14</sup>

## 5. Entrepreneurial research with LoopMe

Chalmers also uses LoopMe in entrepreneurship research about start-ups or corporations. Founder Martin Lackéus considers LoopMe a suitable tool to enrich entrepreneurial research. He perceives traditional research in the field rather mono-methodical, relying above all on surveys and questionnaires. LoopMe adds user-generated data to the toolbox.

In **start-ups**, the platform aims to research how people develop entrepreneurial skills as well as testing the adoption and relevance of entrepreneurial methods (such as lean start-up) in practice. Researchers develop a set of tasks based on the research question they want to study. These tasks ideally involve practical assignments – like contacting a potential client – as well as higher level tasks – such as relating a recent experience to entrepreneurial theory. The tags used to label the experience could involve classifications for successful entrepreneurial endeavours or setbacks. Moreover, when doing research with start-ups, using LoopMe should occur ideally in a setting with a leader (e.g. a researcher or mentor) or a special incentive structure motivating participants to fulfil the tasks. In an entrepreneurial setting, this could be an investor offering incentives for a second funding round. Without such an incentive structure, participation is estimated to be around 15-20%.<sup>15</sup> A recent study analysed the application of LoopMe with students in Chalmers corporate entrepreneurship track, which focuses on intrapreneurial initiatives within established companies. Students used LoopMe as a logbook in the process of data collection and analysis of company structures, creating rich datasets on intrapreneurship in six different rounds of research.<sup>16</sup>

## 6. Outlook

In short, employing tools like LoopMe means leveraging digital transformation more deeply than just by moving traditional teaching online. Yet, the academic environment might not yet be ready for this step

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<sup>12</sup> See Lackéus (2018).

<sup>13</sup> See Lackéus (2018).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See Lackéus, Martin (2020).

<sup>16</sup> See Abdul-Karem et. Al. (2020).

on a large scale. Other fields of application – such as schools and vocational education – seem to be more appropriate, for the time being.

Moreover, the founders of LoopMe are working towards a broader application of the platform in business incubators and accelerators to provide advice to new entrepreneurs. In addition, intrapreneurs could use the platform to boost change management within an organisation. Outside of the entrepreneurial field, the LoopMe team is looking into applications in areas like health improvement, parenting, dieting and personal finances.<sup>17</sup>

### Source

This case study was prepared by Carola Schulz and Dr. Stefan Lilischkis from empirica Gesellschaft für Kommunikations- und Technologieforschung mbH, Bonn, Germany, through collection and analysis of broad documentation about Chalmers and interviews with key representative from Chalmers. The status of information in this case study is June 2020.

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Chalmers University of Technology: <https://www.chalmers.se/en/Pages/default.aspx>

LoopMe Platform: <https://www.loopme.io/>

### Key links

<https://www.loopme.io/>

Lackéus, Martin (2020): Collecting digital research data through social media platforms: can “scientific social media” disrupt entrepreneurship research methods? Available at:

<https://www.elgaronline.com/view/edcoll/9781788114516/9781788114516.00018.xml>. Access: 27.04.2020.

Lackéus, Martin (2018): YouTube Video “The deliberate ‘high tension approach’ to designing an entrepreneurial university”. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Oka>

Abdul-Karem, Maruan et. Al. (2020): “Researching Corporate Entrepreneurship: Findings of the Corporate Entrepreneurship Track at the Chalmers School of Entrepreneurship 2020”. Available at: <https://imit.se/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/IMIT-Research-Report-2020-1-Researching-Corporate-Entrepreneurship-Findings-of-the-Corporate-Entrepreneurship-Track-at-the-Chalmers-School-of-Entrepreneurship-2020.pdf>. Access: 21.09.2020.

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<sup>17</sup> See Lackéus, Martin (2020).