"If You Want to Work Fast, Go Alone. If You Want to Go Far, Go Together: A Case for Shifting Entrepreneurship Education Towards Team-Based Trainings"

Theresa U. Zimmer and Nida ul Habib Bajwa

Abstract Building up entrepreneurial ecosystems has become vitally important for higher education institutions across the world. Be it to tackle high numbers of unemployment amongst the youth, to drive innovation or leverage upon the strengths of particular individuals, it is key for a long-term transformation of societies to build support structures that would enable entrepreneurial thinking and acting to flourish. Therefore, nowadays, it is rare to find higher education institutions across the world that do not offer some sort of entrepreneurship education program. Be it in the form of elective or mandatory courses, short courses on individual topics at incubators, or specialized degree programs, such programs have become an integral part of higher education institutions' strategy to equip their students with the transversal skill of entrepreneurship that is deemed relevant for all students, irrespective of their professional background. Especially entrepreneurship education approaches have gained a lot of interest from researchers, as with an increasing number of programs there is a need for systematically understanding the pros and cons of different approaches. Apart from the plethora of approaches, starting a business is not a straightforward project. Much more often it is a long-term process with many twists and uncertainties that need to be tackled. Aspiring entrepreneurs face different challenges that are related to different developmental stages of their business ideas. Therefore, entrepreneurship education also needs to address the students' needs that arise in these different stages.

Keywords Team-based entrepreneurship trainings · Entrepreneurial teams

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1 The Importance of Entrepreneurship Teaching and Training

Apart from different stages of starting a business that one could try to work on, fundamentally the first step in entrepreneurship education that needs to be achieved is to actually create and/or increase the intention to start a business. It is a common consensus amongst entrepreneurship researchers that the intention for starting a business drastically increases the likelihood to actually start a business. Therefore, the aim of entrepreneurship education activities that are linked to the first stage of starting a business has to focus on raising the entrepreneurial intentions amongst students (Nabi et al. 2017). This is especially important for countries with lower overall intentions to start a business (Bosma et al. 2020), but it is also relevant for higher education institutions' strategies on how to raise awareness about entrepreneurship being a viable alternative to standard employment after graduation. The extent to which such awareness-raising formats for entrepreneurship are embedded within higher education institutions' teaching and training varies a lot across institutions and countries. It seems plausible that if raising awareness is the goal, then such courses need to be offered to not only business students, but need to be attractive to students from all disciplines. Recently, some countries, such as Jordan, have gone even a step further and have legislated that higher education institutions have to offer mandatory introductory entrepreneurship courses targeted at giving a broad overview over almost all aspects of establishing a business, e.g., market analysis, business planning and marketing strategies, and creativity methods. Therefore, students should get an overview of the field of entrepreneurship and start to develop an entrepreneurial mindset.

Even with entrepreneurship education formats that aim at creating or raising intentions to start a business, there is a case to be made for more competency-based education that goes beyond traditional teaching approaches of entrepreneurship that focus more on theories than on application. After all, remembering theories on entrepreneurship and its different stages might just have the opposite than intended effect on students' thinking about starting an own company. In order to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and actually start an own business, the knowledge of strategies and tools can be helpful; however, it is at least as important to also focus on emotional and behavioral aspects (Kuratko et al. 2021). These findings seem plausible, having in mind that starting a business is a dynamic and often stressful process. Therefore, some example competencies to be trained are proactivity, as well as motivation and perseverance (Bacigalupo et al. 2016). Research findings show that such competencies can be developed in applied project-oriented courses (Lange et al. 2014). For example, a lot of project-oriented courses focus on entrepreneurial experiences, through which entrepreneurial competencies can be developed. Such experience-based approaches can, for example, help students get an immediate feedback on their business idea and thereby assist in the development of entrepreneurial competencies. Studies show that these courses

are likelier to increase the chances of establishing a successful business (Frese et al. 2016; Galvão et al. 2018).

Apart from entrepreneurial competencies that are usually taught and trained in entrepreneurship education formats, there are researchers that have started focusing on training individual psychological factors that might impact the success of a business (Frese et al. 2016). For example, one of the most predictive factors for following through with a business idea is self-efficacy. Rauch and Frese (2007) have shown that business creation and success are likelier if the entrepreneur believes in the success of his own entrepreneurial activities. Based on these findings, a six-step training concept was developed and tested that incorporated students' learning of entrepreneurial knowledge and demanded the performing of activities to start a business(Rauch and Frese 2007). This training was tested with over 400 Ugandan students in an experimental-control group design and results indicate that indeed business creation could significantly be increased. Although these formats do a very good job focusing on individual future entrepreneurs and their practical as well as psychological skills, there is the important factor of teams that has not been considered in entrepreneurship education formats so far. This is astonishing as new businesses are rarely founded by a single person and mostly require a team effort (Kamm et al. 1990; Klotz et al. 2014; Schjoedt and Kraus 2009). But the aspect of teams not only gains relevance at the final stage of actually starting and maintaining a new business. There is no specific point in time for starting to cooperate with others in the entrepreneurial process. Some entrepreneurs are walking alone for a long time before they realize that a cofounder or more team members might represent an enormous pool of new resources and therefore increase the probability of business success. Thus, the ability of working together with people from different backgrounds only becomes more and more important.

2 The Importance of Training Entrepreneurial Teams

It is worth to note that successful teamwork, not only in entrepreneurial teams, is often seen as a given, yet there is a plethora of evidence that suggests the opposite (de Mol et al. 2015). Apart from just forming a team, it is necessary to work on team development for entrepreneurial teams, especially because most team members might be focused solely on external environmental factors, such as market demands or financial resources, and might neglect the challenges within the team. And there are many challenges a young team faces, e.g., a lack of knowledge about each other's strengths and weaknesses, a lack of role clarity, AND a lack of standardized procedures and processes for effective teamwork. Given these challenges, it comes as no surprise that many young businesses do fail because of their team (Knight et al. 2020) and it seems plausible that focusing on improving teamwork might reduce many misunderstandings and conflicts and help entrepreneurial teams to establish a productive and effective organizational culture. In addition, it is not only a productive organizational culture that leads to entrepreneurial success. A big challenge for

entrepreneurs is adapting to fast changing circumstances and taking decisions in an environment characterized by high risk and uncertainty. The potential of developing creative problem-solving strategies increases when an entrepreneur does not have to solely rely on his/her own ideas. An evidence-based entrepreneurship education format that focuses on teams might assist in reducing the number of entrepreneurial teams that fail and enable them to make use of their joint potential.

Interestingly, many studies have focused on reasons for why some entrepreneurial teams are more successful than others. There is common consensus amongst researchers that entrepreneurial teams should perform successfully, once they have developed a collective cognition about each other's personal characteristics and their collaboration within the team for the business project itself. Therefore, uncertainty about characteristics and behavior within the team would be reduced. This so-called entrepreneurial team cognition is "[. . .] the product of team experiences and team processes [. . .]" and is defined as an "emergent state that refers to the manner in which knowledge is mentally organized, represented and distributed within the team [. . .]" (de Mol et al. 2015). Thus, an entrepreneurial team collects information about the ability of the whole team during the time they are working together and the information gained is shared across the team members. Recent findings go even one step further and indicate that not only knowledge about the team's abilities are key for successful performance, but the belief in the abilities themselves. This collective belief is also called team efficacy and findings assume that team efficacy might be a very important predictor of entrepreneurial success on the group level just as self-efficacy is on an individual level (Chowdhury 2005; de Mol et al. 2015; Dimov 2007; Ensley and Pearce 2001). Therefore, similar to entrepreneurial self-efficacy, entrepreneurial team efficacy is related to corresponding business activities. However, team efficacy also includes the complex interplay of social interaction processes that are critical to success.

Building on psychological research, we identified Gibson and Earley's (2007) model of the "development and operation of group efficacy" in which relevant team processes are linked to team efficacy and subsequent team performance (Gibson and Earley 2007). To date, findings on team processes that influence successful team performance – particularly that of an entrepreneurial team – have been manifold, but mostly unstructured. One of the possible reasons for this could be different understandings of what successful team performance actually is (Klotz et al. 2014; Knight et al. 2020). In their model, Gibson and Earley (2007) assume that team performance is mediated by team efficacy. This assumption is based on findings from research about information processing, group development, and communication. According to the different phases of information processing within the team, different social interactions play a key role for successful performance. The first requirement to develop team efficacy according to Gibson and Earley (2007) is, for example, to accumulate information about the team's characteristics itself. Team members should know each other's abilities and self-efficacy beliefs. In addition, knowing the own affective response to a situation as well as the awareness of others' effect in the same situation is supposed to have a positive influence on the emergence of team efficacy. Moreover, another crucial step to increasing team efficacy is examining

accumulated information. This requires a team structure where regular interactions allow exchange of different perceptions and negotiation of different meanings. Role clarity and strong routines are suggested to offer such a frame for interaction and examination. Taken together, these antecedents that Gibson and Earley (2007) describe in their model of team efficacy represent a range of trainable teamwork components. Therefore, we suggest to include these team training components in existing project-based entrepreneurship education programs in order to have more successful entrepreneurial teams in the long term.

3 The Importance of Evidence-Based Entrepreneurial Team Training

To this purpose, we designed a concept of an awareness-raising entrepreneurship program at higher education institutions that includes the aforementioned components affecting team cognitions and team performance. Concerning course contents about basic entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, we have followed the suggestions of the aforementioned program by Frese et al. (2016), as well as contents proposed by the EU in the EntreComp framework. In addition to those entrepreneurship basics, we added one of team components that follow the structure of the model proposed by Gibson and Earley (2007), and which can be found in Table 1, to each of the 11 sessions of the course. As some elements require a more intense training and have an effect on different team efficacy antecedents, we used the element of repetition in learning and included them more than just once into a session. The first element to be trained is role clarity. In two sessions, we explain to participants the importance of exchanging information about the team member's strengths and abilities, as well as interpersonal team roles. The second element to be trained is the importance of routines and how to establish them. For example, meetings could be a way of creating routines in a team, which is why we included recent findings from meeting research. The third element to be trained is communication. As communication is a rather complex field to be trained, we have designed two sessions for this component. The sessions contain explanations about theoretical communication models, as well as exercises for efficient communication and active listening. We assume that training communication skills will help students to share information about themselves, but also about tasks and processes. In addition, we assume that a communication training would have a positive impact on the interaction and examination of different perspectives. The fourth element to be trained is self-efficacy. Until now, established entrepreneurship programs include this element rather as part of the methodology of the training, for example, through the involvement of role models, who share their entrepreneurial experience. In addition to the use of methodological aspects, we also want to enable students to increase their own self-efficacy through, for example, considering their personal resources when confronted with a challenging task or regular reflection of mastery experiences.

Table 1 Group efficacy development: example of entrepreneurial team training elements, based on the model of Gibson and Earley (2007)

Team-efficacy antecedents in the model		Team training component	Learning objectives	Examples in the literature
Accumulation of information	Members / Member abilities	Identification of abilities and interests, role clarity	Students know the competencies of all team members	Pearce (1981) and Rizzo et al. (1970)
	Self-efficacy	Self-efficacy	Students know and are able how to increase their own self-efficacy	Gist and Mitchell (1992)
	Group / Cohesion	Conflict management	Students know different types of conflicts and are able to use strategies (i.e., Harvard concept) on how to solve them	Ensley and Pearce (2001) and Tekleab et al. (2009)
	Cohesion/ affect	Group norms	Students know important norms in their teams and respect them	Beal et al. (2003) and Lee et al. (2002)
	Process / Cooperation/ competition	Feedback	Students know the feedback rules and are able to use them in communication	Beauchamp et al. (2002), Mulvey and Ribbens (1999), Pearce (1981), and Sawyer (1992)
	Task context / Task importance	Leadership	Students know tasks of a leader (moderation, delegation, controlling)	Beauchamp et al. (2002), Chen and Bliese (2002), Rizzo et al. (1970), and Taggar and Seijts (2003)
Interaction and examination	Group structure / Roles	Role clarity	Students know the roles of team members and are able to assign tasks corresponding to their competencies	Pearce (1981) and Rizzo et al. (1970)
	Routines	Establishing routines	Students know about the importance of routines and are able to develop them for the example of team meetings	Becker (2004), Gersick and Hackman (1990), Lin et al. (2017), and Vough et al. (2017)

The fifth element to be trained is about giving and receiving feedback. It contains an introduction to established feedback rules and subsequent exercises. The sixth element to be trained is conflict management. Again, this element is trained in two separate sessions. They contain theoretical findings about effective conflict management, as well as practical exercises about managing and solving a conflict. The seventh element to be trained is leadership skills. From our understanding of current entrepreneurship programs, this aspect is mostly trained to enable individual entrepreneurs to effectively lead a team. However, in most teams there is only one who is going to lead so that we looked for skills that are more transversal in an entrepreneurial team. Therefore, we identified leadership skills, such as moderation, delegation, and controlling, as tasks that every team member should benefit from. The eighth and last element to be trained is about establishing norms and a team culture, based on joint values, goals, and beliefs. According to Gibson and Earley's (2007) model, subsequently, information will be accommodated and team performance will increase.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we used the opportunity to test out whether such a course format would work in a digital teaching approach as well and therefore designed an E-learning course. Twelve weekly sessions were designed, with the first one being solely focused on team formation, which involved teams of three members each being formed. Throughout the duration of the course these entrepreneurial teams are asked to develop their own business idea. Each session has five explanatory videos (10 minutes each) that contains basic entrepreneurial knowledge and skills (Bacigalupo et al. 2016; Frese et al. 2016). In addition to that, students have to reflect upon the acquired knowledge in an exercise including past success stories of entrepreneurs. To test students' knowledge, each session also contains a multiple-choice quiz. After passing these three theoretical course elements, student teams are supposed to work on different practical tasks each week. For these tasks, knowledge from the videos is required. For example, students are to implement a design thinking strategy to define a problem they want to address with their business idea. For this practical task, students are supposed to meet with their teams once a week. They write minutes about their work, which afterwards build the basis for weekly feedback in online live sessions. As a final task, students upload pitch videos and a business model canvas that are then supposed to be rated by experts.

The training was piloted in multiple countries, e.g., Pakistan, Jordan, Uganda, and Kenya, from 2020 to 2022, with more than 1200 students registering for the training. First iterations of the training resulted in high dropout rates over the course of the training, which resulted in multiple iterations of improving the program. These iterations included, for example, the involvement of local entrepreneurship experts who gave their input to improving the delivery of different topics thereby making them more culture-sensitive. Some individual factors related to institutions' semester timelines needed to be considered as well, in order to adapt the delivery of the format. After five iterations of the program in different countries, we reached a point of saturation, where student feedback as well as trainer's feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

4   The Way Forward to Training Entrepreneurial Teams: Challenges and Opportunities

Entrepreneurial team development seems to play a crucial role in starting a business. With this training, we tried to answer the call for more team-based training approaches in entrepreneurship (Erikson 2003) and developed an evidence-based entrepreneurial team training that we implemented in numerous countries across the world. Although we have not yet implemented the training in countries of the Global North, we are certain that our approach of piloting the training in multiple countries has resulted in a solid foundation for the training, so that an implementation in the Global North should provide a similar quality of results. However, the implementation of such programs brings a number of challenges, which is why it is necessary to talk about these challenges as well as recommendations for the future.

As with all teaching and trainings, the most important factor is to keep the commitment of participants high. Starting a business is characterized by failure and a lot of ideation loops so that the practical experience in a team-based entrepreneurship course should echo that as well. One way of increasing the commitment of students to the course and its objectives can be through additional support from mentors. Direct contact persons, who can react to team-specific issues, could increase the long-term commitment. We are aware of the increased human resources this would involve; however, this risk could be mitigated by involving student ambassadors/assistants with a sound understanding of entrepreneurship, thereby limiting resources needed. Ideally, course facilitators should not focus on transferring knowledge and explanations of tools only but rather focus on providing specific feedback and motivation for the students to have a full-fledged entrepreneurial experience. Furthermore, including peer feedback and network events between the different participating teams are recommend as students might benefit from each other's errors and mutual support related to the teamwork mode.

An additional challenge is the team formation process. We realized that promoting an extracurricular entrepreneurship course where students develop their own business ideas mostly attracts students who already have an idea in mind. Apart from creating conflicts between team members about which idea should be further developed and participants dropping out if their idea was not selected, the course would not do justice to its aim of raising awareness and increasing entrepreneurial intentions for those who have not had a business idea yet. Therefore, ideas need to be developed on how to promote a team-based entrepreneurship course that also attracts students with non-attitudes or lower intentions of starting a business. One of the possibilities to tackle this could be open sessions at the beginning that could be used as platform for the teams to be formed as well as interest raised with students who will not commit to something longer. Incidentally, in one of the piloting countries, i.e., Jordan, the government made a bold decision to create mandatory awareness-raising entrepreneurship education formats, which dramatically assists in reaching the aforementioned groups as well.

A major challenge in the piloting of the entrepreneurial team training was the digital format. Given the COVID-19 pandemic, we felt that there were "ideal" environmental conditions for E-learning approaches to flourish, as there was no educational alternative being offered apart from digital education. Some aspects, such as knowledge about the importance of teams or teaching theoretical concepts, can easily be taught in an online format. Yet working only in virtual teams is still a major challenge. For example, the execution of team tasks was severely impacted by the physical distance and virtual meetings of teams did not provide enough room for "watercooler" talk that would otherwise have helped with the development of team identity. To a certain extent, these disadvantages can be compensated (e.g., having live virtual sessions as an integral part instead of static E-learning material only). But when it comes to training of interpersonal competences, we certainly recommend developing a face-to-face format equivalent to this course, as many of the team facets are likely to come out stronger in a face-to-face format. Thus, depending on the purpose of the team training, teaching knowledge or training interpersonal competences should impact the choice for the appropriate course format. We have already started to implement a hybrid format, hoping to leverage the best of both worlds.

Finally, we designed the training with a research platform in our mind. From the outset, we rigorously designed a training that could be scrutinized using state-of-the-art empirical research methods. Therefore, we believe that the benefits of such an entrepreneurial team training approach should ideally be understood using an experimental study design. For example, indicators of a successful completion of the course could be seen in the area of entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial team performance, or specific entrepreneurial behavior that is displayed after the course. Obviously, it makes sense to understand these outcome variables not only immediately after the training has been completed but also in a longitudinal approach. To this purpose, the training presented here could be compared with a training that does not include the team elements described above. This could be easily achieved by focusing on the more traditional entrepreneurship contents and leaving out team contents. Ideally, such a study design would show the benefits of the team-based training approach.

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