**The Role of Environment in Fostering Conductive Entrepreneurial Learning - Teaching the ‘Art’ of Entrepreneurship in Boot Camps**

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**Executive Summary**

The modern globalised economy is potentially prone to periods of change and uncertainty as experienced in the economic downturn following 2007. Others have noted that this has led to the shortening of product life cycles (Tassey, 2000), and greater importance of innovation to retain competitiveness (Smith, 2002; Huggins and Izushi, 2007). These are the environments where entrepreneurs are traditionally felt to thrive, be this in starting their own firms, working within larger corporations, or in their lives in general (Gibb, 2002b; Rae, 2010). This ensures that the need for entrepreneurial skills is greater than ever (Taatila, 2010), with higher education seen as having a key role in providing the necessary entrepreneurial and employability skills (Crayford et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2010; 2012). There is, however, no consensus on the best way to develop these skills, if it is possible at all (Jack and Anderson, 1999). Although the traditional classroom environment may be effective in providing students with basic business skills that constitute the ‘science’ component of entrepreneurship it is often felt to be unsuitable for teaching the ‘art’ component associated with innovation and creativity (Jack and Anderson, 1999; Pretorius et al., 2005). Rae (2006) notes the personal and social emergence of an individual forming their own identity and mindset as an entrepreneur as part of this learning experience. With traits such as self-confidence and willingness to tolerate uncertainty found by studies such as Baron (2000) and van Praag and Cramer (2001) to be positively associated with successful entrepreneurs, authors, such as, Johannisson (1991) and Jones and English (2004) see the creation of these traits as being the primary purpose of entrepreneurship education. Gibb’s (2002a) notion of conductive entrepreneurial environment points to the importance of providing an all-rounded student entrepreneurship learning experience that meets the rigors of academia, while keeping an experientially-based approach that enhances creativity and innovation (Gibb, 2002a; Porter and McKibbin, 1988). Pretorius et al. (2005) and Löbler (2006), however, suggest that the everyday pressures associated with the classroom environment and behaviourist forms of teaching make it difficult for students to shift into a more creative less constrained way of thinking.

This exploratory study examines the potential benefits of one option, an entrepreneurship boot camp at the end of an academic year aimed at allowing students the opportunity to participate in multidimensional entrepreneurship activities and discussions in a less formal environment. Although all of the students will have been exposed to similar activities as part of their courses and extra curricula activities, without the appropriate environment it is possible that fewer benefits will be received (Taatila, 2010). Taatile and Vyakarnam (2008) note the important role the mentor plays in creating this environment, but others (e.g. Heap, 1996; West, 2004; Pretorius et al., 2005) note the role played by the physical environment The students’ perceptions of the environment created and the evidence of changes in how students think about entrepreneurship as an activity and of themselves within these roles are examined. In thinking about the boot camp experience, the students also reveal some of the limitations of the traditional classroom environment. In order to achieve this, the study takes an in-depth longitudinal approach with interviews held with the participating students at a number of points before, during, and after the boot camp. This enables the study to examine how students’ attitudes evolve throughout the learning experience.

The results suggest that an informal environment away from campus aides creative thinking, as students expressed an appreciation of the opportunity to discuss their ideas in a more open manner to obtain greater feedback from mentors and peers. The students’ responses suggested that the displacement from the campus environment was of great benefit here. Students explicitly noted the way they could consider their business ideas as new ventures rather than being concerned with making comparisons with previous studies for purposes of assessment. In relation to the need to aid students’ development of social and psychological skills highlighted by Taatila (2010), being away from the pressures of the educational environment meant students were better able to develop their own identities as entrepreneurs. It appears therefore that the boot camp’s multidimensional nature produces different outcomes to those of other experiential-learning approaches, thus providing another piece of the jigsaw to the conductive entrepreneurial environment puzzle. The camps therefore potentially improve the creative entrepreneurial attributes of graduates. Studies such as Taatila (2010) suggest that these skills are expected to increase graduates’ value as business owners or employees in other firms. Implications for entrepreneurial learning both within the university and corporate environments may be that whilst entrepreneurial learning may rely on contextual experience (Rae, 2006; Politis, 2008), it appears that there can be considerable benefits where reflection can be undertaken, and development negotiated, away from the front line of assessed academic work or in the case of firms’, production. Interviews after completion of the study suggest that although actual activities undertaken after such camps may be coloured by the return of day-to-day pressures, an entrepreneurial mind-set remains.

***Introduction***

The modern globalised economy is potentially increasingly prone to periods of change and uncertainty. This has increased the importance of both product and process innovation in attempting to remain competitive (Tassey, 2000; Smith, 2002; Huggins and Izushi, 2007). These are the types of environment where an entrepreneurial approach is likely to be most appropriate (Gibb, 2002b; Rae, 2010). Universities have a key role in creating the next generation of entrepreneurs, intrapreneurs and corporate entrepreneurs with the relevant skills and behaviours to succeed (Binks et al., 2006; Rae, 2010).

It is beginning to be accepted that entrepreneurship can be viewed as being part art and part science (Jack and Anderson, 1999; Rae, 2005). For the art component in particular, as well as utilising the appropriate pedagogical approach, the appropriate environment for creative and innovative behaviour needs to be established (Löbler, 2006; Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006; Heinonen, 2007). This may mean moving outside the classroom, into environments such as entrepreneurship boot camps. The term boot camp is originally referred to the basic training for military recruits, which is now often expanded to include other types of activities that bears an introductory characteristic and requires trainees to temporarily move to a specific, often remote location. In this study the term entrepreneurship boot camp refers to an off-campus introductory entrepreneurship training course aiming to provide students a basic understanding of what is required to start up a business. There has been relatively little research examining the impact of moving out of the classroom has on the way students think, and even less examination of whether this has a lasting influence or quickly dissipates. This study uses a longitudinal qualitative approach to consider the case of UK higher education students participating in one such intervention, a boot camp run jointly by a number of universities across a variety of European countries. Unlike many other studies, the longitudinal element of the study provides more detail of the evolution of these behaviours and preferences through time, and the extent to which there has been a lasting influence on how problems and opportunities are approached in the participants’ lives and careers.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. The following section examines the literature relating to the theoretical impact of environment on the entrepreneurial learning process, before section 3 moves on to the specific example of the use of boot camps in the teaching of entrepreneurship. Section 4 introduces the qualitative longitudinal methodology utilised to acquire the deeper insight required to establish the long-term influence on participants’ behaviour. Sections 5 and 6 analyse the findings of the work and develop the conclusions suggested for the future development and integration of such interventions in entrepreneurship education, as well as the implications these have for management practice in both small and large businesses.

***The Role of Environment in the Entrepreneurial Learning Process***

There has been criticism of the type of students created by business schools, who may not possess the relevant characteristics for the needs of the modern business world (Leavitt, 1989; Bailey and Ford, 1996; Pfeffer and Fong, 2001; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002). A more knowledge based economy increases the demand for graduates possessing both a strong knowledge of specific functional areas, and also across a wide range of business disciplines (Aldrich, 1999; Afuah, 2003; Hannon et al., 2005). It is felt by some that there is an increasing need to be able to work within uncertain and ambiguous environments in a creative manner (Gibb, 2008; Taatila, 2010). Entrepreneurship education has been identified as being able to fill this gap through the promotion of the entrepreneurial behaviour that is critical for the economic success (Gray, 2006; CIHE/NCGE/NESTA, 2008; Harrison and Leitch, 2010; Rae et al., 2010; Crayford et al., 2012). The number of university entrepreneurship courses has increased rapidly, but the importance of entrepreneurial skills appears to have been overlooked with a heavy concentration on teaching about rather than for entrepreneurship (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006; Vesper and Gartner, 1997; Dana, 2001; Katz, 2003; Kuratko, 2005; Fayolle et al., 2006). Emphasis is generally placed on new venture creation, but this is a disservice to entrepreneurship as it can be considered more broadly as the ability to identify and solve problems or the successful introduction and management of change (Kao, 1989; Binks et al., 2006). In this sense entrepreneurship education is more about learning to learn than learning about a subject (Löbler, 2006). As such, studies including Binks et al. (2006), Heinonen and Poikkijoki (2006) and Pretorius et al. (2005) suggest that the modern work place requires the possession of entrepreneurial skills in: creative and innovative problem solving, independent thinking, opportunity recognition and exploitation, readiness for change, risk taking and self-confidence. Although traditional analytical skills are still important, it is these more general entrepreneurial skills that are expected to become more important throughout the small business, corporate and even public sectors (Walshok, 1995; Binks et al., 2006; Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006).

Classroom-based learning boosts the perceived feasibility of entrepreneurship through the provision of functional discipline skills that are essential for employment within a managerial setting (Deakin, 1996; Henry et al., 2005a). It is also found to be effective in providing broad-based transferable skill building courses, including negotiation and leadership (Matlay and Mitra, 2002; Soloman, 2007; Jones, 2007). The rigorous analytical techniques required to set up a new business project and make decision, plus an appreciation of the limitations of those techniques are also effectively taught in the classroom (Miller, 1987; Fiet, 2000b; Henry et al., 2005a; 2005b).

However, as courses have started to become more for entrepreneurship rather than about it, they have started to incorporate experiential, discovery, participative and action learning components (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006). This has meant a move away from a teaching based environment towards a learning environment (Krueger and Brazeal, 1994; Kourilsky and Walstad, 1998; Gorman et al., 1997). Here students are better placed to match the reality taught about in theory with the more ambiguous individually constructed reality that they will have to face (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006; Löbler, 2006). Taatila (2010) notes the importance of being able to make decisions without the presence of ‘a pre-planned form’ (Taatila, 2010 page 54).

The artificial nature of many exercises and simulations can limit the potential to achieve this (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004; Löbler, 2006). As a learning tool business plan development helps identify potential opportunities and issues that need resolving when viewing a business project as a holistic process (Russell et al., 2008). As a teaching tool it therefore fulfils the requirement of enabling students to link rather than just form skills as recommended by Rae (2000). However, others argue that development of a business plan does not reflect one’s true capability to start and run a business, or react entrepreneurially to environmental changes (Gibb, 1997; Wan, 1989). In order to understand new information, constructivist learning theory suggests that students have to use this new knowledge to produce a version of reality compatible with their existing knowledge (Piaget, 1950; Steffe and Gale, 1995; von Glasersfeld, 2000). The close associations between the classroom and more traditional approaches to teaching may mean that students feel compelled to treat information from new activities as being consistent with similar knowledge obtained from classroom teaching. They may not be able to completely free their thought processes and develop the autonomy they require to develop their own constructs of reality to form a full understanding from their experiences (Löbler, 2006).

The exact mix of traits and competences that go into making the ‘perfect’ entrepreneur is disputed (Taatila, 2010). Studies such as Chen et al. (1998), Denslow and Giunipero (2003), and Platt (2004) identify competencies and traits such as: need for achievement; dissatisfaction with the status quo; healthy self-confidence and internal locus of control; willingness to do the job required; concern for detail; networking competence; and tolerance of ambiguity. Many have argued that the formalistic, theoretical and passive nature of classroom-based learning may limit or even suppress the development of such traits (Miller, 1987; Kantor, 1988; Garavan and O’Cinneide, 1994; Löbler, 2006). It has also been accused of neglecting the development of judgement, patience, responsibility and other practical skills that are essential in dealing with uncertainties and ambiguities (Boussouara and Deakins, 1999; Gibb, 2002a; Soloman, 2007; Hynes, 1996). Rae (2006) notes social and personal emergence as a key component of the entrepreneurial learning process. This goes beyond a simple entrepreneurial orientation consisting of a positive attitude to entrepreneurship and perception of its feasibility and instead reflects how students perceive themselves, and how they perceive others see them, in the role of entrepreneurs (Rae, 2006). This will then manifest itself in how they begin to act in uncertain and ambiguous business and other scenarios (Littunen, 2000). To achieve this students need to be able to form their own holistic perception of the entrepreneurial reality (Tattila, 2010). Without these traits and the art component associated with creative problem solving and innovative opportunity recognition and exploitation (Jack and Anderson, 1999), behaviours are unlikely to change as, undertaking entrepreneurial activities is about creating ‘new road maps’ from experience not blindly using existing ones (Lobler, 2006; Parker, 2006). Students themselves are also demanding more in the realisation that they need a curriculum vitae (CV) with the correct balance of skills, experience and academic credentials (Crayford et al., 2012).

In the context of entrepreneurship education, one apparent gap of classroom-based enterprise training is the use of what Gibb (2002a) referred to as the conductive learning approach. This encourages students to find and explore the wider concepts relating to a problem and think independently of ways to overcome business and sector specific constraints, by seeking external sources of information and expert advice. As interest and learning is greatest where self-directed, contemporary learning theories, such as the theory of involvement, emphasise the active participation of the students in directing the learning process (Astin, 1999; Löbler, 2006; Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006; Soloman, 2007). Studies including Löbler (2006) and Fiet (2001b) have noted that this is not always compatible with the traditional behaviouralist approach to teaching where ‘correct’ answers are taught and repetition of ‘correct’ answers is rewarded. For example, Fiet (2001b) suggests that lecturers should consider not what they are going to teach students, but what they will get students to do. The uncertain ambiguous contexts within which entrepreneurial innovative opportunities are identified and put into practice, by definition mean there is no ‘correct’ answer (Löbler, 2006). However, formative assessment is likely to be important as students need to learn from experience, reflect and develop appropriate behaviours (Race, 2001; Rae, 2006). Studies of habitual entrepreneurs suggest that failure is an important part of the learning process (Huovinen and Tihula, 2008). Tattila (2010) suggests that this means that students need an opportunity to fail. This requires a learning process rather than outcome based view of feedback, where students do not fear feedback (Yorke, 2003). Students should not feel they are competing against their teachers’ knowledge (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006). Although, it may be possible to create such an environment within the classroom (Heinonen and Poikhijoki, 2006), Löbler (2006) argues that an ‘out-of-school’ learning environment most closely corresponds to that required to teach entrepreneurship.

In the workplace entrepreneurial activities including the identification of opportunities and creative solutions to problems take the form of a negotiated process. This means that as part of a co-participative arrangement it is important that all parties (entrepreneurs, employees and clients) understand the importance and motivation for undertaking the activity or project and believe in the project as a whole. This means that members need to be included in developing the vision of the venture or project (Lans et al., 2008). Therefore, those looking to be entrepreneurial employees in their later careers need to learn to create a shared significance with others to achieve their aims (Rae, 2005).

Such difficulties with pure classroom based learning have led to incorporation of other elements, such as, experience programmes allowing the waters of a prospective occupation to be tested (Walmsley et al., 2006, King, 1994; Ducat, 1980). However, the ‘entry shock’, to what may be an atypical example, can be dramatic producing a negative effect on the perceived desirability of the occupation (Walmsley et al., 2006; Feldman, 1988).

Extra-curricular activities incorporated into the academic curriculum, provides the opportunity and experience of testing ideas (Gartner and Vesper, 1994), which fosters creativity and enables students to gradually develop the self-image of themselves as entrepreneurs (Rae, 2005). Such an approach is consistent with previous research which suggests that the emphasis of enterprise education should be less about assessment but more about support (Colins and Robertson, 2003). Others, however, note the needs of students to have the correct mix of experience and academic credentials (Crayford et al., 2010). Yet, due to work pressures and the lack of academic legitimacy (Levie, 1999), many students are reluctant to get involved in non-accredited after-school activities. The use of less rigorous assessment processes, for example, the use of milestones would allow such activities to be incorporated into formal academic curriculum (Ames et al., 2002). However, this is not always possible where consistency is required with other programmes (Colins and Robertson, 2003).

***The Role of Entrepreneurship Boot Camp in Fostering Entrepreneurial Behaviour***

As discussed in the previous section, a number of studies have indicated that there are a number of shortcomings of current entrepreneurial mediums on campus relating to not only the teaching techniques used, particularly their artificial nature (Taylor and Thorpe, 2004; Taatila, 2010), but also the environment itself (Löbler, 2006; Bager, 2011). These findings suggest that there is a need for a new type of programme that incorporates elements that enhance behaviour orientated entrepreneurship learning through a new learning environment (Taatila and Vyakarnam, 2008; Kwong et al., 2012). Both in the educational or work situations a new environment that physically and symbolically removes people from their daily routine and activities, allows individuals to think in a clearer and less constrained manner (Heap, 1996; West, 2004; Pretorius et al., 2005; Bager, 2011). For example, even in the supposedly more flexible informal environment of small businesses Lans et al. (2008) note the importance of formal team meetings that provide a setting for obtaining feedback from employees to achieve entrepreneurial learning. This in turn allows participants to step back from the on-going day-to-day processes, examining and reflecting upon the appropriateness of existing ways of doing things, and through constructive debate challenge the way they usually behave and introducing new ways of thinking (Johnson et al., 1998; West, 2004; Taylor and Thorpe, 2004; Dunne, 2007). Studies such as Lans et al. (2008) and Lepoutre and Heene (2006) have noted the importance in discretionary slack within small firms to allow experimentation, reflection and learning. For an owner of a firm delegation of some day to day tasks may provide room for an entrepreneurial role alongside the craftsman and/or managerial rolethat allows learning to occur (Lans et al., 2008). Many companies and organisations strongly believe that events such as away-days ensure a team’s continuing effectiveness (West, 2004; Dunne, 2007). An entrepreneurship boot camp appears to be the ideal solution for this (Astin, 1999). However, the success in creating an environment, for students or employees, where people are willing to discuss new ideas is highly reliant on the facilitator’s skills (Pretorious et al., 2005). Learning environments may be more effective where facilitators have clearly defined roles not associated with the evaluation of outcomes (Bager, 2011). Drawing from other universities or outsiders such as practitioners encourages networking and provides a further separation from summative assessment concerns (Taatila and Vyakarnam, 2008). In a company away-day setting external consultants can also fulfil this role (Mabey and Skinner, 1998).

Gibb’s (2002a) concept of conductive entrepreneurial environment refers to a “realistic” entrepreneurial environment where potential entrepreneurs can be exposed to the “way of life” of the entrepreneurs, otherwise such learning will fail (Johnson et al., 1998). The entrepreneurship camp, however, does the opposite, taking participants away to an extremely unrealistic situation, which bears minimal resemblance to real life. The “pressure of the immediate”, such as everyday routines, often reverses participants back into the old way of doing things, this means that the short duration of environmental change of boot camps may not generate a permanent change in behaviour (West, 2004). To make this change permanent there is a need for organisations to encourage participants to put what they have learnt into practice (Heap, 1996). One way of overcoming this problem is to have very limited aims and objectives that can be achievable in the short and medium terms (West, 2004). For example, the Laurea at Cambridge camps, tackle specific or business problems within existing organisations, or the start-up of a new venture, where the aim is to put the negotiated solutions or plans into action relative quickly (Taatila and Vyakarnam, 2008).

Despite entrepreneurship camps’ increasing popularity, there are few studies discussing the scope of such training beyond technical and business skill acquisition. Collins and Robertson (2003) for example, do not discuss in depth the role of environment in fostering what Jack and Anderson (1999) had described as the art of entrepreneurship, in other words the promotion of innovation and creativity in new venture creation or problem solving beyond that achieved through classroom and work experience activities. Another study by Bager (2011) provides a detailed description of three different boot camp models in Denmark, in terms of their organisations and principles. However, whilst considering the structural elements of the camps this study arguably slightly overlooks students’ perception of these camps and their ability to increase the perceived feasibility, desirability and intentionality relating to entrepreneurial activities. The aim of this exploratory study is to examine whether the entrepreneurship boot camp can provide a creative environment that allows students to develop their own business ideas, promoting the art element of entrepreneurship (Anderson and Jack, 1999). The longitudinal style of the study with interviews held at different points in the process enables us to understand not only how students’ perceived feasibility and desirability of entrepreneurship evolve. This is important, as the extent that students’ existing interests have not only been promoted, but also turned into a target seen as achievable, are important elements in generating solid intentions that lead to action (Shapero and Sokol, 1982). Importantly though the study can also examine the evolution of the extent that students view of themselves as entrepreneurs throughout the process (Rae, 2006).

***Research Methodology***

This study takes a qualitative approach to gain access to individual students’ experiences of the boot camp and to explore and understand the consequences of the boot camp for entrepreneurial, attitudes, intentions and identities. We have used a combination of three complementary data collection methods that not only validates and strengthens our findings in a traditional sense but also gives us access to complex social arenas. These took the form of individual interviews with the 12 participants of the boot camp from the UK institution, collective focus group discussions, and the contents of the individual learning logs maintained by the students, completed as a requirement of the boot camp.

The primary data collection method was the in-depth semi-structured interviews that were conducted with the same students at least at three different times: en-route to the campsite and upon arrival, during the boot camp in lunch breaks, and after the completion of the boot camp. This approach enables us to compare the change of attitude and intention before, during and after entering the camp (Bloor et al., 2001). This means that although the students already possessed an interest in entrepreneurship the evolution of the depth of this interest, concreteness of future intentions, and self-identity as an entrepreneur the students could be examined. This is particularly important as studies have repeatedly found that although student intentions towards entrepreneurship and small firm employment are in general positive (Henley et al., 2009), there is little evidence that these intentions lead to activity for a vast majority of students, at least when measured by the narrow frame of business starts (Rosa, 2003). These interviews were purposely conducted in informal settings to facilitate expression of students’ views more freely. They ranged from 10 minutes to an hour in length depending upon the availability of time. This meant the data collection considering students’ perceptions, beliefs, opinions and views at different stages of the learning process were more similar to ethnographic interviews. An “interview guide” was prepared to promote discussion and obtain “rich” (i.e. detailed) information (Buchanan et al., 1988), as well as a topic guide being prepared to ensure that key topics were covered and that discussion was triggered with questions and prompts (Greenbank, 2009). Both the interview guide and topic guide were revised throughout the data collection process. The follow-up interviews were conducted with students after three months and one year of the boot camp to examine whether changes made during the camp were sustained and to what extent.

Given that the group size was ideal to trigger in-depth discussions, focus group interviews were used to further understand patterns in their learning experience whilst they shared their views, perceptions, thinking, feelings and experiences without hesitance (Morgan and Krueger, 1993; Knodel, 1995; Morgan, 1996). Two formal focus group discussions, lasting approximately 2 hours each, were conducted on the penultimate and last days of the camp to have a deeper understanding of the issues that they shared in the learning process (Vaughn et al., 1996). This is also intended to provide a comparison point to compare how their attitudes and intentions change throughout the camp (Bloor et al., 2001). Focus groups created a much safer environment for the participants to openly discuss their views as they found it less threatening (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Nevertheless, students did get influenced by dominant views but this was already dealt with individual semi structured interviews (Statt, 1996).

This study also makes use of the individual student’s learning logs, a daily report completed as a process of reflection on experiences. This method is popularly used in ethnographic studies to explore human experiences in depth (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Unlike oral debriefing, learning logs represents a personal and private communication with the convenor (Wollman-Bonilla, 1989). The logs provided further useful information and much closer access to personal experiences, the change in critical thinking, and entrepreneurial attitudes at every stage of the experiential learning process.

The data yielded through these methods was no doubt rich but also complex. All data was coded to build themes and thematic categories at a more abstract level (Tables 1 and 2), which are presented longitudinally to enhance readability and to show how experiences and views changed over time.

Please insert Table 1 about here

**The learning programme: an overview**

The “entrepreneurship boot camp” was a one week long training programme aiming to provide support to business students who have seriously considered starting their own businesses as an alternative to employment. The learning programme had three main components:

1. **Idea Formulation and Development**

Sessions were held at the beginning of the camp to help students to formulate ideas through brainstorming exercises. This helped them to assess the opportunities likely to arise as a result of the changing external conditions, where entrepreneurial employees and employers might be expected to thrive (Rae, 2010). Discussion time was set aside everyday with this feedback ensuring learning momentum was maintained (Race, 2001), and allowing students to explore their own identities as entrepreneurs (Rae, 2006). At the end of the camp students were required to complete a business plan.

1. **Technical Training**

Technical training in the boot camp was comprised of a number of skills sessions, including budgeting, marketing, internationalisation, and personnel management. To increase the practicality of these sessions they were generally followed by a workshop where students related these issues to their own business ideas.

1. **Motivational Talks with Entrepreneurs**

Four entrepreneurs of different backgrounds were invited to talk about their personal experiences. This is consistent with the social learning process (Rae, 2006), where although there are criticisms of using entrepreneurs as teachers, due to the reduced theoretical content of the presentations (Fiet, 2000a; 2000b; Hayward, 2000), the advanced stages of these students and support from academic staff should enable students to put theoretical knowledge into action (Gibbs, 2002b).

**Effects of the Entrepreneurship Boot Camp on Students’ Perceived Feasibility of Entrepreneurship**

**a) Effects on Business Idea Formulation**

Universally, participants found that boot camp training effectively facilitated the process of idea formulation (see also Table 2 for additional narratives) through its: interesting exercises, the correct balance of lectures and workshops, and the presence of experienced facilitators who could act as coaches rather than teachers for the students (Löbler, 2006). Students felt that the idea formulation and development that is facilitated by the camp environment boosted their ability and confidence to express their business ideas, which substantially helped them to create their own entrepreneurial identities (Rae, 2006). One student stated that:

Later in the class, we had a very exciting task which gives us a fun start to our journey of writing a business plan. The task is to come up with 20 different ideas in 5 minutes. It seems like mission impossible, but Vesa (the instructor) said just relax and try to come up with as many ideas as we can. Finally, I came up with 16 ideas. All the group members present their ideas and we found there are so many different angles of looking into the world. It is very stimulating. Following on from this exercise, we were then told to discuss with others to see if combining some of the ideas will be possible.

Another student mentioned that:

From the very first moment, we had the chance to interact with other creative people. The camp consisted of people with different backgrounds that we hadn’t interacted before. We exchanged ideas through shaping different groups, discussed on others’ ideas and how they could be further developed. Many interesting ideas were raised, such as energy and water storage, micro loans, network creation for doing business internationally, vitamin water.

This confirms Heinonen and Poikkijoki’s (2006) suggestion that the ‘right’ environment is crucial in maximizing the benefits of such activities, and it is hard to replicate this during regular entrepreneurial events throughout the academic year. Students also have to deal with their ‘fears’ when presenting ideas. Often students underestimate themselves and feel that their idea is substandard. This is mainly due to the fact that feedback obtained in classrooms are seen as an outcome rather than as a learning process (Yorke, 2003). Tied with this is a fear of the wrong presentation of self and subsequent social rejection as evident from the following passage:

I do not normally like discussing my ideas with other people, because I have no idea how they would react. I would normally get very nervous, and feel extremely embarrassed when people disagreed with me, or think that my idea is not good enough… people tend to be very secretive about their ideas. Here the atmosphere is more relaxed and it is easier to bond with other participants.

This intimidation has made the students very protective. They have yet to understand and acknowledge that the project development process is a negotiated process (Rae, 2006). Furthermore, the pressurized environment of campus during term time diverts their attention from longer-term projects of business creation, to short-term commitments (West, 2004).

On campus people are doing different things, and I just don’t feel that many of my friends at school are keen on starting a business. They are more concerned with coursework deadlines, exams, their part-time job, job applications, and social life.

The second issue that some participants raised is ‘fear of being stigmatised’ when they try to discuss their business ideas with others

When I talked to them about my business ideas I tended to get ignored… or very quickly some people changed topic… It makes you feel embarrassed talking about your business idea..

The participants here criticised the limitations of the actual physical environment provided by classroom based teaching rather than actual activities in the classroom. It appears that the pressurised surroundings of campus can in fact be detrimental to the development of entrepreneurial individuals both in terms of the necessary traits (Garavan and O’Cinneide, 1994), and their own self-image (Rae, 2006). The physical environment of the camp and the associated atmosphere changed students’ attitudes towards discussing business ideas with their peers:

The relaxing atmosphere of the camp allowed us to discuss all kinds of ideas, wild ideas, ambitious ideas, unrealistic ideas, crazy ideas, etc… I think it is important to have a sense of humour as it facilitates pleasant discussions. It would be impossible to be creative if people are too serious, and I think the environment allowed all of us to take a more relaxing approach in our discussions… At the beginning, some students were joking and playing around while others simply did not come up with good ideas. Nevertheless, as we rotated between groups, ideas began to evolve and something that began as a joke eventually became more viable. Sometimes we found that even within a bad idea there are good elements that we can take out, and sometimes elements from different people can form new ideas.

Thus, in contradiction to Gibb (2002a), here participants refer to a relaxing environment that enables creative behaviours to take place (Bager, 2011; Jack and Anderson, 1998; Shepherd and Douglas, 1996). The playful dimension facilitates open unbounded explorations, whereas later learning phases (reflection on practice, conceptualization) transform first discoveries in new conscious rules (Kofoed & Rosenorm, 2003). This is in line with Dewey’s belief that the educational growth that emerges from play is often accidental (Dewey, 1916). Also, Winnicot (1975) notes the benefits of facilitating conditions for such experiences to occur, as games are one way in which new truths can be unconsciously discovered.

Students felt that the tranquil surroundings without any distractions successfully created the ‘right’ environment for freely discussing their business ideas amongst within the group. Thus, developing entrepreneurial individuals prepared to use experiences, discussion, and group reflection for opportunity development (Binks et al., 2006). The fact that others felt similar fears made it easier to understand each other thereby encouraging more open communication and interaction, (Löbler, 2006):

Here for the whole week your purpose is to talk about businesses. There are constant opportunities to discuss our businesses, not just within formal sessions but also during breaks and activity time. The fact that all other people here are interested in starting a business makes it more okay to discuss our ideas amongst ourselves. I don’t feel embarrassed talking about your business ideas, because you are meant to do so.

Another student said that:

the more you share the more ideas you can get and that there are people with different expertise that are more than willing to help you and contribute with solid propositions regardless who you are or where you come from.

Please insert table 2 about here

**b) Effects on Business Plan Development**

Instead of concentrating on the theoretical and technical aspects of business planning, the learning sessions with entrepreneurs in the camp were practically orientated, focussing on innovation and creativity. These are skills which should aid problem identification and problem solving in a variety of environments (Kao, 1989; Walshok, 1995; Binks et al., 2006). Many students who were writing a business plan as part of their degree felt that they took a more cautious approach to satisfy the academic requirements of their programme when on campus.

The business plan on campus, which is an assessed module, required us to consider whether the idea has been explored previously, whether data and information existed regarding product demand and market size, whether the measurements they adopted are conventional, and whether there is sufficient literature to back up the adoption of such ideas and measurements, etc.

Unlike the ‘safe and workable ideas’ the camp environment induces a more creative “out-of-box” approach to business planning (Bager, 2011). For business plan writing, students found the practical advice from entrepreneurs within the camp extremely helpful (see Table 3 for additional narratives). On campus they instead relied on lecturers as they marked their plans, where the emphasis was on academic rigour rather than creativity and originality. They had overlooked the benefit of discussing their plans with entrepreneurs who regularly visited the university. This shows how assessment can lead to suboptimal learning as it influences the outcomes achieved (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006).

**c) Effects on Skills and Knowledge Development**

Consistent with Henry et al. (2005a), functional disciplines were seen as better delivered via classroom based teaching (see also Table 4 for additional narratives). This was especially the case for finance and budgeting, where, without prior knowledge in the field, students felt they would not be able to follow some of the sessions given by the practitioners. Students felt that, in pure technical terms, what they learnt from the camp alone is not adequate, and to develop a business plan properly, more technical knowledge from lecturers and textbooks was required. Nevertheless, students found considerable discrepancies between what is in the textbooks and what actually happened in some of the small firms, so the camp helped connect theory with practice providing the more practical classes on financial management desired within enterprise courses (Bager 2011; Carter and Collinson, 1999). Students also felt that, by exposing them to different operating style of different entrepreneurs in a short space of time, the camp provided them with a burst of entrepreneurial ideas, which allowed them to compare and contrast between different business approaches (Bager, 2011), and inspired them to choose a business strategy that is unique for their proposed business. It was felt that this is something that could not be provided in the school setting, where entrepreneurs’ seminars were held irregularly over a long period, making it difficult to develop the right entrepreneurial mindset and identity (Rae, 2006).

**d) Possible Incorporation of Elements of the Camp on Campus**

All students welcomed the incorporation of some of the camp’s elements into their university programme. For instance, some suggested a new module focusing on the business development process as a whole. Others suggested that different elements such as idea formation and development should be incorporated into existing modules, for example the creativity module. To integrate entrepreneurs’ practical knowledge of functional areas, seminars with entrepreneurs could run immediately after theory driven lectures with academic staff. Where writing a business plan was not part of students’ curriculum, they felt that they would never have devoted this amount of time to work on it, and would definitely welcome the idea of having it as an option. Nevertheless, there were reservations that creativity would be suffocated as a result of such incorporation. This is particularly likely to be the case where more standard assessment methods are utilised (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006). Alternatively, some students suggested that the camp should be incorporated into their after school activities, perhaps as a prize competition. All in all, it appears that in order for the incorporation to be successful, there is a need to develop a creative environment within the campus. This would allow likeminded individuals to get together and discuss ideas about businesses, and through this create the self-image of the entrepreneur required (Rae, 2006). Such a context might be a Student Enterprise Programme, with lecturers and entrepreneurs acting as coaches ensuring students do not drift away from their objectives, whilst avoiding the implication of there being a right or wrong answer (Löbler, 2006). Timing also appears to be essential with term breaks allowing students the right frame of mind to focus entirely on business development.

Please insert table 4 about here

**Effects of Entrepreneurship Boot Camp on Students’ Entrepreneurial Intentions and Behaviours**

One question that is of utmost importance is whether the experiences and development of entrepreneurial identities from the camp result in intentions to undertake creative and innovative activities, and whether these intentions are realised. This study examines the change in intentions at three intervals, at the point of completion, three months after completion, and one year after completion.

**a) At the Point of Completion**

The camp appears to have little effect on students’ immediate entrepreneurial intentions. For those who were about to graduate, even if already running an enterprise, their priority was to find employment within large private corporations. As found in previous studies, some felt that entrepreneurship would probably be their last resort if all other employment options failed (Carter and Collinson, 1999). Some students suggested this was likely to be due to the current economic crisis, and may continue to be a factor as graduate recruitment in the corporate world declines (Westhead and Matlay, 2006).

Some students mentioned that they were planning to use the idea that they developed for their future business, but only if the opportunity to pursue it naturally arose. Many wanted to confirm the validity of their business plans through further discussion with others. Therefore, it is unclear at this stage whether they will be taking them further. This confirms Johnson et al.’s (1998) and Parker’s (2006) findings that learning needs to reflect everyday life, come primarily from experience as well as getting down to the “nitty gritty” or else the transferability of learning is likely to be low.

Nevertheless, not only benefiting the students, but also future employers (Kao, 1989; Binks et al., 2006), they felt the main advantage of the camp is for them to be more aware of business opportunities around them. It gave them the tools required to develop them further, so when an opportunity arises in the future, students felt confident that they can grasp it and develop it fully.

Overall, whilst all remained positive in their perception of entrepreneurship, none of them developed a burning desire to start or to expand their own business as a result of the camp. They still lacked courage and confidence, to take the risk. They had been on a journey of exploration, and discovered both positive and negative aspects of entrepreneurship:

The camp gave us the opportunity to determine our goals in life, to examine both positive and negative aspects of becoming an entrepreneur… I am now fully aware that some products will not be an instant success. For example, one entrepreneur went really close to bankruptcy before landing a big deal with Subway (a major fast food chain)… I now know that running a business is not easy… it requires a lot of guts, determination and risk taking, and, even when it is successful it is often not as glorious as the media portrayed… but at least we now know what it is really like (some of barriers are) now.

Nevertheless, further confirming the broader managerial benefits of the entrepreneurial employees, the problem identification process is accompanied by notable positivity in students’ attitude towards business challenges (Walshok, 1995; Binks et al., 2006).

As one of the entrepreneurs said, problems are opportunities, rather than barriers, for the business’s growth. If they are viewed in this way, then the business can identify effective ways to change and to respond. The change leads to success which would not be identified without the problem.

Even though most students were not actively anticipating starting a new business upon graduation, some students set themselves a timeframe within which their entrepreneurial ambitions could be achieved. For example, one student said that:

I consider accumulating experience as an important step and therefore I would now prefer to become an intrapreneur before considering starting my own business. I feel that at this stage my skills, knowledge and expertise are clearly inadequate and therefore after gaining a few years of experience I will be more prepared to start my own business. I can foresee myself starting a business in the area of providing consultations and assistance to Latin American companies to export and to internationalise. At this stage I feel that I lacked skills and contacts particularly in the area of internationalisation and therefore I will target import-exporting companies in the future where I can gain skills in this area.

Therefore, although the camp did not make new venture creation and business ownership more desirable, it provides students with a platform to assess all the available information regarding these careers. There is also evidence that immediately after the camp students voiced a desire to act and see themselves as entrepreneurs, but potentially operating in a large firm context.

**b) Three Months after Completion**

This is the point in time where the majority of the students had just completed their dissertation, and were busy applying for jobs and awaiting responses. There was a sense of anxiety amongst most students, and the “pressure of the immediate” did appear to take over (Johnson et al., 1998). The general consensus from the students was that the timing was not correct for pursuing business ownership, as they wanted to have a go at the job market first. One student stated that:

I am still keen on starting a business but this is an anxious time. I need to think about whether to go home or to stay (in the UK). Getting a merit grade would give me an edge in the job market. However, getting a job takes time and I do not have the financial resource for the search to go on forever, nor to start a business. This does not mean that I am giving up entrepreneurship but to postpone it until I gain a stable footing before thinking about what I want to do with life… I want to learn before I lead, to constantly develop myself … Who knows, in 10 years I may become an entrepreneur!

The narrative thus shows that the student clearly sees employment as the priority, consistent with Johnson et al. (1998). However, contrary to the findings of West (2004), students remained positive about new venture creation, their own abilities, motivation to learn, and the possibility of engaging in business ownership in the future.

**c) One Year after Completion**

By this point students’ circumstances had changed considerably. The majority of those who had graduated the previous year had found employment, and stuck to their guns with four entering employment within large international corporations. Two of them, however, became engaged in business start-up activities based on the business plans they had developed during the camp. One student developed his business completely from scratch while the other one expanded his pre-existing part-time business.

Others who had entered employment remained positively disposed towards entrepreneurship. Some reiterated that they would return to entrepreneurship at some point. Others developed their intentions based on experience and knowledge rather than a moment of inspiration, such intentions are more likely to be maintained into the longer term. Nevertheless, whether students will exercise this entrepreneurship option depends on many factors or changes in circumstances such as unemployment (Parker, 2004). Others revealed their dilemma between seeking employment or becoming self-employed:

Finding a job was always my priority. However, before I started my job I did seriously contemplate the possibility of starting a business based on the business plan that I developed. The longer I was unemployed, the more I wanted to start a business. After all it is better than sitting at home doing nothing or to visiting the job centre regularly.

When asked whether he is simply looking for a short term refuge in entrepreneurship, the student responded

It depends. Given that the most difficult part of a new venture is usually the first year, I would make the judgment if I would stay after that year. If I had successfully established a network of clients, suppliers, affiliates, etc, and a name in the market, then I would commit and try to improve the problematic areas of the business. If I see that there is no viability of this venture within the first year, then I would have it as a refuge. In general, I believe that 'refuge' businesses are the ones that involve trading goods on an occasional basis. If behind the business venture is innovation and potential of growth, I would probably commit to that business 100%. Of course, it all depends as well on the financial background you have to support the idea. If one falls short of funds in the meantime, one may be forced to abandon the project.

This shows that the respondent intends to make the business work although it can also be said that the answer provided lacks conviction. Businesses developed out of necessity tend to have low growth aspirations (Acs, 2007). Enterprise education through camps such as this can help in such situations, providing creativity as well as mental readiness required to start and to run a growth orientated business.

**Conclusions and Management Implications**

Our exploratory findings suggest that an entrepreneurship boot camp can be an effective tool in teaching the “art” form of entrepreneurship, which Jack and Anderson (1998) and Shepherd and Douglas (1996) felt cannot be easily taught in a classroom context. The camp environment facilitates communication between students, instructors, and entrepreneurs, which is crucial in idea formulation and development. In addition, the format of the camp allows students to develop their own initiatives utilising their personal strengths and weaknesses, developing a business plan that is most appropriate for them, and forming their own personal image as an entrepreneur (Rae, 2006).

Furthermore, the camp’s environment takes students away from other distractions and focuses their minds purely on development of business ideas and clarifies the outcomes which are desirable rather than being distracted by academic assessment methods (Heinonen and Poikkijoki, 2006). However, the importance of classroom-based entrepreneurial learning should not be overlooked (Bager, 2011). Without the relevant theoretical foundations students would not be able to absorb the practical knowledge provided during the camp. Therefore, the camp is complementary to classroom-based entrepreneurship learning, and practical work experience programmes, acting as a means to reshape and enforce normal activities (Bager, 2011).

Our findings also widen the existing concept of conductive environment for entrepreneurial learning. Gibb (2002a) refers to a “real” entrepreneurial environment that is not detached from the business world. Here we refer to the opposite extreme, where a relaxing educational environment that is detached from the “real” world may yield benefits in terms of enhancing innovation, diversity, and future orientation. Finally, the boot camp elicited resoundingly positive reactions from the participants. Students described the boot camp as ‘fun’ and found it a pleasant way to pass the time. The camp environment allows students to experiment and provides them with the opportunity to gain hands-on practice, exchange, and discussion (Felder and Silverman, 1988). The positive reactions to the camp are also undoubtedly related to its novelty as a pedagogical device. The fact that it was away from a traditional learning environment also unquestionably contributed to its success and appeal, which in turn contributed to improved student learning performance (Rode et al., 2005)

This study thus has important managerial implications for educational practitioners involving in the running and managing of entrepreneurship courses and programmes at universities. Our study indicates that developing a successful entrepreneurship programme is about instigating the interests of students, by taking them out of their usual, highly pressurised environment and put them in a relaxing educational environment that enhances innovation and creativity. Whilst on campus entrepreneurship programmes are undoubtedly important in providing learners with the basic knowledge of entrepreneurship, for a practical subject such as entrepreneurship, the ability to apply innovation and creativity to an idea is equally essential. Thus a programme such as the entrepreneurship boot camp allows students to take entrepreneurship outside the textbook context and develop an understanding that is personal and original is highly crucial for their learning of the subject. There are also important managerial implications for those involving in improving students’ experience at universities. The fact that our students found the boot camp ‘fun’ and ‘a breadth of fresh air’ suggests that it can be an effective tool in increasing students’ study experience and satisfaction.

We also believe that our finding is not only relevant to university practitioners, but can also be stretched to include those involving in the development of similar programmes in colleges and schools. We believe active learning programmes such as the boot camp is even more crucial for learners at the younger levels, as they tend to have shorter attention span and that they were less sure about their motivation in starting a business. To stretch even further, we believe that there are also implications for those involving in other disciplines, that whilst educational programmes on campus are the core of students’ learning and undoubtedly important to the improvement of the knowledge and understandings of the learners, organising something interesting that take students away from their usual settings, such as mooting for law students, Model United Nations for politics and International Relations students, and service learning, can all improve students understanding of the respective fields as well as improving their learning experience.

All of the changes identified in the study are likely to be useful in the uncertain modern economy (Harrison and Leitch, 2010), regardless of the organisational context the individual operates within (Binks et al., 2006). In fact as discussed in the penultimate section a number of the students explicitly discussed the wider problem solving and management of change based definitions of entrepreneurial activities (Kao, 1989), explicitly within the context of corporate employment. This means that whilst entrepreneurial learning is influenced by contextual experience (Rae, 2006), there is also a case for taking this experience periodically outside the immediate pressures of achieving firm’s output targets, to ensure that an entrepreneurial self-image is retained and allow the negotiated activity to take place in a more unconstrained environment. If appropriately conducted, activities such as ‘away days’ can help to facilitate this entrepreneurial learning within the firm (West, 2004; Dunne, 2007), but it would be essential that it doesn’t get bogged down with dealing with day to day issues. In a similar manner that lecturers have to avoid being ‘teachers’ where experiential and active learning takes place (Löbler, 2006), senior management would have to break free of an environment of behaviouralist learning where employees seek to provide the answers senior management are perceived to desire.

The conclusions that can be drawn are limited by the small sample of participants utilised from a single entrepreneurial boot camp. Comparative studies with other such events and the use of a control group would be of benefit to determine the extent to which boot camp brought changes in entrepreneurial attitude, experience and perception. Similarly although the study sought to follow the development of entrepreneurial attitudes and identities over time, it is unclear to what extent and with what speed such traits and behaviours will dissipate if they are not reinforced. This suggests that further analysis over a much longer period of time would allow the true benefits of entrepreneurship boot camps and entrepreneurship education in general to be identified and courses fine-tuned. The broader benefits of entrepreneurship education are also an area that has been under-explored and an obsession with start-up activities as the main output of entrepreneurship education should perhaps be abandoned. This would be best approached through further longitudinal studies examining how entrepreneurial careers develop within a variety of organisational contexts in the longer term.

In terms of effectiveness, this exploratory study found little evidence that entrepreneurship boot camps increase participants’ immediate entrepreneurial intentions. However, it appears that participants are now more informed about the attractions and obstacles of starting a business, and consider more seriously how entrepreneurship may fit in to their long term future career plans. There is also evidence that students develop a longer term orientation for entrepreneurial behaviour, rather than jump into it impatiently and hastily through new venture creation. Those who gain more skills, knowledge, and connections from employment experience working for others, are more likely to develop growth orientated, organised and well-connected businesses. In other words, good entrepreneurship training at school and university sows the seeds for the future. From a broader methodological level, this study therefore challenges the current emphasis on short-term success of enterprise education using conventional start-up indicators. Instead it proposes for a longer term emphasis of success focusing instead on sustained intentions and the use of entrepreneurial behaviours within all organisational contexts.

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Table 1.Building categories for business idea formulation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  |  |
| 1.1. Facilitation of interactive learning that are useful for business idea formulation | 1.1.1.Interesting exercise |
|
| 1.1.2. Balance between lectures and seminars |
| 1.1.3. Presence of experienced facilitators |
|
| 1.1.4. Humour |
| 1.2. Help dealing with ‘fear’ to come up with ideas | 1.2.1. Supportive environment as oppose to peer ‘social’ pressure faced on campus |
| 1.2.2. Entrepreneurship support as oppose to lack of support on campus |
| 1.1.3. Emotional support as oppose to lack of support on campus |
| 1.3. Help dealing with pressure to come up with ideas | 1.3.1. No time pressure compared to campus |
| 1.3.2. No need to think about financial and other pressing concerns while away from campus |
| 1.4. Relax/ playful physical environment that facilitate idea development | 1.4.1. encourage creativity |
| 1.4.2. encourage exploration |

Table 2. Coding for effect on business plan development

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2.1. Technical development | 2.1.1. Nature of technical development | 2.1.1.1. Marketing |
| 2.1.1.2. Finance and budgeting |
| 2.1.1.3. HRM |
| 2.1.1.4. Internationalisation |
| 2.1.1.5. PESTLE and SWOT |
| 2.1.2. Highly effective | 2.1.2.1. Newly acquired knowledge |
| 2.1.2.1. practical aspect of technical development |
| 2.1.3. Not effective | 2.1.3.1. Campus provision more sophisticated |
| 2.1.4. Not different to what is provided on campus |  |
| 2.2. Creativity and innovation development | 2.2.1. unrestricted ‘out-of-the-box’ writing style | 2.2.1.1. Incorporating different ideas |
| 2.2.1.2. Different presentation format and style |
| 2.2.1.3. Be more ambitious in forecasting |
| 2.2.2. restricted nature of business plan development on campus |  |
| 2.3. Practical knowledge | 2.3.1. Discuss with entrepreneurs about practical issues and problems | 2.3.1.1. provide new insights and ideas |
| 2.3.1.2. not realise its effective while on campus |
| 2.3.1.3. incorporate theory and practice |
| 2.3.2. Impractical nature of academic business plan |  |

Table 3. Additional narrative illustration relating to the theme: idea formulation

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Idea refinement | * *At the beginning, some students were joking and playing around while others simply did not come up with good ideas. Nevertheless, as we rotated between groups, ideas began to evolve and something that began as a joke eventually became more viable. Sometimes we found that even within a bad idea there are good elements that we can take out, and sometimes elements from different people can form new ideas.* |
| Relaxing environment help overcome nervousness | * *In the camp, sessions were conducted in a light-hearted manner.* * *The relaxing atmosphere of the camp allowed us to discuss all kinds of ideas, wild ideas, ambitious ideas, unrealistic ideas, crazy ideas, etc… I think it is important to have a sense of humour as it facilitates pleasant discussions. It would be impossible to be creative if people are too serious, and I think the environment allowed all of us to take a more relaxing approach in our discussions* |
| Appropriate peer support facilitate discussion of ideas | * *In the camp I felt it is okay to discuss, not just because the instructors said so, but because everyone else was thinking of starting a business. I was therefore certain that I was not talking to the wrong crowd. There were opportunities to discuss business ideas in some of the entrepreneurship modules on campus. However, I doubt that most people would be seriously interested.* |
| Appropriate instructional support facilitate discussion of ideas | * *We received constant reassurance from instructors and visiting entrepreneurs that it is okay to come up with any idea, as you never know which type of business can become profitable… Though them, I realised that even running what people perceived as average businesses with ordinary ideas can also be highly successful. This reinforced the view that ideas do not need to be large, but more importantly, to explore a niche market where no one has been before.* |

Table 4. Additional narrative illustration relating to the theme: Effects on Skills and Knowledge Development

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Require many different skills | * *I realise that an entrepreneur needs to know everything: marketing, supply chain, finance, network, human resource, things like that…* |
| Inadequate technical training during the camp | * *What we learnt from the camp alone is not enough. If we are to conduct a business plan properly, we need to go back to our lectures and textbooks.* * *For finance and budgeting, where, without prior knowledge in the field, we would not be able to follow some of the sessions given by the practitioners.* |
| Require practical hands-on approach | * *Running a small business is about getting your hands dirty, requiring hard work and persistency to make things happen. Due to cost and other constraints running a small firm is definitely much harder than I first thought… I have learnt to be more realistic and forget about the grand business marketing techniques because they won’t work in small businesses... I need to be more practical. One of the entrepreneurs, for example, outsourced just about everything whilst focusing just on marketing the product, whilst another one focused simply on marketing.* |
| There are many different ways to develop a business… | * *Through talking to entrepreneurs I realised that there is no single way to start a business. Whilst conventionally nascent entrepreneurs possessed some ideas, skills, resources and contacts, one of the entrepreneurs who visited the camp started his company without any clients and even any person who could deliver his service in mind. He simply had a vague idea of the type of business that he wants to operate. This is in complete contradiction with what another entrepreneur, who said: “do not start your business if you do not have enough clients”. I therefore realised that there are infinite ways of becoming a successful nascent entrepreneur.* |