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Taking an Active Approach in Entrepreneurial Mentoring Programs Geared Toward Immigrants

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TAKING AN ACTIVE APPROACH IN ENTREPRENEURIAL MENTORING

PROGRAMS GEARED TOWARD IMMIGRANTS

ABSTRACT

New businesses pervade every segment of society and have significant influence on national economies and local communities (Dakhli & De Clercq, 2004; De Clercq & Arenius, 2006), yet immigrants do not experience the economic and other benefits of entrepreneurship equally (Reynolds & White, 1997). Along with other economic benefits, they lack equal access to information, risk capital, and necessary business networks (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; De Clercq & Arenius, 2006; Kerr & Schlosser, 2007). Further, they face obstacles due to both actual and perceived challenges. That is, while immigrants face significant actual hurdles that impair their ability to access resources that will develop their entrepreneurial potential, the general public may also harbor unattractive stereotypes of their interests and capabilities. Using an action research and case-based approach, we highlight the challenges experienced by immigrants and in turn discuss practical measures to resolve these challenges through mentoring programs. Study results will provide a model to enable universities and other organisations to reach out to their local communities.

INTRODUCTION

Building a knowledge-based entrepreneurial economy requires a focused, multi-disciplinary and layered approach. Immigrants bring new ideas and different knowledge bases that stimulate innovation and entrepreneurship (Florida 2002; 2007; Light 2006; Saxenian 1994). Traditionally disadvantaged in terms of resources and know-how, new immigrants often find themselves in jobs that do not match their skill-sets or aspirations. They also face other hurdles as their educational background and credentials may not be recognized by their adopted country (Zhou, 2004). Thus, self-employment may present itself as a viable career opportunity for immigrants (Kerr & Schlosser, 2007). Indeed, the Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity 1996-2006 (Fairlie 2008) highlights higher entrepreneurship among immigrants than native-born Americans.

Often immigrants gravitate toward specific types of businesses, serving their own ethnic enclaves. Although this route may provide each a reasonable living, it may not maximize the economic stimuli of their education and knowledge on the adopted country. Economic diversification can be sparked among immigrants by increasing awareness and access to information about business and legal processes in the adopted country and by providing help that might inspire and instill confidence. Although entrepreneurial mentoring programs for immigrants may require a different approach than mentoring for Canadian born citizens, by targeting this group that is disadvantaged in society, the numbers of those involved in creative communities can be expanded, thereby ensuring community sustainability.

Utilizing an action research approach, we examine the role of entrepreneurial mentoring in motivating and enabling immigrants to create new businesses. The contribution to the discipline will be threefold: (1) examining the specific obstacles that must be overcome for entrepreneurship to be promoted among immigrants, (2) providing insight into best practices with respect to relevant transfer of knowledge and skills to the respective groups, and (3) gaining a better understanding of how to measure and assess the success of different knowledge transfer models upon completion, using a balanced scorecard approach.

Understanding Action Research

The term 'action research' describes a problem-centered approach using both theory and action to solve critical social problems through researcher-participant collaboration (Lewin, 1946). Action research embodies humanistic, democratic, and scientific values. It is humanistic in that the approach involves and respects people, democratic because it allows decisions and knowledge discovery to be made by all participants, and scientific because it extends and tests assumptions (Clark, 1976). It is a methodology that seeks to both create academic knowledge and action directly useful to people and organisations. Case studies are the main methods used in studying action research; this is because most of the information gathered occurs in real time.

Action research involves a cyclical process of action, critical reflection, and evaluation. This collective learning process begins with general research questions, which are then revised over time as participants pose new questions. The initial proposals and actions are reviewed and then evaluated as possible changes become apparent through

evaluation. Sussman and Evered (1978) described phases of problem diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, and specific learning.

In contrast to traditional observation techniques, action researchers actively participate and adapt to the group under study. Action Research requires that the researcher contribute theoretical knowledge as well as experience to the problem-solving process, whereas the clients bring practical knowledge and experience of the situations being studied. This encourages a collaborative problem solving style and eliminates the gap between the groups being researched and the researcher. Such a research method is proactive in nature and rooted in dialogue, quite different than the positivist way of research, and demanding practical benefits for people in communities and organisations. Marcos Bidart-Novaes, Gil, and Brunstein (2008) suggest this approach allows subjects to live and build constructive critical attitudes fundamental for the construction and production of knowledge beyond that which the research is focused on, and could not have obtained without being actively involved with the group that is studied. Participatory action research works as an instrument for the formation and development of dialogues between the subject and its existence; between knowing and doing; between ethics and method; breaking the silences that were previously constructed in these relations. However action research is not effective if people feel coerced or forced to participate.

Knowledge generation in action research is connected to action, and the kind of action could change as research progresses making it unpredictable and limitless, increasing the possibilities of effective discoveries. Action research is change-oriented and requires data that help track the consequences of the intended changes, hence

requiring systematic data collection, journaling, interpretation, and sense-making over time. This type of longitudinal research emphasizes gradual learning and improvements. It provides the time necessary to analyze situations as they follow the cyclical process of action research.

Action research in institutions and communities requires an interface between the combination of cultural, structural, and technological factors that make some behaviors and activities more likely than others. The reactions and attitudes of the researchers and participants are shaped by these behaviors. Cultural factors include the values, beliefs and theories about reality that emerge from the interaction between researchers and participants. Structural factors include divisions of labour and distribution of power, and technological factors encompass problem identification, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and the utilisation of findings (Brown, 1983).

Facilitating Research with Disadvantaged Groups

Action research is an accepted research method within the field of community psychology; used by universities and indigenous communities to understand societal influence on human problems (Rappaport, 1977). Likewise, social scientists gather stakeholder evidence to support social causes and to propose actions for positive change (Collier, 1945; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Kurt Lewin (1946) was a pioneer in developing action research as a tool to help minority groups develop their independence, equality and co-operation. More recently, aid institutions have used action research in developing countries to help understand with rural groups, communities, and marginalized persons and to flag key issues. In such cases, participatory research can be

used to improve policy making through development management, and to assist these groups and communities to grow economically, socially, and culturally without the loss of their core traditional values (Bidart-Novaes, et al., 2008).

As the aim of our paper is to promote entrepreneurial education, it is also relevant that the action research method is acceptable to education and business researchers. Curriculum development in education is positively affected because pedagogical researchers develop an understanding of how to best help students learn (Adelman, 1993). In the business world, action research provides a platform for organisations to engage in new forms of strategic decisions important to staying competitive and developing personal and team effectiveness for example, assisting service organisations to bring about desirable changes in culture and customer relationship management. (Lashley, 1999; Waser and Johns, 2003).

Action research is appropriate to use where knowledge required is specific to a particular problem, and is valuable when there is a language or culture barrier or an uneven distribution of power (Brown, 1983). Being involved in such difficult situations during research can be alleviated through by developing understanding of the subjects through increased participation.

Using this method, we can also consider the value of the people involved and deal with the practical concerns of these individuals by creating a more desirable future for them. The researchers learn a great deal about conditions that lead to either the success of failure of the new idea, especially during the early stages of implementation. It is possible to minimize the possibilities of error on future projects, allowing the researcher to distinguish between theory limitations and poor implementation within communities or

organisations (Elden & Chisholm, 1993) and consequently to adapt to unexpected results and changing circumstances. New problems that materialize are recognized, changed and modified because of its cyclical process.

In sum, action research can be distinguished from other methodology because it educates and seeks change and improvement through involvement, involves a cyclic process which synergizes research, action, and evaluation, and is problem-focused, content-specific, future-oriented and founded on a research relationship with participants in the change process (Hart and Bond, 1995). Accordingly, action research allows the researcher to access the information usually overlooked by other mainstream research methods and stresses the social responsibility inherent in the gathering of knowledge from and the heightened visibility of groups who are not well represented.

Action Research Method

Sussman and Evered (1978) developed a cyclical conceptualisation of the action research process, including phases of problem diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, and specific learning. As depicted in Figure 1, the following discussion applies an action research process to the development of an immigrant-focused entrepreneurial mentoring program. We follow this process through 2 cycles, and discuss recommendations for future programs.

Insert Figure 1

<center>**CYCLE ONE**</center>

Step 1: Diagnosing the Problem

Immigrant entrepreneurs are those who, upon arrival, create a new venture as a means of economic survival (Light, 2006; Saxenian, 1994). Canada has experienced a wave of immigrant workers, who fuel much of its 5.4% average population growth. Many immigrants strengthen the economy through entrepreneurial means. Immigrant entrepreneurship (1) creates job opportunities for individuals who are overlooked by mainstream labour markets, (2) decreases competition with native-born workers, (3) develops entrepreneurial role models, and (4) provides a way for immigrants to increase earnings (Zhou, 2004). Florida notes that North America is increasingly dependent on foreign talent to replace an aging demographic, and it is important to minimize barriers faced by immigrants. (Florida, 2007).

Barriers may be present in the host country's government policy (e.g., Tsui-Auch, 2005) and in the labour market, including discrimination (Mata & Pendakur, 1999; Mora & Davila, 2005) and the unemployment level of the native-born (van Tubergen, 2005). However, these barriers may also encourage immigrants to pursue self-employment. Researchers have noted, in general terms, that income is lower for immigrants than for those who are native-born. However, the greater the self-employment rate for a given ethnic group, the greater the average income for the group (Fairlie & Meyer, 1996). Self-employed immigrants are more likely to achieve a higher income than those who work for others (Kerr & Schlosser, 2007). Using U.S. census data, Lofstrom (2002) concluded that self-employed immigrants appear to close the wage gap between natives and

<center>9</center>

immigrants significantly more quickly than employed immigrants. In contrast, employed immigrants are unlikely to ever reach income parity with native-born Americans.

Discovering the Unique Needs of Immigrant Entrepreneurs. Using semi-structured interviews (1-hour length), we asked 25 successful immigrant entrepreneurs about the perceived utility of mentoring. There were six women and19 men, whose ages ranged from 25 to 75 years of age and representing 18 different languages and 17 countries of origin. They operated in a broad range of industries including retail, aesthetics, professional, high-tech, manufacturing, restaurant, footwear wholesaling, and real estate. The ages of businesses ranged from 3 months to 35 years. There were 10 micro firms (1-4 employees), 11 small firms (5-20 employees) and 3 medium-sized firms (21-50 employees).

When asked what obstacles they faced when they chose self-employment in Canada, participants responded that they lacked access to information about the Canadian customer and business regulations like licensing. They described difficulties in obtaining financing without a domestic credit record, and noted they preferred to turn to relatives for financing. Additionally, they lacked business networks when they arrived here. Twenty-three of 25 participants described having informal mentors who were close relatives. One described a non-relative, and one noted that she 'did it on her own'. Four described academic related mentors (one formal and three informal). A different four described workplace mentors, such as partners or industry contacts met through previous employment. All had worked for someone else before starting their business and believed that this had exposed them to the industry and Canadian expectations.

Although our interviews were directed specifically to business-related barriers, we had nevertheless determined anecdotally that most new entrepreneurs especially

immigrant entrepreneurs faced additional challenges in accessing necessary legal resources. Seeking out the help of a lawyer is often viewed of as intimidating and fear of cost, increased complexity and, often, linguistic barriers act as deterrents.

This exploratory dialogue with immigrant entrepreneurs highlighted a need for entrepreneurial mentoring in our community, and we progressed to a new stage of program planning, commencing with a literature review of entrepreneurial mentoring.

Step 2: Planning Action

The active components of the mentoring program considered insights from our earlier review of the action research literature. Action research can be used to enhance the dialogue between program facilitator, mentors and mentees and consequently, is essential for creating effective and sustainable immigrant mentoring programs. This approach can be used to create an atmosphere that encourages these immigrants to freely portray their culture. Given that there are different cultural and social traditions, this gives immigrants voice, and allows participants to adjust the resources and benefits offered by the program to their own pace, time and language.

A participatory approach also helps to develop social capital by building upon the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of their social interactions with their families, ethnic communities, and workplaces. This eases their understanding and transition from their home culture to that of the adopted country and leads to increased confidence and self-determination within the community.

Academic Research in Entrepreneurial Mentoring. We also sought insights from academic studies of entrepreneurial mentoring as we developed the action plan for the mentoring program. However, we found little academic research on entrepreneurial

mentoring even though other entrepreneurial research has indicated that access to information can create a cognitive framework that increases the ability to recognize opportunities (Ozgen and Baron 2007).

We did uncover some interesting scholarship regarding the role of lawyers and the legal profession. This research is looking closely at the function of the lawyer in facilitating, mentoring and assisting new enterprises from the outset – in other words, recasting the lawyering model beyond the traditional transactional role of the business lawyer. The lawyer as 'mentor' in an entrepreneurial setting is increasingly forming part of the discourse surrounding the legal profession. (Gardner, 2003; Goodman (1998); Suchman and Cahill, 1996)

Mentoring functions. Much of the existing management mentoring research related to careers in larger organisations, where mentoring functions included vocational support, psychosocial support, and role modeling (Hu 2008). Higher levels of facilitation made a greater impact in formal mentoring programs (Egan and Song 2008). When we reviewed practical programs of small business assistance, most were broad-based, providing the same services to all small businesses, without customizing. These are generally delivered through government or NGOs, and involve informational and mentoring components. However, there were few that targeted the special needs of newcomers.

Step 3: Taking Action

Upon consideration of these best practices, we developed the New Canadian Business Series. It was a partnership between our Faculties of Business and Law. The mission of the New Canadian Business Series was to stimulate the local economy

through university-community outreach, capitalize on the diversity of the surrounding community, link student learning and application for both Business and Law students, and use this as a way to achieve two overarching goals. These goals consisted of 1) student training in both business and law and 2) retaining both students and immigrants in the Windsor community. The initiative was funded by a Public Outreach Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada 2008-9.

The New Canadian Business Series, reflecting a strong partnership between the Business and Law school outreach centers, produced a series of six workshops (cycle 1) and a culminating mentoring forum (cycle 2) for the benefit of immigrant entrepreneurs over the course of a six month period. The workshops were designed to combine both business and legal considerations in business start-ups and every effort was made to ensure that there was complementarity between business and legal subject-matters. For example, the treatment of market research, marketing and sales was coupled with a discussion of trademark law. The workshop dealing with product development also touched upon aspects of patent law. The workshop relating to team development looked as well into employment law considerations. In their entirety, the informational workshops combined topics included: 1) Doing Business in Canada, 2) Business Organisation, 3) Market Research, Marketing, and Sales, 4) Team Development and Product Development, 5) Financing the Venture, and 6) Doing Business Online (Table 1). All elements of the program were delivered by supervised student facilitators who received course credit and financial incentives. We built upon the unique collaboration, by hiring student project managers who were enrolled in a combined MBA and JD program. In this way, our New Canadian Business Series had multi-layered effects.

In addition to providing legal and business support to new Canadian entrepreneurs, we offered intensive training and skill-based learning for students delivering the workshop series. In addition, our paid project managers honed their knowledge and skills in the development of marketing programs and in managing projects and personnel.

Insert Table 1

A complication arose as we began to take action: the faculty at the university went on strike. In order to ensure that the students and participants were not disadvantaged, we delivered the first workshop hosted by a local NGO immigration settlement agency. This adaptation became the foundation for a strong partnership for other programs targeting immigrants. During the first workshop we covered cultural issues, related to doing business in the adopted country and its legal environment, recognizing business opportunities that build on international experience, and networking, business plans. We assigned 'homework' to the participants so they could connect what we discussed in the workshop to their own business ideas.

Step 4: Evaluating Action

As we were delivering the first cycle of the program, we considered evaluative aspects of the action research, and used this to develop the next stage.

The workshops were comprehensive in nature covering a wide variety of business and legal topics. They were conducted approximately every 3-4 weeks in a classroom type setting. A student project manager collected feedback on the six workshops

compiled a brief report concerning the workshop strengths, potential areas for improvement and recommendations. Areas of feedback have been added to Table 1. The feedback was themed into three areas, including workshop structure, content and relationship development. These targeted workshops had never been delivered before, and there was a lack of even general entrepreneurial assistance in the region. The attendees appreciated the knowledge and helpfulness of the business and law students, but alerted us to information overload, especially given the lack of business expertise in the attendees. Additionally, some lacked a full grasp of English and this hampered their absorption of the topics; another reason that multiple media (handouts and slides provided after the workshop helped to clarify topics).

We found comments relating to relationship development more interesting than the structural and content comments because they showed a desire for attendees to build a longer relationship outside of the workshops with the student consultants. They appreciated having the ability to work one-on-one with student presenters as well as having the email addresses of the presenters for follow-up. Also noted specifically was the need for networking opportunities with the students and other guest professionals and speakers.

<u>Learning</u>

The consultants realized the importance of scheduling, organizing materials and practicing prior to the presentation, and time management during the presentation. It appeared that the mix of business and law in each workshop was worthwhile. Important but complex topics required more time and more

explanation, using applied and simple examples. Based on the feedback, we would decrease the number of topics in each workshop in order to provide more examples and details on the more important topics. There was not enough time in the 3 hours to cover all of these topics in detail to really give the participants a good grasp.

Organizers might maximize relationship development opportunities, some as simple as wearing name tags and providing email addresses in each session. In the future, we intended to provide more one-on-one sessions w/ students and participants, it appeared as though this was useful, especially allowing the participants to ask more specific questions. Even with a larger group, it still might be a good idea, at the end of each workshop to put participants in smaller groups based on their interests, which would allow them to ask specific questions from the presenters. It would give participants a chance to get some information on their specific business or legal needs from the presenter on that topic.

Resource materials were invaluable to the participants and needed to be a continuing part of these workshops. Everything, from the Power Points to the extra hand-out material, should be made available online in case a participant could not attend.

<div align="center">CYCLE 2</div>

Problem Diagnosis

In addition to lacking knowledge of business practices and regulations, immigrants may lack an adequate social/business network (they are new with limited landed contacts outside their family or ethnic enclave) and lack knowledge of the legal framework in their adopted country, as well as lack access to financial resources (they

have no domestic credit history which makes it difficult to borrow from traditional financial outlets) and to successful role models and advisors who, in the past, have faced similar cultural barriers when starting their own businesses.

Consequently, we expected that the participants would valued opportunities for networking and mentoring, whether in the form of one-on-one or larger gatherings of professionals and speakers. This was supported by the feedback from the workshops. Although the workshops had informed their understanding of the technical aspects of entrepreneurship, they would need to be 'networked into' the community. As a result, we moved to a second cycle of the program, and created a mentoring forum.

Step 2: Planning Action

Researchers have noted the importance of developing complementary relationships responsive to the needs of both mentor and protégé (Kram 10985), as well as considering the availability of suitable mentors in the matching process (Klie 2008). When considering the types of mentors to involve, previous research recommended the involvement of government/quasi-government organisations, as well as mentors that were professionals (such as accountants and lawyers) and / or entrepreneurs (Bisk 2002) and venture capitalists (Large and Muegge 2008). Mentors (Eby, Durley, Evans, Ragins, 2008) and mentees (Pellegrini and Scandura, 2005) define and perceive the success of any mentoring process differently, with some gender differences (Fowler, Gudmundsson, O'Gorman, 2007; Hu, 2008). Consequently to ensure relationship quality it was important to gather insights from both mentors and mentees when developing the

matching process and program measurement methods (Allen, Eby, and Lentz 2006; Allen and Eby 2003). Informal mentorships are often based on perceived similarity, identification and interpersonal comfort between mentor and protégé (Ragins et al 2000), hence it was important to situate our mentoring process within the broader context of the organisation rather than just looking at mentoring functions. (Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge 2008). Additionally, researchers recommended mentoring training to stimulate mentor/mentee commitment (Allen, Eby, & Lentz 2006).

The mentoring forum was designed to reward the loyal workshop participants with an opportunity to interact with successful entrepreneurs from the area and to receive some preliminary legal advice from a local lawyer/mentor. The premise was that these mentoring and network opportunities would give them an opportunity to apply some of the knowledge they learned in the workshops while making valuable contacts. The entire program was free of charge to all participants as funding was provided by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Step 3: Taking Action

A variety of mentors were recruited that covered varied professional and industry sectors. For example, a lawyer, accountant and insurance person were invited. We tried to match some of the interests of our mentees, for example, a magazine editor to help a participant who wanted to start a newspaper targeting the local Philippino community. A successful high tech entrepreneur was invited to help with Internet based social networking business ideas. A local marketer provided information about branding. We tried to screen mentors so that they would not solicit participants as customers. Customized packages were sent out to mentors and mentees that explained the role of

each at the forum and provided an agenda and directions. In this way we managed expectations of what the day would be about, list of mentors (professional experience) and speakers (topics).

The mentoring forum was separated into two distinct formats. The morning session was a roundtable design and highly interactive. Participants were given the chance to walk around and ask questions of the mentors who had years of expertise and experience. The hope was that these questions and integrative discussions would result in further development of their ideas and business aspirations. The afternoon session was much more formal and opened up to the public. It featured a number of guest speakers on their experiences in the business world. Speakers included a marketing and branding specialist, a government representative who outlined sources of government funding, a successful local immigrant entrepreneur role model, and immigrant entrepreneur network organizer from another much larger city.

Step 4: Evaluation

A student project manager attempted to contact all mentors and mentees that participated in the mentoring forum in March 2009. Seven of the eight mentors provided detailed insights following open-ended questions. Unfortunately the contact list for all mentees that had attended the workshops had a number of inaccuracies, resulting from incomplete or incorrect contact information. Additionally, attempts to call their home phones were hampered by the lack of English spoken by other residents of the household. A total of twelve individuals (out of approximately 25 attending on a regular basis) agreed to participate in the telephone interview. Despite the low response rates, those that did participate provided meaningful feedback. There were few communication issues while

interacting directly with the mentees on the phone as most spoke fluent English. To

evaluate this second cycle, we developed a customized balanced scorecard approach,

based upon Norton and Kaplan's (xxxx). This appeared to be ideal, because we

measured mainly non-financial aspects of this program.

Developing a Balanced Scorecard Approach. A balanced scorecard approach

(Kaplan & Norton, CITE) was developed to evaluate the effectiveness of the New

Canadian Business Workshop Series and Mentoring Forum. This approach takes

traditional performance metrics a step further by providing a more future oriented

perspective. Its focus on more than just financial measures allows administrators to

better translate strategy into actionable objectives. Figure 2 maps these objectives onto

four performance metrics that provide critical insight into how well the strategic plan is

being executed. Table 2 describes program performance metrics categorized by

financial, participants, student learning and growth, and internal processes, which are

more fully described in the following sections.

Insert Figure 2

Insert Table 2

Financial: It was difficult to accurately assess the financial costs of the

programs. Many elements were provided voluntarily or as in-kind contributions

matching government funding. The terms of the funding were that the programs would be provided free of charge and therefore recouping of any costs was not possible nor even relevant. Expenditures included refreshments and meals that were provided at the workshops and mentoring forum. The program also incurred expenses for promotional materials, handouts for the participants and gifts and honoraria for the mentors and guest speakers. Students earned either salary or course credit when assisting in delivering or researching the program. The majority of mentors and guest speakers at the mentoring forum volunteered their time. Also, the locations of all the events were free of charge as they were held at the university. Given the one time nature of the funding, it must be acknowledged that strictly basing cost estimates on the pilot program may be somewhat inaccurate for future programs. It is estimated that an average of 25 individuals attended each event. Therefore, for costing purposes it will be assumed that the cost per head is based on an attendance of 25 individuals throughout the entire program. Refreshments for 25 individuals and the presenters at each workshop totaled $3000 ($500 per workshop). The meals provided at the mentoring forum (breakfast and lunch) were for an estimated 50 people including mentors, mentees and program administrators. There was also a post-event reception for further networking opportunities that had an attendance of approximately 120 people. These meals were provided at a cost approximately $7500 altogether. Advertising materials including hard copy publicity and promotional materials, placing of advertisements in local papers and trade journals and thank you gifts for the invited mentors and guest speakers totaled $6000 for the program. Honorariums for select mentors and guest speakers amounted to $1000. Handouts, binders and other miscellaneous materials and supplies provided to the participants cost

$1000. A total of 9 project managers and 17 business and law students were formally hired to plan, deliver, evaluate and conduct research surrounding the program from summer 2008 to summer 2009. Their salaries for this work amounted to roughly $40,000. One mentor attended the event from Toronto and his travel and lodging expenses were covered by administrators at a cost of $850. Therefore, the grand total of expenses for the workshop series and mentoring forum was approximately $59,350. This translated into a cost per head of $2,374 for each participant.

The payback on training investment was not likely to result in monetary gains for the program. The programs were administered for free and therefore the payback would more closely resemble success stories of the participants. The hope is that many of these successful individuals will someday return as mentors in future programs. Another area of interest concerned the estimated time before these immigrant entrepreneurs open businesses in the local area helping to strengthen the economy. It was reasonable to expect that some of these individuals would begin pursuing their business ideas shortly after finishing the program. In fact, two of the mentees said they had in fact started their own businesses, but did not wish to elaborate more. It is also likely that others who had their own businesses or family businesses were able to strengthen them from knowledge gained in the program. The program would have also provided others with the realisation that their idea is not feasible and to pursue other avenues. In the current economic climate it is likely that it will take longer than normal to begin a new business as start-up capital is difficult to obtain. A rough estimate would be that the majority of participants would attempt to begin their businesses within the next 1-3 years and that financial

indicators of success would begin to surface within the next 3-5 years. There was

definite interest among the participants in a future workshop series and mentoring forum.

   Participants (Mentees & Mentors): There were approximately 15-20 committed

immigrant entrepreneurs who attended the majority of the workshops and the mentoring

forum. This core group was eager to learn and found all events beneficial to their

business aspirations. There were also a lot of others who attended events sporadically,

but they could not be considered serious participants. This noticeable lack of continued

participation from others was described as discouraging. All participants were impressed

with the content of the workshops and the knowledge base they gained. The split

between business and legal information was also very applicable to their business ideas.

All of the individuals contacted expressed interest in attending similar events in the future

if the information was updated. A few mentioned that they had told their close friends of

their great experiences and had encouraged them to attend the next round of events. Two

immigrant entrepreneurs reported starting their businesses but were not comfortable

sharing specific information at this time.

   The mentors' overall perceptions of the mentees were mixed. Some of the

mentees showed up late or did not attend which was very unimpressive. There was also a

noticeable divide in the preparedness and professionalism of the mentees. Mentors felt

they spent too much time trying to draw out their ideas rather than focusing on giving the

mentees the advice they needed. If they had materials prepared in advance it would have

been easier to connect with them and understand their needs.

   In spite of this, mentor feedback reflected a win-win situation. They found it

valuable to talk to new Canadian entrepreneurs and hear interesting ideas. The

discussions got them thinking about how they could improve their own businesses. They also felt more enthusiastic after the event with respect to their own business interests as the energy and creativity displayed by the mentees fueled their desire. It was also a good opportunity to network and turned out to be a good promotional tool. One mentor was proud to profile her involvement in the program in the business magazine she edited. All mentors were receptive to the idea of attending a future event. They were enthusiastic about giving back to the local business community and they wished they had the same type of opportunities when they started up. The only deterring factor was the time commitment and scheduling constraints.

  Student Learning & Growth: The participants of both the workshops and mentoring forum felt the quality of the presentations were superb. There was not a single complaint regarding the value of the content presented. The workshops were described as comprehensive, providing a great foundation of knowledge. The participants were very impressed with the knowledge and preparation of the students involved. Many topics not previously considered were introduced and complicated concepts were simplified. The law portions were described as 'eye opening' as the tendency is to overlook them. Most other workshops they had attended in the past focused on business topics from textbooks. Overall, it showed participants that starting a business from scratch is no easy task and lots of homework must be done before hand. Participants at workshops felt at ease to participate and ask questions. They also appreciated the fact that if questions could not be answered during the workshops, those in charge would complete the required research and have a good response at the next workshop.

The networking opportunities between mentees were a key success factor of the program. The events brought a group of people together with common interests who were able to share their struggles and ideas with each other. There were also mentees from the same home countries that discovered leads on collaborative business opportunities. Friendships have developed among participants and many recognize each other at other events around campus. Networking with mentors was equally valuable for mentees. They found it beneficial to hear from experienced and successful business people in the community. They felt they would not have gained access to these influential people any other way and were impressed and appreciative that they were willing to give up time from their busy schedules. Some mentees have been in contact with mentors since the event through email and are very impressed with response times. In at least two cases, mentors were able to connect mentees with important contacts in the community. They have also been helpful in recommending books and articles for further learning opportunities.

Internal Processes: There was no shortage of mentors willing to help the day of the event. The consensus of both the mentors and mentees was that the roundtable format required more time at each table. Furthermore, the quality of the mentoring relationship would have improved greatly with increased one-on-one communication. Mentees felt conversations were limited and that they had to restrain from asking more questions because of the time constraint. Mentors found that there was a lack of in-depth discussion and felt at times that they were short-changing some mentees in the group. There always seemed to be one dominant mentee personality that took over the discussion in each group. One-on-one feedback would also allow for specific rather than

generic advice. The allotted time did not always give the mentors enough time to zero in

on how their own business practices would apply to the mentees ideas. Three of eight

mentees said that the roundtable format of the forum benefitted them directly. Many

expressed their normal lack of confidence and intimidation in similar environments as an

issue but that this format forced them to engage with the mentors rather than having to

approach them on their own. All mentees said they were able to apply the information

they learned at the workshops when asking questions to the mentors. The handouts and

materials were useful as many participants stated that they regularly refer back to them

when planning future strategy. As stated previously, costs were managed very well as a

lot of the delivery was performed by volunteers and for course credit saving money.

Mentees communicated that they would like to see future mentors with expertise in the

following areas: financial guru, franchise businesses, online businesses and international

businesses.

Learning

Participants were optimistic regarding the pilot program for the New Canadian

Business Workshop Series and Mentoring Forum. However, as with any new initiative

small adjustments can bring it to the next level. The following recommendations will

improve mentoring programs aimed at involving nascent immigrant entrepreneurs:

1) Develop a welcoming and tracking strategy to better understand the varying and

    changing needs of immigrant participants. This might be as simple as having

    volunteers at the door to welcome them, and timely follow-up and tracking of

    their contact information and venture needs. This will help to build their

    confidence and awareness of support.

2) Develop a network among participants, for example using an email list that includes a monthly update of future events. It could also feature other information including success stories of fellow immigrant entrepreneurs in the area. This will increase the loyalty of the participants and attendance at future events. It is also a way for a participant to keep updated if they have left the country for an extended period of time. Lastly, if members agree to share contact information this may be a safe avenue for future business relationships to develop.

3) Create a dynamic program that incorporates new concepts and updated materials into subsequent workshops in order to attract both new and previous participants This helps to expand their knowledge base and create a continuous learning and support network for them. Also, there should be an emphasis on focusing the information on key aspects that complement the profile of each participant group, and on delivering this in a practical and layman's way.

4) Create customized workshops that suit the needs of a particular region. This will help to retain the entrepreneurial participants in the area where they can contribute to its economic growth. For example, if the program is delivered in a border community, then it might be customized to include aspects of the other country's legal and business environment.

5) Develop a profile of each participant so that appropriate mentors can be found, specifically matching professional and industry specific skills to needs.

6) Emphasize the need for participants to be prepared to talk about their ideas. Elevator pitches and or one page summaries are a critical first step toward commercializing an idea.

7) Consider the development of a longer-term relationship matching mentors and mentees. However, mentors in our program were noncommittal when presented with this option, because they were wary of the increased time expectations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, new businesses pervade every segment of society and have significant influence on national economies and local communities (Dakhli & De Clercq, 2004; De Clercq & Arenius, 2006), yet immigrants do not experience the economic and other benefits of entrepreneurship equally (Reynolds & White, 1997). Along with other economic benefits, they lack equal access to information, risk capital, and necessary business networks (Davidsson & Honig, 2003; De Clercq & Arenius, 2006; Kerr & Schlosser, 2007). Further, they face obstacles due to both actual and perceived challenges. That is, while immigrants face significant actual hurdles that impair their ability to access resources that will develop their entrepreneurial potential, the general public may also harbor unattractive stereotypes of their interests and capabilities. Using an action research and case-based approach, we have highlighted the challenges experienced by immigrants and in turn discussed practical measures to resolve these challenges through mentoring programs. Study results provide a model to enable universities and other organisations to reach out to their local communities.
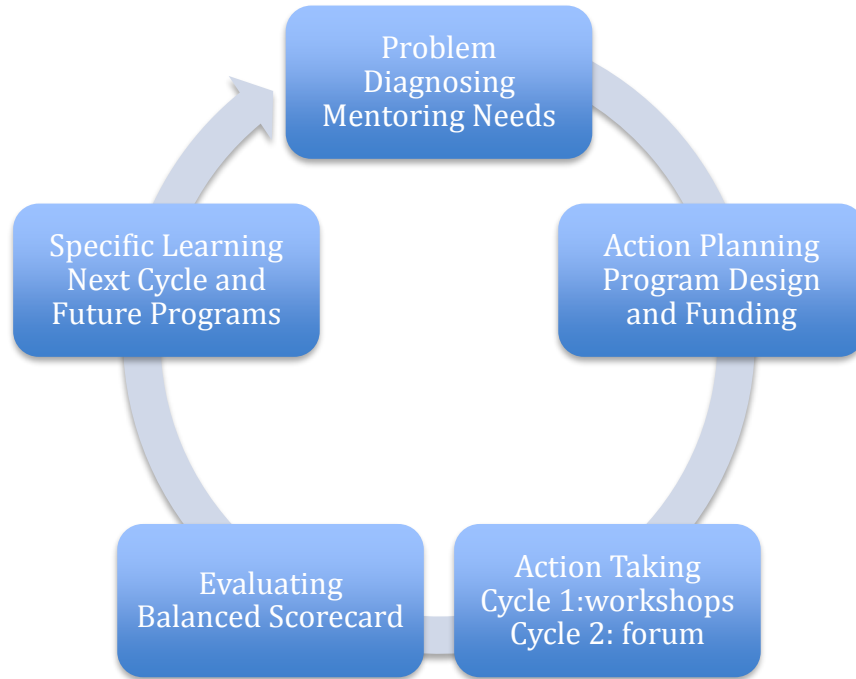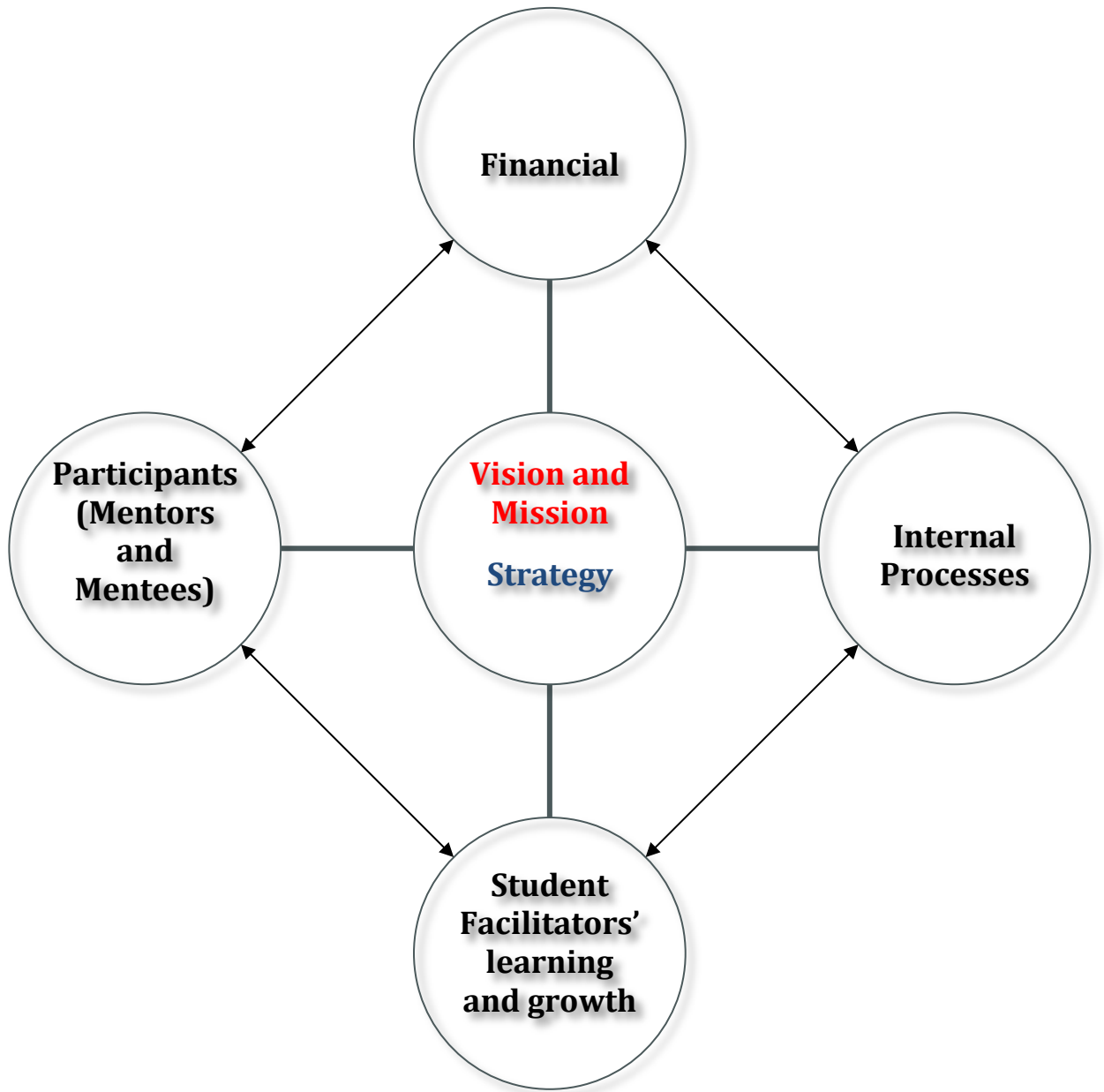
Figure 1:

Action Research Cycles

Figure 2:

A Balanced Scorecard for Measuring the Success of a Mentoring Program

Adapted from: Kaplan, Robert S., Norton, David P. (1996). *The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action.* Boston: Harvard Business Press.

Table 1

New Canadians Workshop Content and Participant Feedback

Workshop	Content	Feedback Themes
Workshop #1: Doing Business In Canada (delivered by law and business professors)	Icebreakers, speed networking, doing business in Canada, basis of law in Canada	1. Structure 2. Informational content • Networking opportunities were noted
Workshop #2: Business Organisations (delivered by law and business students)	Law: Immigration, Torts, Business Associations and Ownership Business: Insurance, Lifecycle, Organisation Structure, Insurance	1. Structure 2. Informational content • Workshop improved in variety of resources provided • Participants provided more post feedback • Liked interactive Q & A • Too much information
Workshop #3: Marketing and Sales (delivered by law and business students)	Law: sale of goods, warranties, and consumer law Business: Market research, marketing strategy and plan, sales	1. Structure 2. Informational content • One on one consultation with the students was noted as an improvement to lecture style
Workshop #4: Team and Product Development (delivered by law and business students)	Law: Trademarks, patents, trade secrets, labour law, child labour law Business: team development, human resources, training, recruitment, leadership, R& D, manufacturing, operations and distribution	1. Structure 2. Informational content • Invitation for post workshop follow-up accepted and indeed requested
Workshop #5: Financing the Venture (delivered by law and business students)	Law: Tax, Securities regulations Business: Sources of financing, business plan, business valuation, equity, debt, business accounting, cash flow, balance sheet, income statement	1. Structure 2. Informational content • Too much information • Need more examples • Renewed emphasis on post workshop info access
Workshop #6: Doing Business Online (delivered by law and business students)	Law: Jurisdiction, copyright, online privacy, domain names, e-contracts Business: ecommerce, sales and online marketing	1. Structure 2. Informational content • Noted need for more networking opportunities

Table 2:

Proposed Scorecard Indicators

Financial	Cost per head
	Payback on training investment
	Future programs planned
	Financial Indicators of new businesses
Participants (mentees and mentors)	Mentee business network size and strength
	Actual venture creation
	Development of their ideas
	Quality of immigrants retained in program
	Retention of mentees and mentors
	Increased knowledge of Cdn business and law
	Mentee and mentor satisfaction
Student Learning and Growth	Quality of presentations
	Knowledge cross over for business/law students
	Jobs related to SMEs afterward
	Continued voluntary interaction with clients
	Size of local network
Internal Processes	# mentors willing to help
	Quality of mentoring relationship (mentee and mentor perspectives)
	Quality of seminars
	Attendees, handouts, cost mgmt
	Perceptions of fairness (credit/paid)

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