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Case Study: Capacity building for entrepreneur enabling in southern Africa

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION The government of Botswana has set itself the challenge of developing an 'innovative and prosperous nation'. However, "an over-dependence on diamonds, high unemployment levels, and unacceptably high levels of poverty and inequality - both in terms of assets and income - are persistent problems." (Clover, 2003) One approach to overcoming these persistent problems is to create an abundance of "grass roots" support for enterprising behaviour throughout the nation. Unfortunately, the principal focus of Botswana's current formal education system appears mainly to educate job-takers for the public sector and larger companies. For instance, accounting studies are the most popular programmes in the University of Botswana's Faculty of Business.

This case summarises the author's experience designing and executing four capacity-building workshops for prospective entrepreneur-enablers whilst he was based at the University of Botswana, Gaborone. The workshops drew on experiential methodologies. In particular, the participants were tasked to work in problem-based learning teams focussed on providing practical advice to real entrepreneurs for whom the author had written introductory case studies. (Mellalieu, 2006)

RESULTS Through the workshop process, the participants recognised the value of the problem-based learning approach. For instance, they developed confidence in providing advice beyond their subject specialty. The experience of running the first three workshops lead to the design of a robust, scaleable programme format for a three-hour networking and knowledge exchange workshop - branded as *Enterprise in Action™*. One pilot of the *Enterprise in Action* workshop format was tested and received enthusiastic response from the participants.

CONCLUSION Botswana has an urgent need to create an enterprising culture. As a pre-requisite to achieving this outcome, an abundance of competent entrepreneur-enablers must be identified and developed throughout the country. The successful trial of the *Enterprise in Action* format lays a tested foundation for pursuing this initiative.

Introduction

When 'outsiders' think of Botswana they may think immediately of the country's immense natural beauty and spectacular wildlife. World-class entrepreneurship is probably not the first thing that comes to mind. Botswana is a southern African country of 1.7 million people in a land-locked area immediately to the north of South Africa. The country is known for its unique and long-established tourist destinations such as the Okavango Delta and the Kalahari Desert. Botswana prides itself - rightly - as the most stable, corruption-free, and peaceful democracy in sub-Saharan Africa.

The government of Botswana has set itself the challenge of developing an 'innovative and prosperous nation'. The challenge appears daunting. The country has embarked on a journey to make the quantum jump to a country with world-class, high-growth companies by 2016. In contrast, at the time of independence in 1966, the country was a traditional hunter-gatherer village-based society. Accordingly, the education and development system required for Botswana's 21st century citizen must extend to include identifying and developing job-makers: world-class serial entrepreneurs and innovators.

However, the principal focus of Botswana's current formal education system appears mainly to educate job-takers for the public sector and larger companies. Furthermore, Botswana's impressive record of growth - based primarily on the

export of diamonds - has not translated into socio-economic transformation: "Over-dependence on diamonds, high unemployment levels, and unacceptably high levels of poverty and inequality - both in terms of assets and income - are persistent problems." (Clover, 2003, p. 4). One approach to overcoming these persistent problems is to create an abundance of "grass roots" support for enterprising behaviour throughout the nation. This case summarises how the University of Botswana could take a leadership role in this initiative.

In 2003, I conducted a one month exploratory visit to southern and eastern Africa. From March 2005, I spent sixteen weeks in Botswana funded by the Faculty of Business at the University of Botswana, Gaborone. As I worked with university staff, economic development consultants, and several entrepreneurs, I recognized that the university had embarked cautiously along the pathway to contribute towards developing innovators and entrepreneurs for the country. However, I determined that the university required significant investment in human capacity-building to devise and expand learning environments appropriate for mass-scale development and deployment of innovators, entrepreneurs, and entrepreneur enablers throughout the country.

Entrepreneur enablers: the critical component

The job-makers and wealth creators that Botswana requires are termed 'serial innovators and entrepreneurs'. They are habitual and compulsive in their passion for innovation and creating substantial new enterprise. They are the 'weirdly wired' people who some observers might regard as 'mad' or 'crazy' in view of the risks that they appear to take. They comprise less than five percent of a typical population (Loporto, 2005). However, these habitual innovators participate in leading substantial business and/or social change in their communities. The lead change through introducing new products, processes, or new service delivery systems. Furthermore, these entrepreneurs provide leadership in creating substantial forms of wealth - financial and/or social - from the new opportunities they identify, exploit, and grow into sustainable organisations. Serial entrepreneurs are distinguished from small business operators. The ambitions of the latter are limited to providing for their own family's survival.

In a developing country context, a limited number of potential serial entrepreneurs will self-identify themselves. Even in many developed economies, the special talents of world-class entrepreneurs are more likely to lie hidden near the bottom of a deep 'well of talent' (Bolton and Thompson, 2004). Consequently, fundamental to the success of initiatives to develop entrepreneurs there must be concurrent development of processes for identifying and developing 'entrepreneur enablers'. Entrepreneur enablers form a unique selection from amongst the professions of teachers, consultants, advisors, and informal investors. They are key agents that locate and identify entrepreneurial talent. They share several of the talents of pure entrepreneurs. Entrepreneur enablers

intervene directly to help their 'entrepreneur prospects' overcome obstacles, and build their entrepreneurial self-efficacy (Thompson, 2006; Bolton and Thompson, 2004; Lucas and Cooper, 2004).

According to Bolton and Thompson, entrepreneur enablers are *the* critical component in developing the processes of coaching, mentoring, business generation, business incubation, and education that a country needs if it wishes to produce the necessary abundance of successful, world-class, new ventures (Bolton and Thompson, 2004). Not all teachers or business advisors have the potential to be entrepreneur enablers. For instance, in a study of business advisors on an entrepreneurship development course, Bolton and Thompson found that just one in 20 of the advisors had the correct empathy and talent to identify and coach potential high-achiever entrepreneurs.

Enterprise development at the University of Botswana

The University of Botswana has supported the establishment of several academic teaching and research programmes in the relevant domains of innovation and entrepreneurship. The university offers several introductory programmes including subjects such as small business administration, fashion design, and industrial design. The university's national library offers a course in information entrepreneurship. There are no courses in world-class (high-growth) entrepreneurship, innovation management, or entrepreneur-enabling (Bolton, 2006). The university's existing courses, programmes, and research initiatives pertaining to innovation and entrepreneurship are scattered across several faculties and departments. The most popular programme in the Faculty of Business is the Bachelor of Accountancy programme. (Wikipedia, 2006) This feature is typical of a country in the early stages of professionalising business practice.

On the positive side, there is a Department of Industrial Design in the Faculty of Engineering. Some world-class research is conducted in the Faculty of Science, particular in the area of identifying the pharmaceutical and nutritional properties of local and traditional biological materials. The university is also located at the geographic hub of an informal regional network of allied institutions, including teachers colleges, research agencies, and technical training institutes. Since so many crucial resources are already 'on the ground', I recommended that the university must strengthen cross-faculty collaboration and provide a staircase of graduate, post-graduate and practitioner-focussed programmes building on these available resources.

The university provides support for several extra-curricular student leadership development activities, such as the student-initiated Business Clinic, AIESEC and SIFE. These initiatives have potential to be important contributors. However,

there is a miniscule proportion of students engaged in these activities: perhaps 50 students at most across the campus as a whole. (There are 15,000 students at the University. (Wikipedia, 2006)) Furthermore, it is vital that these activities evolve into channels for aiding communication and connection between students, staff, and alumni with their peers in 'outside' world markets and educational institutions. The earlier that Botswana students - and home-grown alumni - can see and 'feel' business and social life outside their country, the better informed they will become in their personal and professional career choices. Furthermore, the university must encourage and reward its staff for participating in building upon the student leadership activities such as SIFE, AIESEC, and the Business Clinic.

The Faculty of Business - recently established in a world-class facility - has ambitions to establish an Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) to expand on the Business Clinic's current activities. The EDC is intended to amplify the current support services provided to potential small-business founders who 'drop-in' on an *ad hoc* basis. The new services offered by the EDC are intended to include a regular programme of activities for

Concurrent with the Faculty of Business' plans, the university's fundraising and alumni arm - the UB Foundation - is establishing a one-stop facility in the Gaborone town centre to provide a 'one stop' service centre for young entrepreneurs. The AIESEC student organization is associated strongly with this venture which - on first examination - appears to compete with the intended activities of the Business Faculty's EDC. However, the UB Foundation's operation - tentatively known as 'The Business Place' - draws considerable support from a franchise-like model of operations acquired from a South African development agency. Furthermore - in my view - there is plenty of 'space' for expanding effective services for entrepreneurs and innovators. Multiple streams of services offers rivalry and opportunities for innovation and adaptation to Botswana's unique socioeconomic and geographic features.

Capacity building for entrepreneur enabling

Upon my return to the University of Botswana in 2005, I 'fast prototyped' the implementation of a capacity-building programme, primarily for potential entrepreneur enablers. The initial design of this programme of activities was informed by several factors:

0. My experience designing, launching, directing, and teaching a postgraduate programme in business innovation and entrepreneurship at Unitec New Zealand
1. My co-facilitation with - and introduction to - the high-ambition entrepreneurship development approaches of Professor John Thompson of the Huddersfield University Business Incubator, England. Thompson was Unitec's

inaugural International Visiting Professor in Entrepreneurship. With Dr William Bolton, he is co-author of *Entrepreneurship: Talent, temperament, technique* (Bolton & Thompson, 2001, 2004). This text is increasingly being recognised as a ground-breaking text drawing on the strengths-based approach to personal and professional development pioneered by the Gallup organisation (Gallup, 2006)

2. My exploitation of a diverse range of competency-building pedagogical methods including case-based learning, problem-based learning, outdoor adventure learning, and action (project-based) learning. For example, Mellalieu & Willis, 1999; Mellalieu, PJ, Leberman, S, Bradbury, T & Chu, M, 1994)

Over the sixteen week period I spent in Botswana, I designed and lead four workshops for key stake-holders of the Faculty of Business. The workshops explored the nature, capability and interests of local people engaged in enterprise development activities. Participants at these workshops were selected to ensure a balanced mix of university staff, enterprising students (from SIFE and AIESEC), public and private sector trainers, and technologists from allied institutions, such as the Botswana Agricultural College, Botswana Technology Corporation (Botec), the Citizen Entrepreneurial Development Agency, and the university's Centre for Academic Development.

'Real world learning' was one key feature of the workshops. For instance, in the second workshop, four teams were tasked to address 'living' cases of entrepreneurial start-up or growth opportunities . These living cases built upon documented cases that the workshop teams updated in conversation with the case subject - their entrepreneurial client. Finally, each team presented their analysis and advice back to the client subject, whilst the other case teams observed. Two of the cases are presented in Mellalieu, 2006, Appendices B and C.

One key outcome of this experiential learning process is worthy of note. In a briefing session prior to the workshop several Faculty of Business academics expressed their anxiety about their ability to offer worth-while advice to small-medium enterprise operators. They knew that they had specialist knowledge of one sub-component of business such as accounting, financial management, or marketing. However, they worried about how they could contribute to addressing the potentially broad range of challenges faced by the small enterprise as presented in the cases notes I had circulated. Through the workshop process, these specialists discovered that they could constructively add value to a small enterprise client. They could ask pertinent and apposite questions; they could document the issues facing the entrepreneur; they could work with other colleagues to identify sensible recommendations for action drawing on their colleagues' knowledge. Consequently, their confidence as advisors to small enterprise and entrepreneurs was raised a useful modicum.

A regular capacity-building event: *Enterprise in Action™*

Drawing on my 'in country' experience of leading the first three workshops in Botswana I identified the urgent requirement to institutionalize formally a regular, monthly programme of half-day 'real world learning adventures' for people engaged in the 'entrepreneurship' space. The design format for these learning adventures was devised specifically from my experience of the Botswana context. The events were branded with the suggested name: *Enterprise in Action™* (EiA). An EiA event focusses equally on business networking and knowledge exchange. Both business networking and knowledge exchange are crucial elements in aiding the success of entrepreneurs as they overcome the many obstacles that they experience in their pursuit of success. The EiA format that emerged is designed to be robust, sustainable, flexible, cost-effective, and a valued programme of regular activities for entrepreneurs, entrepreneur enablers, and other stake-holders in the development of Botswana's desired 'enterprise culture'.

The three-hour EiA format includes an interview or presentation with a guest speaker - an ICE-maker. (ICE stands for innovation, creativity and enterprise.) A key element is the opportunity for participants to 'pitch' an enterprise and win support to overcome obstacles they they might be experiencing in their role as entrepreneurs, entrepreneur enablers, or other service providers to the emerging 'enterprise development sector'. Table 1 shows the typical programme format for an EiA event.

There are few high-rise elevators in Botswana. Accordingly, the American notion of a fast-paced 'elevator pitch' was translated as an 'ICE Pula Pitch'. The pitch was required to use the time it takes for a glass of iced water (pula) to melt into pure water! ('Pula' is the Botswana language word for both water, and the unit of currency. In a hot, desert country, iced pula is a very, very, very valuable and scarce resource. In some instances, pula is more valuable than diamonds in this dry and drought-prone country!)

A key aim of the EiA format is to maintain widespread co-operative 'buy-in' from stake-holders. Consequently, I recommended that the EiA events rotate amongst stake-holders' places of enterprise: businesses, government offices, street stalls, the university, research laboratories, and international agencies.

Table 1: Typical Schedule for an Enterprise in Action Event

Time (h)	Program item	Detail
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1330	Arrival and Exhibition	Perusal of exhibits and meeting with exhibitors
1400	Welcome and Keynote Address	Welcome by venue host; overview of program; introduction to speaker
1500	ICE Pitch Contest	5 minutes per contestant
1600	Multi-stream Workout and workshop sessions	Multiple stream workshop breakouts chosen by the judges and audience to be the best opportunities identified in the ICE Pitch Contest. May include workshops presented by service providers to ICE-Makers.
1700	Capstone Creative Conversation	The conversation discusses the ICE-maker's history, how they became an ICE-maker, successes and trials, and key advice they would offer young, upcoming ICE-makers.
1730	Networking	Power Networking, food, refreshments, exhibits
1800	Award Ceremony	Announcements of semi-final prize-winners for the ICE-Pitch Awards, the best workshop, the best exhibit, and the winner of the host location for the next event

Many Batswana return to their homeland from study or work in foreign countries. They bring back knowledge, experience, and professional contacts to Botswana. However, a proportion of these returning Batswana are not deployed effectively upon their return home. Accordingly, one important opportunity is for a proportion of the *Enterprise in Action* programmes to focus on providing a networking opportunity to help the productive re-integration into Botswana business and community life of returning Batswana.

The full report to the University of Botswana - available from the author (Mellalieu, 2006) - provides further detail beyond this article including:

3. The series of course topics recommended for delivery as workshops and/or educational programmes through the university's proposed Entrepreneurship Development Centre. The course topics are linked directly to develop the competencies required to embrace all elements of the entrepreneurial process model, introduced by Bolton and Thompson (2004).
4. Examples of the *Enterprise in Action* format conducted in both Botswana and New Zealand.
5. Identification of a series of five Strategic Focus Areas proposed as a basis for collaborative, robust development of the entire university's commitment to becoming an enterprising institution.

6. Recommendations that at least one of the three following courses are required for study by all students at the University of Botswana. If not, then certainly by students of the Faculty of Business and the Faculty of Engineering: Foundations of innovation and entrepreneurship; New venture start-up project; and a strengths-based course in personal and professional career development (based on the work of Gallup, 2006).

Beyond implementing the foregoing initiatives, the university can evolve the Entrepreneurship Development Centre into a university-wide, world-class applied research and development centre focussing on innovation and enterprise development studies in the southern Africa region: A Centre for Innovation and Enterprise Development Studies.

Conclusion

Just a small proportion of Botswana's new job-makers - perhaps one percent of the country's total population - will possess and develop the correct mix of talents, temperament, and skills that are pre-requisite to creating large-scale, world class enterprise. But these people will be Botswana's new diamonds. Accordingly, they require careful identification (extraction!). They require a distinctly different kind of nurture, education, training, and career development (refining!) in comparison with Botswana's current educational methods. In the words of Dee Hock, the world's first chaordic leader and founder of the Visa international credit-card system:

"Without question, the most abundant, least expensive, most underutilized, and constantly abused resource in the world is human ingenuity. The source of that abuse is mechanistic, Industrial Age, dominator concepts of organization and the management practices they spawn." (Hock, 2000).

The strategic - and urgent - challenge for the University of Botswana is to lead the re-orientation of the country's educational system to focus significant emphasis on creating job-makers and business builders in preference to job-takers and home-makers. A vital co-requisite is the need to identify and develop 'entrepreneur enablers': those entrepreneur-like teachers, trainers, advisors, and consultants. For it is these entrepreneur enablers who must provide street-wise and timely advice to the wierdly-wired entrepreneurs who have the talents for focussed ambition and achievement. The successful trial of the Enterprise in Action format offers a tested foundation for pursuing these goals.

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Photographs by the author. For further images of Botswana, visit the author's photo web site, <http://myndFoto.shutterFly.com>

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At Unitec New Zealand, Peter was the foundation director for a unique masters program in business innovation and entrepreneurship. He has also developed and taught courses in adventure learning, innovation, lateral and creative thinking, strategic thinking, and general management. In 2005, he completed a four-month assignment at the University of Botswana, southern Africa, where his role was to enhance that university's capability for teaching entrepreneurship and enterprise development. Prior to his return to New Zealand he taught at Florida Gulf Coast University, Naples, USA.

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