

Professor aims to create 30 Danish high growth comets

MIT professor wants to raise the ambition and sales ability of Danish entrepreneurs – the government’s entrepreneurship program may create global comets.

Entrepreneurship • by Nikolaj Sommer

A new entrepreneurship program is meant to create 25-30 new global growth comets in the Danish economy. The government wants to launch an entrepreneurship program after New Year’s with intensive special training of 60-70 growth companies within the ITC and Biotech sectors.

The project is going to be carried out with help from MIT in Boston. The leader of the MIT Entrepreneurship Center, Ken Morse, has just visited Denmark and he predicts that the program is going to create a score of Danish global companies with a turnover of at least a quarter of a billion DKK /year.

“I am convinced that between a fourth and a third of these companies are going to reach the goal of at least 250 mio. DKK/year in 5-7 years,” says Morse.

Morse visited Denmark during the weekend in connection with the preliminary probes of the entrepreneurship project, which the government is going to supply with 15 mio. DKK a year on the budget for the next five years.

“If just one of the companies reaches the goal, the program will have paid for itself,” says Morse.

GNP-progress

The VK-government has put support for growth-oriented entrepreneurs high on the agenda. An estimate from the government says that by doubling the number of growth entrepreneurs, Denmark can increase economic growth by 1% of GNP, the equivalent of 15-20 billion DKK.

The 25 x 250 Program is going to estimate the commercial potential of a number of entrepreneurship projects, and then provide the most ambitious entrepreneurs with counselling from established business people with experience in sales on a global scale, negotiations, and writing better business plans.

Ambitious goals

The Danish Association of Entrepreneurs bids the project welcome, but wonders whether the goal can be achieved.

“It sounds very ambitious, that they will help create so many successful companies for just 15 mio. DKK on the budget. But we deeply believe in the concept which the MIT Entrepreneurship Center has suggested, where experienced people from business at large are put together with start-up companies in, for example, research environments,” says Thomas Kollner, Director of The Danish Association of Entrepreneurs.

High ambitions are crucial when it comes to entrepreneurship. Morse points out that if Danish entrepreneurs want to succeed internationally, the first and most important step for them is to raise the level of their ambition and to learn to be better salesmen.

“The greatest challenge for Denmark when it comes to entrepreneurship is ambition. There are not enough ambitious entrepreneurs who want to build global companies,” says Morse. He has been an advisor to several European countries and regions in the field of entrepreneurship and has a thorough knowledge of Danish conditions both professionally and personally in Denmark.

In order to make the grade, companies will need the necessary ambition and an urge to grow globally. And, according to Morse, dedicated entrepreneurs must sign up for the stretch targets and then stand up and openly commit to global growth.

“In this project no company will be excluded – except by their own lack of ambition. The mere fact that we will measure their level of ambition will help to raise their sights,” says the MIT-leader.

People can learn both skills

Ken Morse emphasizes that Danish entrepreneurs need to improve their sales skills if they want to take part in international competition.

“Fortunately, our experience tells us that both ambition and salesmanship are abilities that can be learned. It is wrongly assumed that these are skills you are born with,” says Morse.

The Danish Association of Entrepreneurs agrees with Morse that ambition and salesmanship are important and can be taught.

“We see many entrepreneurs who have problems with the scaling up their business. And very often, it is the task of internationalizing the sales effort that is the crux of the matter. At the same time, it is quite obvious that we can learn a lot from the enthusiasm and ambition that entrepreneurs have in the USA,” says Thomas Kollner.

Yet, Kollner also points out that networking and the availability of venture capital are central problems that also have to be addressed.

A private sector framework is important

Ken Morse praises the Danish government and the civil servants of, amongst others, the Ministry of Research Science and Technology (VTU), for being among the best in Europe when it comes to embracing new initiatives in the field of entrepreneurship. Yet, he firmly stresses that the 25 x 250 Project must be free and independent of government in order to function as efficiently as possible.

“It is very important that the administration of this project is based on a public-private partnership, that it operates in a private sector framework, and that no ministry makes it into a secretariat,” says Morse.

In principle, all companies are going to get the opportunity to participate in the project, provided they have the ambition to sign up for the goal. The offer of help is going to be presented openly and publicly throughout the country.

[Special thanks to Steen Rydahl for helping to translate this article. Additional words have been added to facilitate understanding by non-Danish readers.]