

No Entrepreneur is an Island

An Exploration of Social Entrepreneurial
Learning in Accelerators

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No Entrepreneur is an Island: An Exploration of Social Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators

JIBS Dissertation Series No. 105

© 2015 Duncan Levinsohn and Jönköping International Business School

ISSN 1403-0470

ISBN 978-91-86345-61-7

Printed by ARK Tryckaren AB, 2015

”Na terra dos cegos quem tem um olho é rei.”

Portuguese proverb¹.

“When we are dreaming alone it is only a dream.
When we are dreaming with others,
it is the beginning of reality.”

Dom Hélder Câmara

¹ In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.

Acknowledgements

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

One of the findings of this dissertation is that even the most experienced of social entrepreneurs are dependent on the encouragement and inspiration they find in the company of others. I share this particular aspect of their experience – and at the end of what feels like a very long journey, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to some of the many people who have walked with me.

In Swedish there is a word that has no real equivalent in English, namely *livskamrat*: ‘life-friend’. Helena, you are my life-friend in the deepest meaning of the word. Without your love and support I would not have been able to make this journey – nor would it have been worth making. Thank you for all your practical help year after year: for the conference days you have spent alone with our children and in the past year, for making it possible for me to spend Saturdays at my desk. Far more valuable however, has been your generous attitude; your willingness to support me in achieving something that has been important to me. I look forward to continuing our journey together, hopefully at a slightly slower tempo!

What would a doctoral student be without his or her supervisors? At school I hated chemistry, but over the past years I have been grateful for its role in making my time as a doctoral student harmonious and productive. Thank you Ethel and Anders, for accompanying me on my academic journey of ‘becoming’. I appreciate you both, not only for your sharp intellects and your determination to get the best out of me – but also for your humour and concern for my wellbeing. Our regular interrogation sessions in room B6050 have been an enormous help in my development and have revealed new dimensions of the ‘good cop, bad cop’ approach to dialogue – I only wish I could figure out who was who! Thank you as well for recruiting Benson Honig to your team. Meatloaf sings “Two out of three ain’t bad”, but over the past years I have been blessed with *three* out of three! Benson, thank you so much for making my stay in Hamilton and at McMaster such a positive experience. My time in Canada with you sharpened my intellect – and after dinner in your home, you have forever sharpened my appetite!

There are many academic role models out there and not all of them are positive. My three supervisors have shown me the ‘sunny’ side of academia and modelled a generous, yet rigorous intellectual curiosity. However, you are not alone in this role. I would also like to thank the opponent at my defence – Daniel Hjorth – and my examining committee, for taking the time to read and assess my work.

I am particularly grateful to Ulla Hytti for her insightful and constructive comments at my final seminar. Your feedback has helped me to both reframe my study in a more exciting direction – and led me to engage with literature that has added a deeper dimension to my work. Although I look forward to my defence with some trepidation, I could not wish for my work to be assessed by a more distinguished group of scholars. Nonetheless, it is not your intellectual rigour that I most appreciate – even if you clearly display this – but rather; the creative, provocative and multicultural aspects of your academic personalities. Thank you Ethel for putting together such an exciting group!

My time at JIBS has been greatly enriched by many people and by trying to name you all, there is a risk that I will miss somebody's contribution. I think those of you who meet me in the corridor with warmth and a smile, know who you are – and you know that I value your friendship at work. Of course, those of you who are (or have been) doctoral students – and have shared the 'blood, toil, tears and sweat' of research with me over the past years – have a special place in my heart. Nonetheless, not all of my time at JIBS has been spent on research and Anna Blombäck is worth of a special mention, as my co-teacher on several courses. I have appreciated your encouragement and trust – and JIBS would be hard put to find a more talented and deserving Associate Dean for Education. A big thank-you as well, to all the people at JIBS who make our teaching and research possible – to our coordinators, administrators, librarians and caretakers. I am especially grateful to Susanne Hansson for your work. Not just in the past weeks as I added the final formatting to my dissertation – but also over the years, as you have arranged doctoral courses and maintained a modicum of structure in a changing organisational environment.

I wish I could name the managers and social entrepreneurs who populate this study. I now count many of you as my friends and am extremely grateful for the warmth, openness and insight with which you shared your experiences.

Last, but not least, I would like to send a huge hug to my family and my 'non-work' friends. I am privileged to have parents who were not afraid to take their children with them into a colourful and at times insecure environment – and a father who challenges me by his example, to strive for societal impact as an academic. My little sister Heather continues to be an inspiration for me and has probably forgotten more about people-management, than I will ever teach my students – I look forward to our curry nights every time I am in the U.K! I have also been blessed with a fantastic mother-in-law, and a large and colourful flock of children. My biggest hug is reserved for all six of you: Hannah, Emily, Kevin, Douglas, Martin and Jonathan. You are a constant reminder to me that there are more important things in life than Ph.Ds. – and that knowledge and wisdom are two very different animals. Vai com Deus!

Abstract

This dissertation explores the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators. Building on Jarvis' (2010) existential theory of learning, it conceptualises entrepreneurial learning as a process in which purposeful individuals encounter and transform experiences of disjuncture. These experiences are embedded in both human and material contexts. Learning processes and outcomes are portrayed as phenomena that are influenced by social entrepreneurs' interaction with these environments. Accelerators are depicted as non-formal contexts of learning, of relatively short duration – in which the structure and content of education is progressively adapted to the requirements of the individual.

This study represents one of the first attempts to open the 'black box' of social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators. The process and outcomes of learning are investigated by means of a longitudinal case study involving twenty-four social entrepreneurs and three accelerators run by the same organisation. Information about learning was gathered using narrative and ethnographic techniques, and analysed drawing on an abductive methodology.

An in-depth study of the learning experiences of four social entrepreneurs is made and a typology of social entrepreneurs is developed. The typology integrates experience-oriented factors with social entrepreneurs' degree of embeddedness in the context addressed by their product or service. These factors combine with venture stage and the intentions of the entrepreneur, to influence the learning process – and the outcomes associated with learning. Seven principal outcomes of learning in accelerators are noted and the learning of social entrepreneurs is linked to a 'sideways' move from a project-based charity orientation, to a more sustainable emphasis on hybridity. Furthermore, learning in accelerators is found to be more a product of co-creation than of effective programme design. The characteristics and dynamics of the accelerator cohort are found to have a significant impact on learning, with heterogeneity in terms of industry a key stimulus. In contrast, learning is enhanced when accelerator participants are at a similar stage of venture development.

This dissertation develops a model of the learning process in accelerators, emphasising the influence of entrepreneurs' backgrounds and intentions. Ten educator roles in accelerators are identified and it is found that these functions may be filled by more than one of the three main categories of educator in accelerators (i.e.: managers, mentors and coaches). Opportunities for learning are created by the interaction of accelerator participants with both human actors and material objects. The term "splace" is used to refer to these 'areas of opportunity' – which allow entrepreneurs to engage in learning through reflection, dialogue, action or community – or by combinations of these four orientations.

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List of Abbreviations

A.o.M:	Academy of Management
BIF:	Business Innovation Facility
DFID:	Department for International Development (U.K.)
ECE:	Economic Commission for Europe
EED:	Entrepreneurship education
EL:	Entrepreneurial learning
ESIE:	Education for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship
I.a.P:	Innovations against Poverty
MDG:	Millennium Development Goal
N.f.P:	Not-for-Profit
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSE:	Network for Social Enterprise
PDW:	Professional Development Workshop
SEC:	Social Enterprise Coalition
Sida:	Swedish International Development Programme
SOCAP:	Social Capital Markets
SVP:	Social Value Proposition
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
WCED:	World Commission on Environment and Development

I Introduction

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

John Donne

I.1 Setting the Scene

In 1624 the English poet and reluctant clergyman John Donne penned the above words while recovering from a severe illness. Students of poetry suggest that it was the recurring sound of bells tolling for other invalids' funerals that awoke in him a stark awareness of his shared humanity with these strangers. An understanding of his interconnectedness with every individual.

Hundreds of years after his poem was written, society is rediscovering the truth of Donne's often-cited strophe "no man is an island". Today it is not the sound of a tolling bell that has awoken us to the reality of a connected and interdependent world, but instead the increasing visibility of indicators of social and environmental tension in our world. A combination of high-profile industrial accidents and more gradual changes in ecosystems have alerted people to the fact that their lives can be changed not only by the activities of their geographical neighbours, but also by developments on the other side of the globe. Importantly, many people have also come to realise that this impact is reciprocal. In an interconnected world we are not only affected by other people's actions, but also have an impact on the welfare of others.

In this dissertation the reader is introduced to a number of individuals who engage in an intensive process of learning. All of these individuals are concerned about the impact of business on society and are engaged in starting up their own enterprises. In academic terms they would be classified as ‘nascent social entrepreneurs’. Some of them are founding enterprises whose primary impact is on *people*, while others are more concerned with creating *environmental* value. Some startups combine the two. What all three categories have in common is their status as emerging entrepreneurs and their participation in an eight-week programme of entrepreneurship education – an ‘accelerator’. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the learning associated with this accelerator. I seek to explore the learning that occurs as social entrepreneurs move from the relatively lonely and unstructured environments in which they seek to create their ventures – to the more structured and intense setting of a programme of entrepreneurship education. An important focus in this study is thus the *interaction* of these entrepreneurs with the particular approach to entrepreneurship education represented by the accelerator. Consequently, although this dissertation primarily focuses on the learning of social entrepreneurs, it is also about the accelerator programmes they participate in. It tells the story of both.

1.2 Moving towards Involved Enterprise

John Donne explains his sorrow over the death of a stranger by referring to the concept of shared humanity: “for I am involved in mankind”. In many business organisations a similar recognition of the interdependence of the firm with society has taken place during past decades, even if this recognition has resulted in business leaders taking several very different types of action.

The first and most common business reaction is seen in the dramatic increase in formalised programmes of corporate responsibility (CR), or corporate *social* responsibility (CSR). As the terms themselves suggest, these programmes are based on the recognition that businesses are in some way ‘responsible’ towards society – even if the nature of this responsibility has varied over time (Blowfield & Murray, 2011). Closely linked to these concepts is the stakeholder approach to strategic management, which very clearly drives firms towards a greater recognition of the socially embedded nature of the firm (Freeman, 1984; Rowley, 1997). Critics of these approaches however, argue that despite the increase of CSR activities in business environments, the steps being taken are largely incremental and fail to tackle firms’ “systemic unsustainability” (W. Visser, 2010, p. 11).

A second way in which individuals have acted upon their recognition that they are ‘involved in mankind’ is seen in the rise of the social enterprise. In contrast to instrumental forms of corporate responsibility - which tend to emphasize shareholder profit while maintaining ‘licence to operate’ (Donaldson & Dunfee,

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1999), social enterprises prioritise the creation of *social* value (Mair & Martí, 2006). In this context the term “social” may imply either a purpose that is oriented towards human needs or the environment– or a combination of the two (SEC, 2010). Nevertheless, according to Thompson (2008) several other characteristics are also associated with the field of social enterprise; including the pursuit of social value via the trading of goods or services, and the existence of a double or triple bottom-line.

A third way in which a relatively small number of individuals and firms have attempted to incorporate a vision of shared humanity into their operations, is by means of what I term ‘synergy-oriented’ enterprise. Under this category a large number of apparently unrelated business strategies can be grouped together. What these approaches have in common is a reluctance to prioritise one aspect of sustainability, or one particular stakeholder over another. Instead, value creation is pursued in several areas simultaneously. It is suggested that value creation in one area need not exclude the creation of value at another point – indeed, it may even enhance it. The best known example of a synergistic approach to enterprise is Porter and Kramer’s (2011) concept of ‘shared value’. Nonetheless, upon careful examination it is possible to see that many other concepts – such as ‘inclusive business’, ‘base-of-the-pyramid strategies’ and ‘sustainability entrepreneurship’ – operate under a similar logic. Although this logic is perhaps most clearly spelled out by scholars such as Young and Tilley (2006), these approaches all emphasize the need for firms to move beyond strategies that achieve value in one area, with only a neutral (or even a detrimental effect) in another. The aforementioned scholars term this shift a move from “efficiency” towards “effectiveness” and emphasize the importance of firms achieving effectiveness at several ‘bottom-lines’ simultaneously. In the case of inclusive business this may involve a firm achieving acceptable levels of profit, while at the same time generating income and employment for disadvantaged individuals. For example: Coca-Cola’s strategy of adopting a labour-intensive distribution model in Ethiopia and Tanzania (Nelson, Ishikawa, & Geaneotes, 2009). The entrepreneurs whose development is discussed in this study are engaged in the creation of firms that either belong to this third, synergistic type of enterprise, or to the second category: the social venture.

1.3 From Enterprise to Entrepreneurship

The above paragraphs briefly introduce three basic categories of what Azmat & Samaratunge (2009) term “responsible” enterprise. What has not been discussed however, is the question of *how* such enterprises come to exist. This is an important question to ask in view of the important role attributed by many societies to entrepreneurs and small firms, with regards to the creation of social and economic prosperity. For example: in 2008 the European Union noted that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are “providers of employment

opportunities and key players for the wellbeing of local and regional communities” (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). In 2010 in the United States, the International Trade Administration (2013) noted that SMEs accounted for 33.7 % of exported goods. Furthermore, in Asia SMEs typically accounted for 30-60 % of GDP and around 50 % of formal employment in the same period (Calverley, 2010). Unsurprisingly therefore, many policy-makers are fervent, if at times uncritical promoters of entrepreneurship – with Barack Obama (2006) perhaps most explicit in his expression of the entrepreneurial ‘creed’: “I believe in the free market, competition, and entrepreneurship!”

If the figures in the above paragraph reflect even a small measure of the impact of SMEs on society, then it is clearly important to understand the factors associated with the establishment and proliferation of new enterprises. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between small business management and the actual process of *establishing* a small business. Many entrepreneurship scholars suggest that new firms are important to society not only because of the possibility that they may one day grow and employ significant numbers of people, but also because of their innovative nature. Schumpeter (1943) identifies the entrepreneur with a process of innovation that involves “creative destruction”, as new products and processes make contemporary offerings redundant. Miles, Snow, Meyer and Coleman (1978) are more conservative and argue that some firms (“defenders”) in fact maintain competitive advantage by engaging in activities that are not necessarily innovative. Nevertheless, on the basis of Welsch’s (2010) survey of entrepreneurial typologies, it is clear that many scholars associate entrepreneurship with some form of innovative behaviour. Indeed, in the field of sustainability entrepreneurship, Schaltegger and Wagner (2011) suggest that it is their *innovative* behaviour that makes small, nascent firms so valuable. They argue that entrepreneurial firms are often responsible for radical innovations that are initially less viable in commercial terms, but subsequently adopted in modified form by larger firms – and marketed on a much larger scale. Although the firms used to illustrate their discussion are primarily ‘green’ entrepreneurs, Schaltegger and Wagner define sustainability entrepreneurship as including both social and environmental innovation. I have therefore suggested that ‘social’ entrepreneurs can be expected to follow a similar pattern of innovation; with small, new firms often responsible for the most radical social innovations (Levinsohn, 2013). If this is true, a deeper understanding of the processes associated with the successful founding of such ventures can be expected to generate significant social and environmental benefits. One aspect of venture development is the *learning* achieved by nascent social entrepreneurs, learning that may be linked to the processes of entrepreneurship training and education discussed in this dissertation.

1.4 Learning to be Social and Sustainable

In this chapter I have so far suggested that many contemporary firms are adopting a more ‘involved’ stance as regards the role of business in society. Some firms are making social impact their primary purpose, while others pursue a more synergistic approach to value creation. I have also argued that small businesses often have a positive impact on society and that this impact is of particular value where firms are not only radically innovative with regards to service or product, but also innovative with regards to the creation of social or environmental value. This suggestion naturally provokes the question of *how* society can contribute to the establishment of these types of firm. What type of business environment is conducive to the establishment of effective social (or sustainable) enterprises? What type of person or organisation should receive financial support in order to establish this type of business? And what kind of education or training will these firms find useful? Questions such as these are particularly relevant when the high rate of failure among traditional startups is taken into account, with approximately half the number of new businesses launched in the United States ceasing operations after four years (Headd, 2003). It is apparent that nascent enterprises develop in many different ways and that very different outcomes result from their entrepreneurial ‘journeys’. As Jenkins (2012) points out, even firm ‘failure’ is a far more diverse phenomenon than is initially apparent.

The different outcomes and dissimilar paths of development that new ventures follow is a phenomenon that I link to what Strauss (1993) and Wenger (1998) term “trajectories”. Although these scholars differ slightly in their use of the term (studying the development of illness on the one hand, and professional identity and skill on the other), they both use the term to refer not only to recurring patterns of development and outcomes, but also to the *interactions* that produce these patterns. Business advisors, accelerators and incubators are all examples of interventions into the trajectories (or development) of nascent firms – interventions that involve purposeful interaction with the entrepreneur or the entrepreneurial team. This interaction is usually based on the unspoken assumption that entrepreneurs are able to learn – and that this learning is in turn related to positive venture outcomes. Indeed, drawing on Moingeon and Edmonson (1996), Harrison and Leitch (2005) suggest that in nascent firms the learning of entrepreneurs is probably as important to the success of the nascent venture – as organisational learning is to the prosperity of established organisations.

Because a significant number of entrepreneurial trajectories lead to an exit from the venturing process, stakeholders such as investors are naturally eager to promote forms of interaction that prevent new ventures from following patterns of development that are either unprofitable or unsustainable – or both. Furthermore, many stakeholders are also keen to promote interaction that

accelerates the development of the new venture from a position of unprofitable, low-impact activity; to one of sustainability, profitability and high impact.

In the fields of business administration and economics, researchers who have studied the phenomenon of new venture creation have tended to adopt only one of two general perspectives. Frequently a choice is made between focusing on either the entrepreneurial *context* or on entrepreneurial *agency*, with fewer studies recognising the interplay that occurs between the two. Accordingly, economists often suggest that a region develop industrial infrastructure, clusters, or milieus that are attractive to creative individuals (Florida, Mellander, & Stolarick, 2008; Johansson, 1993). Entrepreneurship scholars on the other hand, often advocate more effective entrepreneurial education or better systems for identifying and supporting promising individuals and ventures (Carrier, 2007; Krueger & Brazeal, 1994). Increasingly however, scholars recognise that effective intervention often requires a recognition of the *combined* impact of “economic, sociological, psychological and anthropological explanations” (A. A. Gibb, 2007).

As an entrepreneurship scholar I am more interested in the processes associated with the creation of new ventures, than in the intricacies of regional development. Nevertheless, I believe that it is important to take the arguments of sociology seriously and to recognise that the trajectories of individuals and of firms are always modified to some extent by their interaction with their environment. Donne’s phrase “I am involved in mankind” reflects not only emotional insight, but also social reality. It also reflects Strauss’ suggestion that individual agency (action) is embedded in interaction. This idea infers that the study of *interaction* rather than agency is a key task of entrepreneurship research. In other words, entrepreneurial learning needs to be studied at what Harrison and Leitch (2005) term the “interface” between the entrepreneur and their context. Once again therefore, I emphasize that although the primary unit of analysis in this dissertation is the learning of the individual social entrepreneur, I recognise the powerful influence of the entrepreneurial *context* on this learning. Indeed, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is arguably the only factor that ‘society’ (i.e.: policy makers and enterprise support systems) can realistically manage in the short term. For this reason, I begin this study with a discussion of one particular aspect of the entrepreneurial ecosystem, namely entrepreneurship education and training. A particular type of entrepreneurship education and training (the accelerator programme) is framed as an intervention into the learning of the social entrepreneur. The theoretical foundations for this learning are discussed in chapter two, but before that I address the question of *why* it is important to conduct research into social entrepreneurial learning in the particular context of accelerators.

1.5 Enhancing the Learning of Entrepreneurs

One method of supporting individuals as they launch (or prepare to launch) new ventures is entrepreneurship education (EE) – or entrepreneurship training (ET). Both approaches operate under the assumption that if the founders of new ventures learn to be more “competent” (Markowska, 2011) – or “expert”, if we use the language of effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2008), then they will be more likely to succeed. For the purposes of this study therefore, entrepreneurship education is framed as a particular *context* for – and as an intervention into – entrepreneurial learning. Pittaway and Cope (2007a, p. 500) suggest that the field of entrepreneurship education is still in its infancy and that “We do not really know what ‘entrepreneurship education’ actually *is*”. Despite this observation, Henry, Hill and Leitch (2003, p. 123) suggest that entrepreneurship *education* focuses on raising awareness about entrepreneurship, while entrepreneurship *training* is about “instruction for enterprise”. Martin, McNally and Kay (2013) suggest that entrepreneurship education initiatives can be distinguished from entrepreneurship training initiatives on the basis of their academic or non-academic nature (“academic-focused” and “training-focused”). Although the above scholars base their ideas on theories of the transfer of learning, Alan Gibb (1997) suggests that in practice it is difficult to distinguish between education and training. Indeed, the challenge of distinguishing between the two may explain Martin, McNally and Kay’s failure to find support for their article’s third hypothesis – which related to training, distinguishing it from education. Gibb (1997) notes that some writers suggest that education has to do with knowledge, and training with skills. He argues however, that in reality the two are so intertwined as to be nearly inseparable, due to the fact that “the practice of skill always has a knowledge component and behaviour (embodying knowledge) nearly always involves interpersonal skills” (ibid. p.16).

Gibb’s ideas imply that education is an activity that takes place in *both* academic and non-academic contexts, even if dissimilar environments may be characterised by different emphases. This infers that it may be more useful to categorise initiatives that promote learning on the basis of their objectives, target groups and degree of formality (or structure). Indeed the difficulty of making a meaningful distinction between entrepreneurship education and training is illustrated by scholars’ inconsistent use of the terms. Akola and Heinonen (2008) for example, use the term “entrepreneurship training” to discuss initiatives that address both practicing entrepreneurs and “potential” entrepreneurs (such as academics) – despite the distinction advocated in the previous paragraph by Henry, Hill and Leitch (2003). Isaacs et al. (2007) on the other hand, use both terms (“entrepreneurship education and training”) to refer to initiatives in South Africa. Hytti and Gorman (2004) employ the term “enterprise education” to discuss programmes that either educate about entrepreneurship, foster entrepreneurial behaviour or enhance the skills of individuals that are willing to

start a new enterprise². The results of their study however, suggest that these three emphases serve more to categorise emphases *within* a programme of entrepreneurship education, rather than to distinguish between programmes. My own findings are similar to those of Hytti and Gorman in this respect – and in chapters four and five I describe how social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators is associated with all three of these objectives.

The gist of my discussion in the above paragraphs is that it is not meaningful to distinguish between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship training, when discussing interventions into entrepreneurial learning. For this reason, in the remainder of this study I use the term “entrepreneurship education” (as opposed to “entrepreneurship education and training”) to refer to *all* of the activities that some scholars refer to as either education *or* training. Nonetheless, I argue that it is still useful to distinguish between educational initiatives on the basis of the individuals (or groups) that they target and the degree of formality (predetermined structure) associated with them. As will be seen, these aspects are often linked to one another.

1.5.1 The Challenge of Access to Entrepreneurship Education

Studies of entrepreneurial education often focus on the teaching of entrepreneurship in schools, colleges and universities – as the contents of the excellent “Handbooks” edited by Alain Fayolle (2007a, 2007c, 2010) illustrate. Indeed, it appears that some scholars even take this focus for granted, as exemplified by Martin, McNally and Kay’s (1997) discussion of the evaluation of entrepreneurship education. They note that the literature “for good reason employs essentially all student samples” (p.214). I suggest that this emphasis is not at all self-evident. Indeed, these scholars’ own survey of the literature indicates that several writers have studied entrepreneurship education as it relates to individuals whose primary identity is *not* that of a student. They cite for example, Bjorvatn and Tungodden’s (2009) study of the impact of training among Tanzanian micro-entrepreneurs, and Miron and McClelland’s (1979) study of three practitioner-oriented training programmes. Furthermore, Pittaway and Cope’s (2007a) survey of the literature suggests that the practitioner-oriented³ ‘branch’ of entrepreneurship education makes up almost 20 % of the total number of publications. These examples suggest that although entrepreneurship education is often studied in a university or college context, it does not have to be. In subsequent paragraphs I suggest that an important issue in the field of entrepreneurship education is that of *access*. By this I refer not only to the individuals at whom education is targeted (students or practicing entrepreneurs), but also to the means by which it is provided (issues of structure

2 This categorisation draws on, among other scholars: (Jamieson, 1984)

3 In their survey this branch is referred to as “management training”.

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and duration). In terms of both the provision of entrepreneurship education and the study of this provision, I suggest that it is important to achieve a greater balance between the education of prospective entrepreneurs (usually students) – and individuals who are already engaged in starting their own businesses (i.e. practicing entrepreneurs).

The question of access to entrepreneurship education is one that relates to both age and context. Although there have been some changes in recent years, the majority of students in fulltime tertiary education are still relatively young. Indeed it appears that the design of many entrepreneurship education programmes discourages older⁴ individuals from participating. Older individuals – who often have higher family and financial commitments – are naturally hesitant to take part in programmes of study that require them to abandon (or substantially reduce) not only their sources of income, but possibly also the careers upon which they have embarked. Allan Gibb (1983) suggests that this caution characterises not only adults in general, but also many enterprise owner/managers. This implies that older entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs who are engaged in the founding of a new venture will find it harder to benefit from programmes of entrepreneurship education that are associated with a substantial investment of time and money. This difficulty may be accentuated if the individual belongs to a “tribe” of entrepreneurship (such as corporate or technology entrepreneurs) whose success depends on the entrepreneur having at least some measure of experience in their profession (Welsch, 2010). Unfortunately, as Heinonen and Akala (2007) point out, educators are at times overly focused on issues of content and delivery. As a result, they at times ignore the vital question of ‘target’ and end up educating “just about anyone willing to participate”, rather than addressing issues relating to access to entrepreneurship education (ibid., p84).

In Western society, *age* is one factor that appears to influence the access that individuals realistically have to many programmes of entrepreneurship education (Rae, 2005c). Put simply, once an individual moves beyond the age traditionally associated with formal study they are less likely to engage in a full-time programme of education. In Europe this constraint has been addressed to a certain extent by the provision of shorter programmes of entrepreneurship education – as discussed by scholars such as Heinonen and Akola (2008) and De Faiote et al (2003). In other parts of the world however, the restricting factor of age is exacerbated by social and economic factors. In many developing countries a relatively small proportion of individuals have access to tertiary education – and of those who complete university studies a significant number are subsequently

4 I.e.: older than the typical US college student I.e.: 25 years and older (Marketing Charts, 2014).

employed in other countries⁵, or in governmental agencies (Beine, Docquier, & Rapoport, 2008). Consequently, if graduates of academic programmes of entrepreneurship education are to apply their knowledge in their own countries of origin, they often need encouragement to stay in (or return to) these countries.

Another way in which access to entrepreneurship education might be increased is to deliver it so that a broader spectrum of people is able to participate. As noted in the previous paragraph, in Europe practicing entrepreneurs are often targeted by entrepreneurship educators. In emerging and developing economies however, the proportion of training programmes delivering entrepreneurship education is generally much smaller – with Ladzani and Van Vuuren (2002) suggesting that only 27 % of SME support in South Africa addresses entrepreneurship-related issues. When entrepreneurship education is provided to less-frequently targeted groups the results are encouraging – as illustrated by Bjorvatn and Tungodden's (2009) study, in which the owner/managers of Tanzanian micro-enterprises were provided with business-oriented training. Among other things, this study found that participating entrepreneurs subsequently demonstrated superior business knowledge to a control group – and that individuals with less formal educational backgrounds appeared to benefit most from the training. Studies such as this lend credence to one of the emphases of this dissertation, namely the idea that entrepreneurship education is often an effective way in which to enhance the learning of practicing entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, relatively little analysis has been made of the provision of practitioner-oriented education for *social* entrepreneurs, even if Casanovas and Bruno (2013) have done some initial work in this area. It is reasonable to assume however, that the provision of education for social entrepreneurs is unlikely to be *more* developed than that of traditional entrepreneurs – and that there is a need to address the question of how access to education can be improved.

The above paragraphs suggest that demand of developing countries for effective businesses requires that access to entrepreneurship education be extended beyond the traditional business school student. In other words, access to entrepreneurship education needs to be provided not only before employment, but also during employment. In many Western contexts there is also a need to provide entrepreneurship education either *after* employment, or in the later years of employment. In some Western contexts (such as the U.K.) the number of people over 50 exceeds the number of people under 25 – and frequently, individuals over 50 who become unemployed have difficulty in finding work again. Consequently, researchers are beginning to discuss how individuals in what Kautonen (2008) terms the “third” age (over 50), might engage in entrepreneurship. Indeed, in the United Kingdom significant resources are being

⁵ I.e.: The 'brain-drain' phenomenon.

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invested in supporting these types of entrepreneur (Kautonen, Down, & South, 2008). Although some individuals do return to full-time education in the ‘third age’, they are comparatively few in number and most countries do not have effective educational strategies to address their needs. For example: in Sweden individuals are not eligible for student grants after 55 and have only limited access to government student loans after 45 (CSN, 2013). It is therefore clear that both developed and developing countries are in need of alternative ways in which to provide entrepreneurship education, even if the reasons for this need are very different.

1.5.2 Formal, Non-formal and Informal Learning Environments

The gist of my discussion until now is that the potential of entrepreneurship education for societal transformation is significantly limited by educators’ preoccupation with addressing primarily the needs of students. In other words, the learning achieved by practicing entrepreneurs is sub-optimal to a large extent because they have not been *sufficiently* targeted by educators. Indeed, Daniel Hjorth (2013) notes that initiatives that target practicing/emergent entrepreneurs (such as incubators) rarely discuss their offerings in terms of learning⁶. However, the experience of Pittaway and Thorpe⁷ (2012), Gibb (1993), and Heinonen and Akola (2007) also suggests that practicing entrepreneurs have not been *effectively* targeted by educators. If entrepreneurs’ learning is to be optimised, it is not enough to simply target individuals using the same methods that work for individuals in fulltime education. Instead it is important to determine the extent to which the methods themselves have an impact on the access entrepreneurs perceive themselves to have, to entrepreneurship education. In this study entrepreneurship education is portrayed as a particular context for entrepreneurial learning. Consequently, the issue of access to entrepreneurship education is one that addresses the question of how optimal environments for entrepreneurial learning may be developed. I suggest that a useful conceptual foundation for discussing this question lies in the distinction between formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts.

Writing from the perspective of educational theory, Coombs, Ahmed and Israel (1974) suggest that learning may take place in informal, non-formal or formal settings. They suggest that contexts of *formal* learning are associated with most institutions of higher education and tend to be “highly institutionalized, chronologically graded and hierarchically structured” (ibid., p.8). They contrast learning in these settings with that which takes place in both non-formal and

⁶ Hjorth draws on the work of Christine Thalsgård Henriques (forthcoming) in making this observation.

⁷ These authors refer to entrepreneurs’ lack of enthusiasm for government-backed educational programmes as a “problem of engagement” (p.854).

informal settings. At the other end of the spectrum, they suggest that learning in *informal* contexts tends to be associated with the individual's interaction with friends and acquaintances, and that learning is strongly influenced by factors such as social class, ethnicity and gender. In between the formal and informal learning contexts they identify *non-formal* learning environments. They define these as "any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups of the population, adults as well as children" (Coombs et al 1974, cited in Jarvis, 1987, p. 69). Critics argue that Coombs, Ahmed and Israel fail to distinguish between education and learning in informal settings – and that they mistakenly label informal learning as a form of education (A. Rogers, 2004). I agree with this critique and with Rogers (ibid.) suggestion that it is important to distinguish between learning in a context in which there is no educational structure at all (informal learning) – and learning that is developed in a context that involves learners in educational design and delivery (non-formal and participatory education).

La Belle (1982) builds on the work of Coombs et al. (ibid.) and underlines the idea that non-formal *education* is a distinct approach to the facilitation of learning. He suggests however, that it is important to understand that the three forms of learning are not mutually exclusive, even if one particular approach usually predominates in any given environment. He also emphasizes the idea that formal education tends to be associated with schools or universities and with "a sanctioned curriculum". La Belle notes however, that although non-formal education is still systematic in character, it is less standardised and often allows learners to influence programme goals. From the perspective of entrepreneurship research therefore, it is arguable that scholars of entrepreneurial *learning* tend to focus on the informal ways in which practitioners develop entrepreneurial capabilities (i.e. the day to day learning of the entrepreneur). Scholars of entrepreneurship *education* on the other hand, usually focus on the role played by formal and non-formal learning environments in the acquisition of these capabilities. I suggest however, that many of the latter scholars discuss the design, content and delivery of entrepreneurship education in contexts of formal learning, and that comparatively few publications discuss non-formal environments. This suggestion is supported by Pittaway and Cope's (2007a) observation that around 80 % of the entrepreneurship education literature focuses on student-oriented entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, when it comes to research on the process and content of entrepreneurship education; Gorman, Hanlon and King (1997, p. 67) note that "most of the empirical literature in this area, examines the implications of teaching strategies, learning styles, and delivery modes, primarily at post-secondary institutions".

Although the coordination of education by a post-secondary educational institution does not necessarily mean that education is structured in a *formal*

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manner, it is striking to note that this term is frequently associated with entrepreneurship education by the scholars whose work is surveyed by Gorman, Hanlon and King (1997). It is also interesting to note that when the term is used, it is often linked to either scholars' doubts about whether entrepreneurship can be effectively fostered by formal education – or to practitioners' avoidance of formal entrepreneurship education. Gorman et al. for example, refer to Stanworth and Gray's (1992) suggestion that “most small businesses [are] still prejudiced against participating in formal training”. This comment supports my argument that questions of *access* to entrepreneurship education are often linked to the educational context (formal, non-formal, informal) in which educators operate.

To summarise: although some study has been made of education for practicing entrepreneurs (for example: Heinonen & Akola, 2007; Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004) comparatively little study has been undertaken with regards to non-formal or participatory approaches to entrepreneurship education. This is particularly the case when it comes to the provision of education for practicing *social* entrepreneurs. This is a significant omission for two reasons. First of all, there is a risk that scholars who discuss the education of practicing entrepreneurs will not be informed by the extensive discussions of pedagogy that characterise the literature on more formal, student-oriented approaches to entrepreneurship education. However, this omission is also serious in view of my discussion of the importance to society of increasing access to [social] entrepreneurship education. For as La Belle (1982) points out, it is the non-formal approach that tends to be adopted in situations where there is a need to improve access to education. Consequently, I suggest there is a need for more study of non-formal approaches to entrepreneurship education, not simply because most studies focus on formal, student-oriented programmes – but also because of the importance of this type of entrepreneurship education to society.

1.5.3 Enhancing the Learning of Practicing Entrepreneurs

Gibb (1983) makes it clear that the task of educating entrepreneurs does not become easier as they grow older and become involved in starting up a new venture. He suggests that small firms demand training which is not only highly individualised, timely and provided in small ‘doses’ – but also training that provides them with skills that they can implement immediately. Additionally, Gibb notes that small firms are usually “less willing to pay a market price”, which suggests that entrepreneurship education also needs to be affordable. Naturally, governments and related institutions are aware of these challenges and have responded with initiatives designed to provide entrepreneurs with this kind of timely support. However, many of these initiatives (such as consulting and advice services) are not necessarily intended to support the learning of entrepreneurs. Instead, they often provide entrepreneurs with access to expert services that they

themselves do not possess, instead of increasing their capacity (Chrisman & McMullan, 2004). Consequently, other methods of enhancing entrepreneurial learning have been experimented with. Two of these – business counselling and business incubation – have been found to be reasonably effective if designed appropriately (Chrisman, McMullan, Ring, & Holt, 2012; Cooper, Harrison, & Mason, 2001). Nonetheless, both approaches have their drawbacks. For example: both are associated with a long-term⁸ process of development and although this process often increases the *quality* of a new venture, it does not necessarily accelerate the rate at which individuals acquire entrepreneurial abilities. In the case of incubators, there are also clear limitations to their capacity in terms of hosted ventures. As the Economic Commission for Europe (2000) points out, business incubators are a relevant, if at times costly solution for *a small group* (“handful”) of the entrepreneurs who are unable or unwilling to participate in a more formal, long-term programme. Most incubators are also linked to specific geographical locations and this factor limits their clientele to firms in their geographical vicinity or firms that are willing to relocate to the incubator site. Consequently Hjorth (2013, p. 51) suggests that the next generation of incubators will emphasize the role of ‘space’ rather than ‘place’ – and attempt to cater to the needs of entrepreneurs in their “natural habitat”.

If the unattractiveness to practicing entrepreneurs and older individuals of formal, long-term programmes of entrepreneurship education is taken as a ‘given’, it becomes increasingly important to identify the ideal characteristics of less formal initiatives. Based on my discussion in previous paragraphs, it appears that ‘practicing’ entrepreneurs and ‘prospective’ entrepreneurs who are not enrolled in full-time programmes of higher education, will be best served by education that is characterised by the following adjectives:

- *Effective*: education must lead to clear improvements in the ways in which people conceptualise, initiate and run their ventures.
- *Timely* (or relevant): education must be provided at a point in time when the individual is best able to make use of the information and abilities they develop.
- *Accessible*: education must be provided in a manner that allows the individual to participate, without unrealistic demands on their time or physical location. The volume of education provided must also match demand.
- *Affordable*: education must be provided at a reasonable cost, when its long-term impact on the creation of sustainable ventures is taken into account.

One approach to the provision of non-formal entrepreneurship education that appears to fulfil several, if not all of the above criteria, is that of the new venture

⁸ I.e.: inferring a process of years, rather than months.

(or seed) *accelerator*. Accelerators are a form of enterprise incubation that involves entrepreneurs in relatively short, but intense processes of learning and networking – and I will discuss them in more detail soon. Before this however, I discuss the factors that influence the provision of entrepreneurship education to *social* entrepreneurs.

1.6 Educating the Social Entrepreneur

I began section 1.5 by discussing some of the challenges associated with entrepreneurs' learning in the context of traditional⁹ entrepreneurship education. In particular I emphasized the importance of making entrepreneurship education accessible to a broader range of individuals. For example: not only to prospective entrepreneurs (a group often represented by business school students), but also to older individuals and practicing entrepreneurs. In order to reach these groups I have suggested that non-formal types of education will often be useful. What I have not discussed however, is the question of whether or not it is possible to apply a similar strategy to the education of *social* entrepreneurs. For example: does the issue of 'access' apply to social entrepreneurs' learning in the same way as it does to traditional entrepreneurs? Are business schools primarily concerned with educating individuals who have the potential to become social entrepreneurs (i.e. students)? Are they less engaged in educating those entrepreneurs who are already developing a social venture? And if this is so, are factors of geographical distribution and entrepreneurial circumstances also relevant to the design of interventions that aim to enhance the learning of these individuals?

In 2004 a special issue on entrepreneurship education was published in the Academy of Management's *Learning and Education* journal. It made little or no reference to the field of social entrepreneurship and this omission was discussed by Tracey and Phillips (2007). These scholars argued for the increased integration of social entrepreneurship into traditional programmes of entrepreneurship education. They also suggested that social entrepreneurs need to be competent in all of the areas associated with success in traditional entrepreneurship, but that three additional emphases needed to be included. Tracey and Phillips suggested that social entrepreneurs have to learn to manage accountability to a wider range of stakeholders, a "double bottom-line" (social and/or environmental value creation in addition to the creation of financial value) – and a hybrid identity. Their ideas are supported by the work of experienced teachers of social entrepreneurship such as Gregory Dees. Dees (interviewed by Worsham, 2012) suggests however, that it is also important that social entrepreneurs develop emotional intelligence: cultivating the ability to relate in a sensitive manner to community stakeholders – and not just to individuals with a background in

⁹ That is: oriented towards for-profit enterprises.

business. He also points out that social innovation requires deeper insight and skill than many traditional business interventions. This latter emphasis is echoed in Mirabella and Young's (2012) survey of social entrepreneurship education, in which they identify the need for business schools to include more training in "political" and "philanthropic" skills. Miller, Wesley and Williams (2012) note furthermore, that practicing social entrepreneurs emphasize several competencies that business school courses in social entrepreneurship tend to neglect. These include the marketing and selling of the organisation, a sense of moral imperatives and ethics, the ability to communicate with stakeholders, and the ability to challenge traditional ways of thinking.

What is interesting about the articles identified in the above paragraph is that they appear to take it for granted, that the learning of social entrepreneurs will take place in the formal academic environment of the college or university. In common with much of the literature on traditional entrepreneurship education therefore, most scholars who address the education of social entrepreneurs neglect the possibility of educating *practicing* entrepreneurs. A rare exception is Yaso Thiru (2011), who links a particular type of educational strategy ("immersion") to this type of learner. Elmes et al.'s (2012) study of social entrepreneurship education in South Africa, the work of Chang, Benamraoui and Rieple (2014) – and Beck's (2008) study from Indonesia, suggest that this approach has not only been used in Thiru's three North American examples¹⁰. Nonetheless, in keeping with their 'for-profit' colleagues, the above scholars discuss a form of social entrepreneurship education that focuses primarily on developing the skills of students. Consequently, the British study of Howorth, Smith and Parkinson (2012) is unusual in framing itself as a study of social entrepreneurship education, while focusing on the learning of practicing social entrepreneurs.

1.6.1 Access to Social Entrepreneurship Education

In section 1.5 I suggested that the design of entrepreneurship education needs to be informed by the characteristics and contexts of the targeted learners. I particularly emphasized the idea that the circumstances of practicing entrepreneurs affect the access they have to education, so that non-formal approaches to education are often more suited to these individuals. In this section I suggest that the particular goals of social entrepreneurship also affect individuals' willingness to participate in a programme of social entrepreneurship education.

Many programmes whose aim is to increase the numbers or performance of 'for profit' enterprises, are located in specific geographic locations due to social or

¹⁰ Note that one of Thiru's cases is an incubator.

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political considerations. Stakeholders may wish to encourage new ventures in a particular neighbourhood or among a particular population. For example: Brad Feld's involvement with the *TechStars* accelerator was rooted in his desire to improve the startup community at Boulder (Feld, 2012). A geographical location may also have the ambition of becoming a centre for a particular type of innovation, such as health care. Many *social* entrepreneurs however, seek to address social or environmental challenges in specific geographical areas, or among specific populations – building on a “local knowledge” that is central to their contribution (Dees, 2011). Consequently, for many social entrepreneurs long-term relocation to another site (such as an incubator) might involve distancing themselves from the very people they exist to serve. To make the challenge of enhancing their learning even more difficult, the desire of the social entrepreneur to promote the interests of particular areas or social groups frequently places them in areas that are underserved by traditional business services. This was the initial experience of Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh.

The challenge of supporting the learning of social entrepreneurs is augmented by the fact that in many communities, the number of social entrepreneurs is comparatively small, when compared to the numbers of conventional startups. This often means that it is more difficult to obtain the ‘critical mass’ of participants that is needed to justify an investment in [social] entrepreneurship education. This was the case in the second of the training programmes studied by Howorth, Smith and Parkinson (2012) – where participants were “sought out and strongly persuaded to enrol so that target numbers could be met” (p.376). The United Kingdom is often portrayed as one of the bastions of social entrepreneurship and if it is difficult to gather sufficient numbers of social entrepreneurs in such a context, it is probable that it is even more difficult to create critical mass in less favourable environments. This implies that significant challenges will accompany attempts to deliver social entrepreneurship education to individuals or teams in developing countries – even if these countries may be those with the greatest need for effective social enterprises.

The issue of gathering a ‘critical mass’ of social entrepreneurs for education has been recognised by several organisations. Naturally, it is difficult to know whether their approaches to educating social entrepreneurs have been formed by a preference for a particular approach, or by their awareness of the factors outlined above. I believe however, that I have presented credible evidence for the possibility that the above challenges *should* influence the way in which education is delivered.

Two established providers of education to early-stage social entrepreneurs use the term “accelerator” to refer to their programmes, even if their strategies for delivering education are slightly different. In the United States the *Unreasonable Institute* has run a five week residential course for social entrepreneurs from all

over the world, for several years. The institute targets social enterprises with proven business models and in 2013 it also began to run courses in Mexico and Uganda. In the United Kingdom *The Young Foundation* runs a four month course that also targets nascent social entrepreneurs, but does so by means of twelve two-day workshops. It focuses on enterprises that have demonstrated that their ideas are both effective and scalable. In contrast to the *Unreasonable Institute* however, participants in *The Young Foundation's* programme are primarily involved in enterprises that have national as opposed to international impact.

1.6.2 Social Entrepreneurial Learning in a Non-formal Setting

The programmes initiated by the *Unreasonable Institute* and *The Young Foundation* suggest that some educators of social entrepreneurs have taken into account many of the challenges discussed in the previous section. Not least the idea that educators of practicing entrepreneurs must adapt their educational strategies to the circumstances of the entrepreneur. It appears that this adaptation is associated with a move from a formal to a non-formal mode of education, on the part of the educator. For scholars of entrepreneurship education however, the two examples introduced above infer the possibility of achieving a *second* shift in the attention of scholars of entrepreneurship education. In other words, not only an increased emphasis on entrepreneurship education among practicing entrepreneurs, but also the focusing of attention on interventions that enhance the learning of practicing *social* entrepreneurs. As a result, the term “social entrepreneurial learning” has been used by scholars to refer to the learning of both practicing social entrepreneurs (Beck, 2008; Scheiber, 2014), and also *potential* social entrepreneurs - that is: young people and students (Chang et al., 2014; Kirchsclaeger, 2014).

Many of the most pressing social and environmental needs of the world are located in developing countries. In these contexts the relative scarcity of social entrepreneurs often combines with geographical factors to mitigate against the gathering of a ‘critical mass’ of individuals that might justify the establishment of an incubator, or make regular part-time education practical. Despite these challenges, there is little evidence that a drop in society’s need for capable social entrepreneurs is about to take place. If this need is to be filled, it is therefore probable that educators will need to create new, more effective means of delivering entrepreneurship education – to not only the social entrepreneurs of tomorrow (primarily students), but also those of today. To cite Donald Kuratko (2005): “professors [...] must expand their pedagogies to include new and innovative approaches to the teaching of entrepreneurship”. In the ‘for-profit’ sector, short-term ‘accelerator’ programmes have been created to both quicken and improve the development of nascent business ventures. This study investigates the efforts of the ‘social’ sector to enhance (or accelerate) the learning of practicing social entrepreneurs using a similar approach. However, before

addressing this adaptation the growth of the accelerator ‘movement’ in the for-profit sector is discussed and its key characteristics identified.

1.7 The Rise of Accelerator Programmes

In recent years increasing attention has been devoted to designing non-formal methods of entrepreneurship education that are appropriate to the circumstances in which nascent entrepreneurs find themselves. One indicator of this renewed interest is the rapid increase since 2005 of the number of short-term accelerator programmes (P. Miller & Bound, 2011). Accelerators are intensive programmes of non-formal entrepreneurship education that usually last for six to twelve weeks – with three months the most common duration (Cohen, 2013m). They are arguably a form of enterprise incubation and most programmes display many of the characteristics associated with incubators. This includes the sharing of subsidised office space and facilities, an emphasis on networking and the fostering of a climate that facilitates enterprise development (Lichtenstein, 1992). Participants are almost always nascent entrepreneurs and the accelerator is designed to quicken the pace of venture development by means of individual coaching, networking events and seminars on key aspects of business. Nonetheless, not all of the programmes which are covered by the definition of accelerators that I introduce in section 1.7.1 refer to themselves as ‘accelerators’. The terms “boot camp” and “business lab” are also fairly common – and the Science Park initiative discussed by Ojala and Heikkilä (2011) is simply referred to as “a training program”. It is therefore important to acknowledge the fact that similar types of intensive training programmes may be referred to by different names, even I submit that the most common term is “accelerator”. What is most important for the purposes of this study however, is the idea that these programmes are described by scholars as a form of enterprise support which address the *learning* of entrepreneurs (Hallen, Bingham, & Cohen, 2013; Rivetti & Migliaccio, 2014). Furthermore, as discussed in the next paragraph, the accelerator phenomenon is both recent and growing.

In their survey of impact-oriented¹¹ accelerator and incubator programmes; Baird, Bowles and Lall (2013) noted that 73 % of the accelerators they surveyed were founded within the last five years (i.e. since 2008). A professional development workshop (PDW) at the 2013 meeting of the Academy of Management suggested that 3 000 startups had participated in accelerator programmes since 2005 (A.o.M, 2013). My own monitoring (using the Google Alerts tool) suggests that much of this increase is located in North America and that one to two new accelerators are founded there each month. Nevertheless,

¹¹ That is: programmes that focus on enterprises whose primary goal is that of addressing social or environmental problems.

the Global Accelerator Network (2013) notes that accelerators exist on six continents and an Indian journalist points out that the apparent increase in the number of accelerator programmes is not restricted to the United States. He suggests that in 2013 the number of accelerators in India increased at the rate of around one new programme every month (Dey 2013). It is also worth noting that not all of the increase in accelerator numbers is associated with new, independent programmes. Many established accelerators expand their operations to other regions, or even continents – as seen by *Plug and Play*'s expansion to Jordan and Canada, and *LaunchPad*'s expansion from California to Long Island¹². Nevertheless, there are some indications that the proliferation of programmes may be faltering, with new accelerators struggling to source the necessary expertise and investors associated with success (Lennon, 2013). Despite this qualification, the fact that the accelerator phenomenon is not only new (A.o.M use the term “novel”) – but also growing and global, suggests that it is worth studying. Rivetti and Migliaccio (2014) describe research on accelerators as “exiguous¹³” and the Academy of Management PDW noted that accelerators represent a “potentially large, yet heretofore underexploited research opportunity” (A.o.M, 2013).

1.7.1 Defining Accelerators

Although Lewis, Harper-Anderson and Molnar (2011) note that some industry professionals use the terms “accelerator” and “incubator” interchangeably, scholars suggest that accelerators are distinct from incubators in several ways. In the overview of the 2013 annual general meeting of the Academy of Management, accelerators were defined as “time-limited entrepreneurship educational programs that provide cohorts of nascent entrepreneurs with formal education, mentorship, seed capital and introductions” (A.o.M, 2013). Miller and Bound (2011) go into more detail and suggest that accelerators are characterised by five characteristics. That is: an open and highly competitive application process, the provision of investment, a focus on small teams (as opposed to individual founders), a relatively short period of programmed events and intensive mentoring, and the training in ‘cohorts’ of startups – rather than individual companies. In addition to the above characteristics, Susan Cohen (2013b) and Paolo Borella (2012) suggest that a sixth distinguishing feature of accelerators is that they conclude their programmes with a planned ‘demo’ event that exposes entrepreneurs to investors. Baird, Bowles and Lall (2013) suggest that accelerators tend to target firms that already have customers and revenue, while incubators focus more on early stage ventures. Cohen (2013) however,

¹² Note that there is also a *LaunchPad* in Denmark, but I have been unable to ascertain whether it is associated with the North American accelerators.

¹³ “excessively scanty” (Merriam-Webster, 2014).

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argues that accelerators usually target early stage ventures – a difference in perspective that may be due to the different types of accelerators they survey. Nonetheless, Baird et al. point out that accelerators do not always target ventures at a specific stage of development, so that what really characterises them is the provision of a subset of support “at any stage of [venture] development” (ibid., p.2). Lewis et al. (2011) agree with Baird et al.’s suggestion that accelerators tend to focus on ‘mature’ ventures, but point out that some accelerators are simply modified incubation programmes aimed at launching the ventures of incubator graduates.

When the above definitions are compared with one another and with practice¹⁴, it is clear that some suggested traits are more characteristic of accelerators than others. For example: most accelerators include events in which entrepreneurs are introduced to investors, but not all accelerators provide entrepreneurs with investment. Similarly, although many accelerators prefer to train teams of entrepreneurs, many do recruit individuals to their programmes. I therefore suggest that it is useful to employ a ‘two-tier’ definition that includes both necessary traits (without which a programme would not be considered an accelerator) and common traits (characteristics that many, but not all accelerators display).

I define an accelerator as a non-formal programme of entrepreneurship education that:

- Aims to shorten (i.e. accelerate) the process of moving a new venture from one stage of development to the next¹⁵.
- Aims to improve the quality of a new venture’s product or service, and its financial sustainability.
- Trains entrepreneurs simultaneously as a cohort (rather than providing training individually as entrepreneurs join the program, as with most incubators).

¹⁴ In order to learn more about the general characteristics of accelerators, I monitored the internet for a period of about a year using the *Google* alerts tool; making a note of factors such as duration, location, affiliation, residency and the provision/non-provision of seed funding.

¹⁵ The possibility of accelerators addressing enterprises at more than just the initial phase of venture development is illustrated by Ojala and Heikkilä’s (2011) study, which involved a programme that focused on supporting firms in the internationalisation process.

- Involves an intensive development process of limited duration, with a maximum programme length of six months¹⁶.
- Includes a structured programme of enterprise-oriented education.
- Provides entrepreneurs with individualised coaching and/or mentoring.
- Involves the expansion and/or refinement of the entrepreneur's network.

Furthermore, many (but not all) accelerators are characterised by:

- An open and highly competitive selection process.
- The provision of seed-funding, or the introduction of entrepreneurs to potential investors.
- A duration of three to four months.
- Shared office space at a common site, with subsidised access to basic administrative services (internet, telephone, etc.).

1.7.2 Categorising Accelerators

Although the majority of accelerators are characterised by the traits outlined above, they often differ from one another in terms of focus, participant location, frequency of interaction and funding. As regards focus and participant location, some accelerators are conceived of as tools for local or regional development. They therefore adopt a more general approach to education, and focus primarily on entrepreneurs in the local community. *Manizales-Mas* and *Working Capital* are examples of this type of accelerator. *Manizales-Mas* is located in the city of Manizales, Colombia and *Working Capital* has accelerators in several Italian cities. Both organisations focus on local startups. It is however, also possible for accelerators to focus on startups within a particular industry, sector of the population, or technology. *Y-Combinator*¹⁷ focuses, for example: on web and mobile applications – while New York's *Count Me In* targets female entrepreneurs. In contrast to *Manizales-Mas* and *Working Capital*, *Y-Combinator* recruits its participants from a large geographical area and brings them to Silicon Valley for three months of intensive training. These differences suggest that one way of categorising accelerators is to locate them on a four-field diagram (see figure 1-1), on the basis of participant location and frequency of interaction. Most accelerators however appear to base their educational strategies on well-known

¹⁶ Some scholars suggest a time 'limit' of three months, but my own monitoring suggests that a significant number of programmes run for more than three months (e.g.: UpTech and the Telluride Venture Accelerator in the U.S.A.) Very few programmes however, last for *more* than six months.

¹⁷ The accelerator credited with starting the accelerator "boom".

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programmes – such as *Y-Combinator* and *TechStars* – and tend to be located in sectors I or II of figure 1-1 (providing intense, residential education to either local entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs who travel to the accelerator location). The programme that I employ as a case study is located in sector II of the figure – providing intense, residential education to entrepreneurs that travel to the accelerator location.

Returning to the theme of accelerator focus, it is clear that many accelerators recruit participants on the basis of the industry to which they belong. In the United States for example: several accelerators target new ventures in the field of health-care – for example: Boston’s *HealthBox* and New York’s *Digital Health Accelerator*. Nonetheless, some accelerators focus on both a particular geographical area and a specific industry – as illustrated by the *Northwest Tennessee Entrepreneur Center* programme – which recruits entrepreneurs from the northern part of the state and from the agricultural sector. The focus of an accelerator appears to influence its method of delivering education. Programmes that focus on startups in a particular area (sectors I and III in figure 1); may for example, find it easier to adapt to the needs of local entrepreneurs.

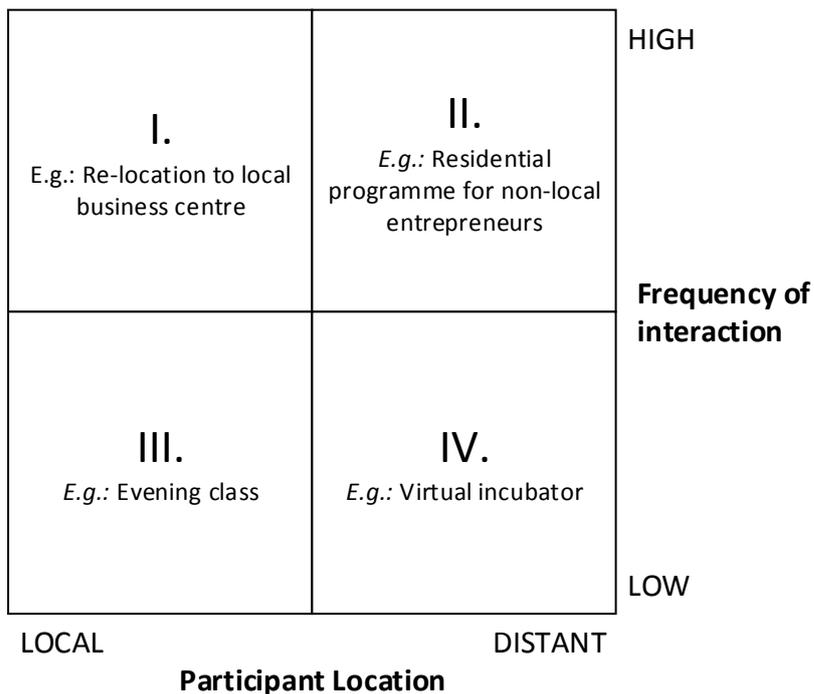


Figure 1-1: Key contextual influences on accelerator design

Where entrepreneurs have already begun to pilot a product or service – or where they have other jobs¹⁸ – the nearby location of the accelerator makes it easier for participants to maintain normal business operations while taking part. Furthermore, participants are often able to stay in their own homes while participating in the accelerator. These factors allow for the possibility of a longer period of education and less frequent interaction between participants and educators – even if they do not require such an adjustment.

Accelerators that recruit entrepreneurs from a larger geographical area face particular challenges. Participants are either required to move to the accelerator location for an extended period of time (usually two to three months), or they travel to the accelerator for regular, short ‘bursts’ of education. Some organisations have experimented with virtual accelerators (for example: *StartupPlays* and *World Accelerator*), but these initiatives do not appear to have had the same kind of impact as more established programmes that require physical participation in their activities. Regardless of the mode of delivery, most accelerator programmes focus on for-profit enterprises. Only a relatively small number of accelerators focus on social entrepreneurs or on startups in the not-for-profit sector – even if this number is growing (Casasnovas & Bruno, 2013). Nonetheless as noted in section 1.6, the environments in which practicing social entrepreneurs operate suggests that there is a need for more programmes that focus on this sector.

When it comes to the funding of accelerators, Susan Cohen (2013b) notes that accelerators are now funded on both a for-profit and not-for-profit (N.f.P) basis. She suggests however, that the first ‘wave’ of accelerators tended to be for profit and often charged participants a proportion of equity in return for their services. In the United States for example, the *Hatch* accelerator in Virginia charges new ventures an 8 % share of their equity, while *LaunchHouse* in Cleveland charges between 1 and 8 %. It is more unusual for accelerators to charge participants for their services, as does the *Women’s Small Business Accelerator* in Ohio – which charges USD \$1 500 for their programme. Cohen (2013b) suggests that the initial for-profit approach is linked to the management of several of the first accelerators by venture capitalists. As accelerators became more visible however, the approach attracted the attention of government. This in turn led to the creation of accelerators that are financed by public funds, if not necessarily owned by governmental agencies. *Eleven* in Bulgaria is for example, funded by the European Union; *The Difference Engine* is funded by regional government in

¹⁸ In the initial stages of a start-up many entrepreneurs ‘bootstrap’ by taking jobs that may not relate to their intended product or service, but which nonetheless enable them to provide for themselves until their ventures become profitable.

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the United Kingdom – and *ilab/Germinate* in Queensland, Australia is also supported with public funds.

Despite the fact that many accelerators rely on funding that is either private or public in character, many accelerators operate on the basis of a mix of revenue streams. The *Grindstone* accelerator in Cape Town for example, is financed by Knife Capital (a private investment firm) and the South African Department of Trade and Industry. Frequently, accelerators are at least partly funded by the industry to which their new ventures belong. For example: the *HealthBox* accelerator in the United States receives funding from the hospital company *HCA* – and the ‘food and beverages services’ accelerator *DrivenDonkey* is sponsored by *2 Gingers Whiskey*. A growing number of accelerators are linked to universities. For example: the *ManizalesMas* programme, which has links to Babson College – and *SearchCamp* in the United Kingdom, which is linked to Teesside University. Among impact-oriented accelerators, Baird, Bowles and Lall (2013) note that 74 % of accelerators receive at least some of their support from philanthropic sources, with just over half of the total funding for impact accelerators coming from philanthropic capital. They also note that impact accelerators appear to be more intent on cultivating non-philanthropic sources of income than ‘traditional’ accelerators, so that two-thirds of impact accelerators are structured as for-profits and one third charge participants fees. It is possible that the charging of fees by impact accelerators is linked to the uncertainty of financial returns from firms that focus on social or environmental impact – which could make the charging of an equity stake less meaningful.

1.7.3 Performance

Accelerator performance is generally measured in terms of *success* and *survival* (Lall, Bowles, & Baird, 2013). By ‘success’ scholars generally refer to either the profitable operation of participating firms one to three years after the accelerator, the sale of the new venture, the public sale of firm shares, or the raising of significant investment. Scholars suggest that ‘significant’ investment implies the raising of \$350 000 (Hochberg & Kamath, 2012) to \$500 000 USD (Lall et al., 2013). Lall et al. (ibid.) suggest that ‘survival’ includes not only firms that are profitable and that have raised investment, but also startups that are still running – even if they are not yet profitable or have raised investment. Accelerators sponsored with public funds however, often include statistics for job creation as an indication of success.

One reason for the widespread interest in accelerators is the apparent success of several high-profile programmes (for example: *Y Combinator* and *Techstars*). These accelerators report relatively high rates of post-accelerator investment, with *Y Combinator* noting that 94.4 % of participating startups received follow-on investment in 2011, with *Techstars* reporting a follow-on investment rate of 53.7

% (P. Miller & Bound, 2011). These figures are accompanied by a relatively low failure rate – with the above scholars reporting a figure of ten to fifteen percent of participating firms. This figure mirrors Hoffman and Radojevich-Kelley's (2012) comment that accelerator managers generally anticipate that about 20 % of their startups will fail. These widely publicised statistics have attracted the interest of not only investors and government, but also nascent entrepreneurs. Consequently, Miller and Bound (2011) suggest that demand for places on an accelerator has outstripped supply. This observation is borne out by the relatively small proportion of startups that are admitted to the most popular accelerators (less than one percent of applicants) – and the increasing size of their cohorts (in recent years *Y Combinator* has had cohorts of up to 84 entrepreneurs). This contrasts with acceptance rates of five to ten percent in other accelerators and in incubators (Lall et al., 2013).

Despite the apparent success of accelerator programmes, investors and scholars advise caution. Hoffman and Radojevich (2012) point out that data on accelerators is relatively new and often provides only a limited, two year perspective. The venture capitalists surveyed by Hochberg and Kamath (2012) expressed concern that the 'hype' created by accelerators' final 'demo day' would artificially inflate their ventures' value and make it difficult for them raise later stage investment – a concern shared by Miller and Bound (2011). The most convincing evidence for the need for caution is however, provided by Hallen, Bingham and Cohen (2013). These scholars conducted a comparative study of new ventures that included not only startups from several different accelerators, but also an equal number of startups that did *not* participate in an accelerator programme. They concluded that effective accelerators provide new ventures with knowledge and resources that they cannot otherwise access, regardless of founders' human and social capital. This finding addresses a common critique of accelerators, namely that their success is due to stringent selection procedures and subsequent 'credentialing' (the legitimacy afforded the startup due to its association with the programme). It also lends weight to my suggestion that accelerators are not only contexts in which entrepreneurs network and obtain resources, but also important environments for learning. Nonetheless, Hallen et al.'s study notes that not all accelerators are effective. Indeed, the startups from several of the accelerators studied performed no better than their non-accelerated peers. They therefore conclude that it is difficult to increase the pace of development in new ventures and that there is presently no theoretical explanation for *how* programmes achieve acceleration.

1.7.4 The 'What' and the 'How' of Acceleration

Despite Hallen et al.'s (2013) suggestion that relatively little is known about firms' development processes within accelerators, several scholars have identified the main contributions made by programmes to participating startups. Furthermore,

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in her doctoral dissertation Susan Cohen (2013a) has begun to explain the accelerator process, using insights from the organisational learning literature. In the following paragraphs I discuss her ideas and the factors that other scholars link to accelerator outcomes.

Several scholars associate the contributions of accelerators with particular aspects of programme *design*. Bill Outlet – the CEO of the MIT accelerator programme – suggests that programmes tend to be designed around space, funding, structure and status (Outlet in Feld, 2012, p. 118), while Hallen et al. (2013) discuss the centrality of time in the accelerator process¹⁹. Cohen (2013b) suggests that “intense mentorship and education” are capstones of accelerators. She also suggests that accelerators accelerate startups by encouraging entrepreneurs to delay ‘doing’ until they have created a coherent strategy (Cohen, 2013a). Her observation is an interesting one, as some scholars link accelerators with the ‘hands on’ approach of *Lean Start-up* strategy (P. Miller & Bound, 2011). In this study I contribute to the literature on accelerators and entrepreneurial learning by showing that some accelerators succeed by emphasising both aspects, but at different stages in the learning process.

A core accelerator assumption is that startup development is a process that can be made to happen in a shorter period of time. Venture capitalist Brad Feld suggests that the accelerator process involves a period of time that is short enough for founders to work with enough intensity to achieve “substantive” development, while avoiding the burnout that a year-long intensive programme implies (Feld, 2012). In more theoretical terms, Hallen et al. (2013) suggest that entrepreneurs often engage in ‘sub-optimal’ learning, so that the task of the accelerator is to optimise the learning process and create a “time compression” economy. However, as Cohen (2013b) points out, the short duration of accelerators is also a factor that enables programmes to enlist the services of experienced mentors who would otherwise shy away from engagement.

Hallen et al.’s (2013) discussion of the role played by time in accelerators is complemented by Outlet’s (in Feld, 2012) observation of the function of *funding*. Funding refers to the financing of entrepreneurs’ living expenses during the accelerator period, as opposed to the provision of investment. It enables entrepreneurs to work fulltime on their startups and to devote energy and thought to their development, without the distraction of part-time work and similar income-generating activities. Hjorth (2013) notes that in the context of incubators, “time to devote to the startup” is a key variable that affects the

¹⁹ Note that Hallen et al.’s (2013) article appears to build extensively on Cohen’s (2013) doctoral research. This is worth noting, as it is otherwise easy to gain the impression that different scholars have arrived at similar conclusions – whereas in reality, several foundational articles on accelerators are informed by the same data. This does not detract from their contribution, but instead underlines the need for more empirical studies of accelerator processes.

development curve of the nascent venture – and it is reasonable to expect a similar effect in the context of accelerators.

A key part of most accelerators is *co-working*, by which most scholars refer to the idea that business development takes place in a social context, primarily in the company of other nascent entrepreneurs. Autlet (ibid.) emphasizes the importance of creating a sense of community among participating startups, so that entrepreneurs can learn not only from visiting speakers, but also from one another. Cohen (2013a) however, suggests that entrepreneurs' learning is stimulated not only by their perception of fellow entrepreneurs as colleagues, but also by the motivation generated by perceiving them as competitors. Autlet (ibid.) notes that entrepreneurs provide one another with emotional support as they interact. Both Cohen (2013a), and Miller and Bound (2011) note that participants engage in problem-solving together with other ventures. The entrepreneurs interviewed by Hallen et al. (2013) described this interaction (and the networks it generated), as the main long-term contribution of the accelerator. Nevertheless, accelerators vary in the way they facilitate this interaction. Many programmes provide participants with shared office space for the duration of the programme, but participants in *Y Combinator* tend to work in their own living quarters and meet one another in weekly sessions that include a meal (P. Miller & Bound, 2011).

The highly structured programme of education and networking associated with accelerators is a characteristic that differentiates them from other types of incubator. Cohen (2013b) for example, contrasts the intensity of accelerator coaching with the incubator processes described by Hackett and Dilts (2004), where tenants frequently do not take advantage of available expertise. In her doctoral research Cohen (2013a) emphasizes the advisory role of the accelerator manager ("director experts"). Despite this emphasis, it is worth noting that Lichtenstein (1992) identifies a similar managerial role in his study of the Fulton-Carroll incubator. Consequently, it is probable that the main difference between incubators and accelerators in this context is not so much a contrast in the advisory role of programme managers, but instead the structured nature of their advice. This suggestion is supported by Cohen's (2013a) discussion at other points in her dissertation and by Miller and Bound's (2011, p. 28) observation that the accelerator process is characterised by "pressure and discipline". Entrepreneurs are expected to make progress within a given timeframe and are provided with a basic structure in which to work.

In practice the accelerator structure discussed by scholars often consists of didactical 'units' that resemble one another in terms of educational strategy, even if they occur in different accelerators. A typical educational 'unit' is composed of a visit by an experienced entrepreneur or business professional, followed by one-on-one coaching (Cohen, 2013m; P. Miller & Bound, 2011). For example: a

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specialist on online marketing might begin by giving a talk on the role of websites or electronic commerce to the entire cohort. The visitor would then follow up their talk by discussing the implications of this input with each one of the participating entrepreneurs, on an individual basis. At times this will be the only interaction the entrepreneurs have with this person, but frequently one or two entrepreneurs will spark an interest in visiting speakers – and will engage with them after the visit. Miller and Bound (2011) suggest that this structure serves not only the purpose of helping entrepreneurs refine their operations, but also enables them to develop their networks – and thus gain long-term access to resources and knowledge. The networking component is thus an important addition to the lean startup methodology that Miller and Bound (ibid.) associate with accelerators – and which is also apparent in programmes such as *The Difference Engine*²⁰. Nonetheless, accelerators appear to place greater emphasis on the future value of networks as they facilitate the development of entrepreneurs' knowledge and networks. Both of these are difficult for entrepreneurs to gain access to in the absence of the 'convening' role played by interventions such as accelerators (Hallen et al., 2013).

In the preceding paragraphs I have outlined several of the contributions accelerators make to entrepreneurs' development and the means by which these are achieved. My discussion has been structured around the key components identified at the beginning of this section, namely: time, space, funding, structure, mentorship and education. In the following paragraph I discuss *legitimacy*, the final component.

Many scholars suggest that an important accelerator activity takes place at the end of the programme, when a 'demo day' is held (Cohen, 2013m; Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012). At this event entrepreneurs 'pitch' their ventures to the general public and in particular, to investors. For this reason, accelerators are sometimes referred to as "seed accelerators", due to their emphasis on helping ventures at the 'prototype' stage to become investment-ready (Hoffman & Radojevich-Kelley, 2012; Lall et al., 2013). Scholars suggest that accelerators play an important role in increasing the perceived legitimacy of participating ventures, by at least two means. Firstly, accelerators' stringent selection procedures reassure investors that graduate ventures have potential. Secondly, the fact that ventures are graduating from an accelerator infers that they have undergone a rigorous process of testing and development. In his discussion of incubators, Hjorth (2013) notes that the media publicity associated with new programmes enhances the legitimacy of participating entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, several other factors also influence venture's legitimacy in the eyes of investors. For

²⁰ Miller and Bound's (2011, p.19) description of the development process followed by *The Difference Engine* (refine, build, show) emphasises several of the processes advocated in lean start-up methodology (build, measure, learn), albeit in a different order (Ries, 2011).

example: where investors are linked to accelerators, they often have the opportunity to get to know potential investees better and are able to cultivate trust. Similarly, where investors are linked to accelerators, they are often in a position to influence the development of ventures that they consider for investment. An accelerator's investor network is therefore extremely important, not only in accelerators oriented towards for-profit ventures, but also in programmes catering to 'social' ventures – as shown by Lall et al.'s (2013) study of impact accelerators²¹. Hoffman and Radojevich-Kelley (2012) suggest however, that the attitudes of *mentors* also have an effect on venture legitimacy – as the continuing engagement of an experienced mentor in a startup is an indication of their confidence in its potential.

1.7.5 Accelerators for Social Enterprises

Until now I have primarily discussed the development of accelerators in the 'for profit' sector. I have suggested that when compared to other types of incubator and to university programmes, accelerators appear to enhance the learning of a larger number of entrepreneurs in a relatively short period of time. When compared with incubators, the investment required of both the entrepreneur and programme funders appears to be lower in accelerators, and the limitations associated with long-term residence at a specific geographical location are alleviated. Furthermore, by selecting the most promising candidates from a comparatively large pool of applications (an additional advantage of the shorter term of residence), accelerator programmes increase their chances of developing successful, high-growth ventures.

The adaptation of the accelerator concept to the education of *social* entrepreneurs has to some extent followed the general structure of the traditional accelerator (a two to four month period of intense training, coaching and practical work). Casanovas and Bruno's (2013) study however, suggests that 'social' accelerators and incubators²² adopt a greater variety of educational approaches than for-profit programmes, both with regards to the delivery of education and in relation to the length of time entrepreneurs spend at the accelerator. Furthermore, in contrast to accelerators that recruit commercial startups, many of the accelerators that focus on social enterprises target entrepreneurs far beyond the borders of their own cities, states and even countries. In the United Kingdom the accelerators run by *The Young Foundation* and *Wayra Unltd* work primarily with social entrepreneurs on a regional basis. In the United States *Good Company* and *Echoing*

²¹ In their study Lall et al (2013) noted that programmes with formal links to investors had higher rates of both success and survival.

²² Although I argue that accelerators are a type of incubator, for convenience I refer to programmes that employ the 'accelerator' approach to incubation as "accelerators" and to programmes that adopt a longer, more traditional approach to incubation as "incubators".

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Green go a step further and train international cohorts. Lall et al.'s (2013) study of 'impact-oriented' accelerators and incubators notes that of the 52 programmes surveyed, 27 % are 'global' in terms of recruitment, 31 % are 'regional' (primarily focusing on Africa and Asia) – and only 43 % recruited from a single country (35 %) – or city (8 %). Consequently, the *reSET* accelerator in Hartford, Connecticut (which supports primarily local social entrepreneurs) is more an exceptional case, than the norm.

From a research perspective, initiatives that recruit social entrepreneurs in a 'global' or 'regional' manner are interesting for several reasons. To begin with, they represent a question that is worth finding the answer to (how can the development of social entrepreneurs in less prosperous regions be strengthened and accelerated?). However, because these accelerators recruit entrepreneurs from a wide geographical area (to which they then return), these programmes also represent a new form of accelerator – and educational strategy. Relatively few studies of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators have been conducted and even less investigation has been made of accelerators for *social* entrepreneurs. In the following section I therefore discuss some of the 'gaps' in accelerator research, from the perspective of entrepreneurial learning. These areas represent opportunities for further study and several of them are explored in this dissertation.

1.7.6 Weaknesses, Gaps and Opportunities

A significant 'gap' in scholars' discussions of accelerator contributions and processes has to do with the relationship between studies of accelerators and the literature on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education. This gap can be expressed in two ways. First of all, it is possible to critique the literature on accelerators for its failure to draw more extensively on scholars who study not only the general phenomenon of learning, but also its context. In the context of entrepreneurship, this translates into a need for studies of accelerators to be informed by *both* the literature on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education. At the moment scholars have only just begun to apply theories of learning to the developmental processes apparent in accelerators – even if Cohen (2013a) and Hallen et al. (2013) have introduced the idea of time compression economies, and mention concepts such as vicarious learning and reasoning by analogy. When scholars do refer to educational scholarship, it is arguable that they sometimes do so at a superficial level (referring to a concept, yet not employing it in an in-depth analysis) – and furthermore, that they at times use educational terms inaccurately. For example: Hallen et al (ibid.) describe education in accelerators as "formal", when from the perspective of educational theorists it is clearly non-formal in character. As I emphasized in an earlier section, the education of practicing entrepreneurs relies primarily on a non-formal approach to education – even if it occasionally relies on both formal and

informal strategies. Accelerators are not exceptions, as they are aimed at a “subgroup” of the population (nascent entrepreneurs), involve “organized, systematic, educational activity”, and are usually located “outside the framework of the formal system” (Coombs et al 1974, cited in Jarvis, 1987, p. 69). The distinction between formal and non-formal education is important to make if future studies are to be embedded in educational scholarship.

The above paragraph suggests that there is a need for accelerator scholars to draw on educational theory and on the work of scholars of both entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education. However, it is just as important to note that when compared with the number of studies on entrepreneurship-oriented learning among students, the numbers of studies of entrepreneurs’ learning in the context of educational programmes are relatively few²³. Consequently, there is an opportunity for a reciprocal exchange of ideas: for accelerator scholars to draw on the entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education literature – and for scholars from these fields to develop knowledge from studies of accelerators.

If an assessment of accelerator research is made from the perspective of entrepreneurial learning (EL), it is useful to discuss the field with reference to the literature review of Peter Erdélyi (2010). Erdélyi suggests that EL scholarship tends to focus on either the individual learner or the organisational context as the unit of analysis. ‘Individual-focused’ studies are portrayed as discussing learning from the perspective of individual cognition or as a particular type of managerial learning. A significant number of articles also discuss EL from what Erdélyi terms a ‘supply’ perspective: focusing on executive education and management training. He contrasts this emphasis of the individual’s role in learning with a second major category of EL scholarship, which discusses learning in the context of networks and systems of innovation. An interesting aspect of Erdélyi’s review is his discussion of the role of non-human objects in entrepreneurial learning. In keeping with Leitch and Harrison’s (2008) argument that entrepreneurial learning cannot be separated from the contexts in which it occurs, Erdélyi posits that a neglected ingredient in entrepreneurial contexts is the domain of ‘objects’. Advocating the use of actor-network theory he argues for a closer analysis of the role played by material objects in entrepreneurial learning. He also echoes Ravasi and Turati’s (2005) concern that EL scholars have been overly concerned with conceptual discussions, at the expense of empirical work.

²³ Note that I distinguish studies of entrepreneurs’ learning in educational contexts from that of studies of management learning in SMEs. I am aware of the large body of research on ‘enterprise’ education, including the series of special issues on this theme in *Education & Training* between 2000 and 2005.

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In contrast to Erdélyi, discussions by Leitch and Harrison (2008) and Taylor and Thorpe (2004) highlight the ‘human’ side of context – emphasising the idea that entrepreneurial learning develops in a social or relational environment. When the social aspect of accelerator scholarship is considered, a weakness of several studies emerges. This weakness has to do with the inconsistent and non-specific use of the terms by which scholars refer to the different actors in accelerators. This flaw relates particularly to scholars’ use of the term ‘mentor’. Cohen (2013m, p. 23) uses the term to refer to both the limited numbers of individuals who coach entrepreneurs throughout the accelerator *and* the large number of visiting speakers who only engage with the entrepreneurs for the space of a few hours (her “four or five mentors a day” group). In her doctoral work (2013a) however, she distinguishes between accelerator managers (“director experts”) and visiting advisors/speakers (“mentors”). Miller and Bound (2011, pp.3, 9, 10) also employ the term “mentor” in their article, but it is unclear exactly who they refer to. In most accelerators, entrepreneurs are coached by at least three main categories of individual: the accelerator manager(s), one or two additional individuals who coach them on a regular basis throughout the course of the programme – and the visiting, ‘thematic’ speakers who provide them with brief, topical coaching in their areas of expertise. In their review of the terms used in the ‘developmental interactions’ literature, D’Abate, Eddy and Tannenbaum (2006) make it clear that although the terms ‘mentor’ and ‘coach’ are occasionally used interchangeably, in scholarly literature ‘mentor’ is generally used for interactions that focus on an individual’s general, long-term development – while the term ‘coach’ is used to denote more short-term development and “practical application”. If we are to deepen our analysis of the impact of the ‘social’ context of accelerators on entrepreneurs’ learning, I suggest that it is important to make a clearer distinction between the different actors involved.

A weakness exemplified by only one of the articles that discuss accelerators, is displayed by Lall et al.’s (2013) foundational article *Bridging the Pioneer Gap*. This article is worth mentioning as it is one of only a few publications that examine programmes that focus on the development of social enterprises. Unfortunately, the article does not distinguish between accelerators and incubators, although my impression is that this information may be available. The article builds on ongoing research conducted in cooperation with several leading institutes (Aspen, Village Capital and ANDES) and its authors appear to have access to a rich data set. However, because an unclear distinction is made between accelerators and incubators, this data can only be used to draw tentative conclusions about accelerator activity in the social sector. Casanovas and Bruno (2013) in contrast, distinguish between accelerators and incubators. Nonetheless, in their study it is apparent that the initiatives they label with each of these two terms are very different from one another²⁴ in terms of duration and educational

²⁴ I.e.: within each group.

strategy. Consequently their study does not really bring more clarity to the field (in terms of distinguishing different types of programme). Instead it highlights the multiplicity of educational strategies that scholars label with the term “accelerator” and graphically illustrates the need for scholars to distinguish between the different forms. For example, by employing categorisations such as the four-fielder diagram I introduced in figure 1-1 (p.37).

In addition to the ‘gaps’ discussed in the preceding paragraphs, many of the scholars whose work I have discussed suggest directions for future research. Miller and Bound (2011) for example, suggest that more study needs to be made of how accelerators’ performance and impact can be measured – to facilitate the comparison of different programmes. More importantly for the purposes of this study, Lall et al. (2013) and Hallen et al. (2013) both identify accelerator *quality* as a key focus for study. They emphasize the need for developing a detailed understanding of what ‘quality’ means in the context of accelerators, given the latter scholars’ observation that not all accelerators are equally successful. In particular; Hoffman and Radojevich-Kelly (2012), and Hallen et al. (ibid.) argue that it is important to learn more about the ‘how’ (or process) of acceleration. Hallen et al. underline the need to understand the interplay of factors that makes the structuring of accelerator education “unclear and critical” (ibid., p.33). Finally, Miller and Bound (2011) suggest that future research should address the possibility of extending the use of accelerators to the development of social ventures. In this dissertation I discuss a series of educational interventions that have done just that. I also begins to address the ‘how’ question identified by several scholars. In other words: the question of which factors constitute ‘quality’ in accelerators, to the enhancement of entrepreneurial learning and hence venture performance.

1.8 Research Purpose

Despite the apparent advantages of the accelerator concept, Miller and Bound (2011) and the Academy of Management (2013) note that little research into this type of entrepreneurship education has been conducted. Unsurprisingly given the rapid proliferation of accelerators, the academic community has been unable to keep pace with the development of the accelerator concept. As a result, until very recently the primary sources of information on entrepreneurs’ learning in accelerators tended to be practitioner-oriented reports such as those of Stross (2012), Miller and Bound (ibid.), and Baird, Bowles and Lall (2013). This phenomenon is readily explained by the recent emergence of this type of entrepreneurship education, with scholars identifying the first accelerator programme (*Y Combinator*) only ten years ago in 2005. Importantly, even less study has been carried out of the ways in which organisations have *adapted* the accelerator concept to the particular needs of social entrepreneurs.

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In previous paragraphs I have suggested that non-formal approaches to entrepreneurship education (such as accelerators) make it easier for practicing entrepreneurs to participate in educational activities – and as a result, optimise their learning. Even so, accessibility is only half of the story and if entrepreneurial learning is to be enhanced, education also needs to be effective. The experience of leading accelerators such as *Y Combinator* and *Cleantech Open* suggests that many entrepreneurs benefit from accelerator activities. However, not all programmes have seen similar success. *GigTank* in Chattanooga, Tennessee for example, noted that only two out of the eight ventures that participated in its 2011 accelerator survived²⁵ (Bradbury, 2013). Nashville's *Jumpstart* accelerator on the other hand, reported a considerably higher success rate of 65 % (McGee, 2013). Figures such as these imply that simply setting up an accelerator programme for new ventures does not guarantee that participating entrepreneurs will be able to learn enough to create sustainable businesses. Instead, it is important to recognise the additional impact of factors such as the business environment and firms' access to finance. Given the focus of this study, it is especially important to understand *how* and *what* entrepreneurs learn as they participate in accelerator activities.

Umbrella organisations such as the *Global Accelerator Network* boast of the high levels of investment associated with their members' programmes²⁶. It is therefore possible that the combination of access to investment and a highly selective recruitment process might be the main reasons for participating entrepreneurs' success. The recent study by Hallen et al. (2013) however, suggests that this may not be the case and that it is instead the quality of the accelerator process that determines venture performance. Entrepreneurs engage in several developmental processes during accelerators; processes that include networking, the formalisation of their enterprises (for example: through a business plan) – and learning. In this dissertation I focus particularly on this latter process: on the role of education in accelerating the learning of social entrepreneurs – and hence, the development of their enterprises.

In this chapter I have suggested that practicing entrepreneurs are more able to participate in shorter, non-formal courses of education than in long-term, formal programmes. I have also identified accelerators as a promising new method of non-formal entrepreneurship education. Furthermore, I have suggested that social entrepreneurs are an important category of learners that educators might target. Despite these promising signs, scholars agree that we know very little about the characteristics of non-formal educational programmes such as accelerators – and that there is a pressing need for studies of this type of

²⁵ I.e.: 25 %

²⁶ <http://gan.co/>

entrepreneurship education (A.o.M, 2013). Moreover, as Baird et al. (2013, p. 4) point out: “the study of *social-impact* focused incubators and accelerators is in its infancy”. It is therefore important to learn more about the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerator programmes – and about the ways in which their learning shapes their development and the development of their enterprises. Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation is to:

Explore the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerator programmes

In chapter two, four more specific research questions are developed from the above purpose. However, these questions are informed not only by this statement of purpose, but also by the theoretical perspectives that I adopt in this study. Although the reasoning behind these questions will only fully emerge in the following chapter, it may be useful for the reader at this stage to view the study’s purpose and research questions together.

The four research questions addressed in this dissertation are:

1. In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators influenced by their experiences and intentions prior to entering the programme?
2. In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs influenced by the non-human ‘objects’ (primarily educational design) that are associated with entrepreneurship education in accelerators?
3. In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs influenced by their interaction with the different human actors within accelerators (managers, mentors, coaches and peers)?
4. In which ways does the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators affect their development and that of their enterprises?

1.9 A Dissertation Road-map

In the next chapter I introduce the reader to the main theoretical perspectives that inform my discussion of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators. The theoretical perspectives I adopt reflect the scholarly contributions that I hope to make. In this chapter I have already introduced other scholars’ studies of accelerators – and naturally I hope to contribute to learning in this field. In particular I hope to expand our understanding of how the non-formal learning environments of accelerators enhance social entrepreneurs’ learning – and hence, the development of their enterprises. It is also my ambition to develop knowledge about accelerators, by discussing the application of the concept in a new context – namely that of the social entrepreneur.

Introduction

In chapter two I draw on the ideas of learning theorist Peter Jarvis. I also make reference to the literature on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education, placing particular emphasis on scholars' ideas about appropriate educational philosophies and pedagogies. It is not however, my ambition to develop any revolutionary insights with regards to adult learning. Nonetheless, I hope that my discussion of the learning of social entrepreneurs will provide learning theorists with some empirically-based insight into the factors that influence the learning process among adults. I have however, higher hopes with regards to making a contribution to the fields of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education. In this area I hope to develop our understanding of the learning process, as regards on the one hand *practising* entrepreneurs – and on the other hand, *social* entrepreneurs. In particular, I hope to make a contribution by introducing non-formal learning environments as a particular context of/for entrepreneurial learning. Importing so to say, this approach from fields where it is more widely discussed – such as youth and development studies (Kirchschlaeger, 2014). It is my expectation that a discussion of this aspect of learning will lend depth to ongoing discussions of pedagogy among scholars of entrepreneurship education (Neck, Greene, & Brush, 2014). By employing an 'engaged' method of data collection and analysis, I also hope to make a small contribution to our understanding of how qualitative research may be conducted in a manner that is both scholarly rigorous, yet also mutually beneficial.

Based on the statement of purpose introduced in section 1.8, and on my discussion of the literature on adult learning, entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education; at the end of chapter two I reiterate my four more specific research questions. In chapter three I describe the case study method used to gather information about social entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators – and to analyse this data. In chapter four I introduce the reader to the social entrepreneurs whose experiences provide the basis for my discussion in chapter five – and to the 'Booster'²⁷ accelerator programme; both of which are studied in order to achieve the purpose of this dissertation. Later on in this chapter I provide a more detailed description of the experiences of four social entrepreneurs. In the final section of the chapter (section 4.5), most of the findings associated with research question four (relating to the outcomes of learning) are located. In chapter five I discuss my findings as they relate to research questions one (the roles played by prior experience and intention), two (the role played by non-human objects) and three (the role of interaction between accelerator managers, mentors, coaches and entrepreneurs). I conclude my dissertation in chapter six, by summarising its contributions and by suggesting possible avenues for future research.

²⁷ In this study I use 'Booster' as a pseudonym for the real name of the accelerator programme.

1.10 A Brief Note on Terminology

This study is primarily about the learning of social entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, I have often felt that the flow of my discussion would be hindered by the unwieldy and repetitious positioning of the adjective “social” before the noun “entrepreneur”. Consequently, unless the context is unclear I usually refer to the individuals who participated in the *Booster* accelerators as simply “entrepreneurs”, “the entrepreneurs” or “participants”. Where this is done, I take it for granted that the reader will understand that the entrepreneurs I refer to are the social entrepreneurs who participated in the accelerator.

Slightly more controversy may be attached to my use of the terms “startup”, “new venture” and “enterprise”. Traditionally, entrepreneurship has been associated with the founding of a new firm and consequently, practitioners often favour the term ‘startup’. In recent years scholars have suggested that this definition does not capture all of the possible implications of entrepreneurship – a term that may refer not only to the creation of a new for-profit firm, but also to the founding of an organisation with a social purpose – or even to the creation of a new organisation by an existing firm. For this reason scholars increasingly use terms such as “new venture creation” (Timmons & Spinelli, 1994) and “venturing” (Kloosterman & Rath, 2003). In this study my primary emphasis is on social entrepreneurs who are engaged in the creation of a new organisation – regardless of whether this organisation is entirely new, or an independent entity sprung from an existing organisation. Consequently, I use the terms “startup” and “new venture” interchangeably – and also refer to the emerging, nascent organisation using terms such as “enterprise” and “venture”. I believe that my use of these terms as equivalents is acceptable in view of the purpose of this study – which focuses on the role of learning in the venturing process, rather than on distinguishing different forms of nascent entrepreneurship. My use of the terms as interchangeable references to a similar, general activity also has its academic precedents in other scholars’ practice (for example: Mullins, 2009).

2 Theoretical Perspectives

In order to build a theoretical foundation for my study of the learning of practicing social entrepreneurs I draw on three main bodies of scholarship, namely the literatures on *entrepreneurial learning*, *entrepreneurship education* and *adult learning*. By doing so it is my intention to address the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ questions inherent in my research purpose – and advocated by scholars such as Hoffman and Radojevich-Kelly (2012). These and other scholars underline the need for a deeper understanding of how accelerators support the learning of nascent entrepreneurs. By adopting these three theoretical perspectives I am in a sense looking at accelerators from two main positions in this chapter. My discussion of entrepreneurship *education* provides the necessary theoretical background for my later discussion of research questions two and three (the influence of human actors and non-human ‘objects’ such as educational design). Here I adopt the position of the ‘accelerator’ and participating entrepreneurs are framed as targets of a programme of entrepreneurship education. As the chapter progresses however, I re-position myself and discuss the accelerator from the perspective of the participants. In theoretical terms this involves framing the participant as both an adult learner and an adult learner who is also an entrepreneur. This background is particularly important for my later discussion of research questions one and four²⁸, but is also necessary in order to provide a more complete answer to question two and three.

In adopting the position of the accelerator I discuss the ‘how’ of entrepreneurship education in accelerators. This question has to do with the *way* in which programmes seek to develop entrepreneurial capacities in participants – and a natural point of departure is the literature on entrepreneurship education. Nonetheless, within this large body of literature I focus primarily on only two themes. Firstly, the literature that Pittaway and Cope (2007a) label “the education of entrepreneurs” – and secondly, pedagogy. In other words, I am mostly interested in publications that discuss the education of individuals that are *already* engaged in starting a new venture, and the philosophies and practices associated with this education.

In adopting the position of the participating entrepreneurs I discuss the ‘why’ of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators – and attempt to uncover the underlying explanations for the success or failure of entrepreneurship education within accelerators. An initial step in this process is the recognition that entrepreneurs are not simply individuals who start and manage businesses, but also adults. I

²⁸ Research question (1) addresses the impact of entrepreneurs’ intentions and previous experience, while (4) focuses on the relationship between learning and enterprise development.

therefore examine the literature on adult learning and in particular, experiential theories of learning – as these are the theories most commonly linked to entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning (Pittaway & Cope, 2007g). Nonetheless, while recognising that the individuals who interact with the educational activities of accelerators are almost always adults, it is important to also understand that they are also *entrepreneurs*. Consequently, it is necessary to allow for the possibility that the occupation or ambition of the adult learner, may also influence the manner in which they interact with accelerator activities. For this reason I integrate insights from scholars of entrepreneurial learning into my discussion of the literature on adult learning.

2.1 The Education of [social] Entrepreneurs

2.1.1 Overview

Although growth has slowed in recent years, entrepreneurship education is one of the fastest growing fields of education in the world today (Finkle, 2007), and is characterised by what Mwasalwiba (2010, p. 20) terms “explosive growth”. Despite this growth, the field is characterised by heterogeneity – with Jones and Matlay (2011) suggesting that this is a natural result of the diversity of the field of entrepreneurship itself. Scholars also note that entrepreneurship education research is relatively immature, with little agreement on core concepts and measurement, widespread dependence on self-reported measures and a large number of cross-sectional studies (Gorman et al., 1997; Pittaway & Cope, 2007a). Despite these challenges, writers agree on several points. Jones and Matlay (ibid., p.702) suggest for example, that there is a shared assumption that entrepreneurship education focuses on the “development of the student for future entrepreneurial behaviour”. There is also general agreement over the *categorisation* of entrepreneurship education programmes, even if scholars associate slightly different foci with the commonly used categories²⁹ (see for example: Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2012; Mwasalwiba, 2010). These categories are briefly introduced below.

Most scholars agree that education *about* entrepreneurship aims to increase learners’ awareness of entrepreneurs and the venturing process – often attempting to make students more open to the possibility of an entrepreneurial career (Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004). They also agree that two objectives of entrepreneurship education can be to equip individuals to start a new venture, *or* to act in an entrepreneurial manner in other contexts (Blenker, Korsgaard, Neergaard, & Thrane, 2011). Here Kirby (2004) and Blenker and Christensen (2010) suggest that education can also operate *through* entrepreneurship, creating

29 I.e.: the distinction between education “about”, “in” and “for” entrepreneurship.

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knowledge by means of entrepreneurial action. Mwasalwiba (2010) however, suggests that there is no need for this fourth category, as strong similarities exist between Kirby's idea of education "through" entrepreneurship and their own concept of education "for" entrepreneurship. Blenker et al. (ibid.) are therefore unusual in omitting the "about" objective and in augmenting the remaining two objectives with a further two. They suggest that entrepreneurship education can also focus on enabling learners to create high-growth firms or social value. It is unclear however, whether any of these scholars actually address education 'during' entrepreneurship (i.e. the education of practicing entrepreneurs). Given the university-oriented focus of many entrepreneurship education scholars, it appears that even education 'through' entrepreneurship is frequently concerned with promoting entrepreneurial behaviour in *students*. The practice of entrepreneurship may therefore only be one of several educational strategies, rather than an end in itself.

Despite the differences outlined above, the majority of scholars agree that entrepreneurship education should *not* be primarily aimed at the "about" objective (awareness-raising), but rather at the development of entrepreneurial behaviours and an entrepreneurial mindset (Blenker et al., 2011; Kirby, 2004; Kuratko, 2005). This view reflects concerns that present education places too much emphasis on knowledge acquisition (Carrier, 2007). There is also increasing consensus around the suggestion that the definition of 'entrepreneurship' (which guides the emphases of entrepreneurship education) should be broadened, so that it not only includes the starting of new business ventures – but also the mindsets, skills and competences associated with innovative behaviour in general (A. A. Gibb, 2002; Neck & Greene, 2011). Several scholars also suggest that it is important to develop new approaches to teaching, due to the distinctive characteristics of entrepreneurship (Kirby, 2004; Kuratko, 2005). As Gibb (2002) points out however, in university settings the adoption of more appropriate pedagogies may be hindered by academic traditions that emphasize standardisation and are based on implicit "contracts" of knowledge delivery, rather than individual development.

As noted earlier, much of the literature on entrepreneurship education adopts the perspective of the university or college, and focuses on the education of *students* (Mwasalwiba, 2010; Pittaway & Cope, 2007a). Indeed, Hytti and Gorman (2004, p. 15) explicitly exclude education for practicing entrepreneurs from their study, on the grounds that it is "training" or "professional development". This attitude contrasts with Gorman, Hanlon and King's comment in an earlier paper (1997, p. 72), in which they noted that the needs of the broader support network for entrepreneurship education are "overlooked completely". Other scholars also note the relative lack of studies on entrepreneurial education for small firms (Curran & Stanworth, 1989), and suggest that studies of entrepreneurship education need to include *all* education activities and not just those "within the

educational system” (Liñán, 2007, p. 237). Liñán suggests therefore that entrepreneurship education should address several stages of entrepreneurial development, which she describes as those of the “potential”, “nascent” and “dynamic” entrepreneur. Gibb (2002) also suggests that entrepreneurship education can be usefully related to different stages of business development, and proposes six steps on the road from “idea and motivation acquisition” to “survival”.

The tendency of scholars to engage primarily with entrepreneurship education in higher education means that the background to subsequent discussions of *pedagogy* tends to be that of the student – and not that of the practicing entrepreneur or small business. This clearly has an impact on some aspects of education (for example: practicing entrepreneurs do not need to be encouraged to engage in startup activities). Nonetheless, there are reasons why it is worth considering the contribution that student-oriented approaches to learning might make to the learning of nascent entrepreneurs. The majority of entrepreneurs are for example, adults – and many teachers of entrepreneurship are keen to adopt philosophies of education that emphasize the values of adult learning. Neck and Greene (2011) explicitly link their approach to andragogy (theories of adult learning), and Gibb (2002, p. 142) emphasizes the role of entrepreneurship education in adding to the value of experience in contexts outside of “the classroom and university”. Other scholars underline the importance of learning by doing – an emphasis that reflects the philosophy of adult learning, even if the connection is not explicitly made (Vanevenhoven, 2013). It is therefore useful to discuss the range of approaches that scholars of entrepreneurship education have used to develop entrepreneurial ability, even if many of these have primarily been used in the context of higher education.

2.1.2 Philosophies of Entrepreneurship Education

In education, scholars often distinguish between pedagogy (theories of learning) and didactics (approaches to teaching). This difference is seldom maintained in the literature on entrepreneurship education (Blenker et al., 2011 are an exception), perhaps mirroring the relative immaturity of the field – or simply a difference in Anglo-American and Continental terminology (Kyrö, 2006). Several scholars do however underline the importance of recognising the educational ‘philosophies’ that undergird particular approaches, with Jones and Matlay (2011) even suggesting that a *shared* philosophy is necessary. Nonetheless, Blenker et al. (2011) cast doubt on the feasibility of such a suggestion, given their argument that different educational objectives appear to rely on distinct ontological ideas about entrepreneurship and how it should be taught. Frequently this idea is reflected in the contrast between scholars’ impressions of the present situation (depicted as dominated by a teacher-centred philosophy of education) – and their image of an ideal situation, which is more student-centred (Carrier, 2007).

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Neck and Greene (2011) link teacher-centred approaches to learning with what they term the “entrepreneur world” and suggest it is associated with older, ‘trait-oriented’ concepts of entrepreneurship. This model of entrepreneurship education is also linked to teaching ‘about’ entrepreneurship, a model that Piperopoulos and Dimov (2014) suggest infers a “single ideal [entrepreneurial] process”. These scholars argue that if students do not fit into the ‘ideal’ mould they are often dissuaded from pursuing an entrepreneurial career. Honig (2004) suggests that models such as these are characterised by “convergent” thinking. He points out that this type of reasoning is not confined to models of the ideal entrepreneur, but is also apparent in the unreflected use of business plans in entrepreneurship education. He argues that if used carelessly, business plans may limit students’ thinking once completed and lead them to perceive entrepreneurship as a linear rather than iterative process³⁰. On a more philosophical note, Daniel Hjorth (2011) draws on Gilles Deleuze in emphasising entrepreneurship education as a *social* and *affective* (rather than primarily cognitive) activity. Hjorth also argues that entrepreneurship education needs to be based more on a ‘paralogical’ (non-rational) perspective. This role infers a pedagogue role that focuses on ‘provoking’ the learner and subsequently helping them *remain* in the “cracks and fissures” in their knowledge, that this provocation creates³¹. As will be seen in my discussion of Jarvis’ theory of learning, Hjorth’s ideas parallel Jarvis’ thinking in many ways and add valuable detail to some of his concepts.

In order to accommodate the many different types of entrepreneurship (and indeed entrepreneur) reflected in the writing of scholars such as Gartner (1990), several scholars suggest that a philosophy of education be adopted that accommodates the distinctiveness of the individual. Vanevenhoven (2013) and Blenker et al. (2011) suggest that such a philosophy is inferred by the interaction of the individual with opportunity, in the entrepreneurial process. They argue that the individual and the opportunity develop simultaneously, with each affecting the other. This implies that *the experience of the individual* is likely to be the point of departure in entrepreneurship education, rather than the content an educator believes the individual needs to assimilate. This provides a credible explanation of why entrepreneurship education may be usefully carried out using approaches grounded in experiential learning theories. The more common explanation (experts and seasoned entrepreneurs learn from experience, therefore students should be taught through experience), is less convincing – as in a university context there is no immediate similarity between the two, apart from their shared adult humanity.

³⁰ Honig (2004) and Johannisson (2005) argue that entrepreneurship involves iterative, rather than linear processes.

³¹ Hjorth draws on the ideas of Homi Bhaba in his discussion of the process of learning.

The idea that an underlying educational philosophy of ‘experience’ exists in many approaches to entrepreneurship education is borne out by the discussions of several scholars. Blenker et al. (2011) note the risk many students run of delaying action until they can see the whole picture, and therefore advocate an action-oriented approach to education. Fiet (2000a) calls for “theory-based activity”. Honig (2004) advocates “learning by inoculation” (the exposure of students to the entrepreneurial experience of failure) – and both Neck and Greene (2011) and Gibb (2002) write of the need for learners to “feel”, or experience the “way of life” of the entrepreneur. Writing in the context of education for practicing entrepreneurs, Johannisson (1992) suggests that educators need to provide input that is close to real life and advocates a strategy of learning-by-doing.

In philosophical terms the emphasis of experiential learning in entrepreneurship education has several implications, not all of which are recognised in the literature. One implication is that by making the individual’s experience a primary focus in education, educators extend the reach of education beyond knowledge, to include affective and conative aspects (emotions and motivation). This fits in well with competency frameworks, which in contrast to many university traditions recognize the importance of these “attributes” (A. A. Gibb, 2002). The difficulty of this approach is however, that it does not fit in well with present structures of higher education. Blenker et al. (2011) argue that entrepreneurship education is not generic and needs to be tailored not only to the type of value entrepreneurs intend to create, but also to the learner’s stage of mindset development. This implies that education needs to be individualised to a far greater extent (Johannisson, 1992; Jones & Matlay, 2011). Hytti and Gorman (2004) link such a shift to increased effort on the part of both staff and students, and to a need for more skill on the part of teachers – to balance the role of teacher and coach. Many educational programmes cater to large groups of students and clearly, it is uncertain whether additional resources for this purpose would be forthcoming. Furthermore, Gibb (ibid.) notes that the didactics (teaching strategies) of many programmes are presently designed for ease of examination. The outcomes of education that seeks to develop not only knowledge; but attitudes, behaviour and mindsets are harder to assess.

Many studies of entrepreneurship education suggest methods for developing behaviour and attitudes (see section 2.1.3). For the most part these entail exposing the learner in some way to some of the realities of entrepreneurial behaviour. For example: Honig’s (2004) “learning by inoculation”, Gibb’s (2002) “way of life” and Kirby’s (2004) “role-models”. Most scholars relate these ideas to the concept of experiential learning or “action-based teaching” (Mwasalwiba, 2010, p. 40). What few scholars explicitly recognise however, is that many of these approaches are rooted in theories of situated learning. This perspective on learning suggests that learning is a ‘social’ process that is ideally carried out in a realistic situation. Consequently, in discussing adult learning and the

development of vocational expertise, Wenger (1998) suggests that it is useful to frame learning in terms of “legitimate peripheral participation”. By this he refers to the development of both identity and expertise through the practicing of behaviour at the ‘edge’ of a profession – for example: through apprenticeship. When entrepreneurship education is viewed through the lens of situated learning theory, many approaches are seen to adopt its emphases. Blenker et al. (2011) draw on Wenger’s concept of “imaginisation” and emphasize the importance of transforming identity. The use of narratives, storytelling, simulations and films (Blenker et al., 2011; Buckley, Wren, & Michaelsen, 1992; Honig, 2004) is an artificial means of ‘situating’ venture ideas in reality, while Gibb’s (2002) “learning through relationships” clearly embeds the learner in the reality of business networks. Kirby (2004) suggests the use of role models, and Blenker and Christensen (2010) discuss the function of practicing entrepreneurs in entrepreneurship education. In a very real sense therefore, situated learning is the unacknowledged guest at the table of entrepreneurship education.

2.1.3 Methods Associated with Entrepreneurship Education

In the entrepreneurship education literature, as noted earlier, a distinction is generally made between the objective of learning ‘about’ entrepreneurship and the objectives which many scholars clearly prefer – of learning ‘for’, ‘through’ and ‘in’ entrepreneurship. Scholars associate the first objective with knowledge-centred teaching methods and suggest that classroom-based methods such as lectures, case-studies and supervised reading are associated with this educational goal (Carrier, 2007; Garavan & O’Cinneide, 1994). These methods are primarily linked to the cognitive aspects of entrepreneurship. For example: to Bird’s (1995) “knowledge about” and to the “managing across a range of functions” that Garavan and O’Cinneide (ibid.) identify with entrepreneurship, and which they link to analytical skills. McMullan and Boberg (1991) suggest that these skills are developed by the practised use of case-studies. As Fiet (2000c) points out therefore, progress in entrepreneurship education does not entail abandoning the knowledge component, but rather framing it in a more applied manner and complementing it with other attributes.

When it comes to the objective of educating learners to *start* new ventures Carrier (ibid.) suggests that business plans are a common tool. Kuratko (2005) links the use of business plans to experiential learning, as the tool gives the impression of being situated in reality. Several scholars however, question the uncritical use of business plans in entrepreneurship education. They note that in real life entrepreneurs often emphasize their business ‘models’ over their business ‘plan’ (Hjorth, 2013) – and that plans tend to foster a ‘single solution’ mindset in learners (Honig 2004, Neck and Greene 2011). Neck and Greene (ibid., p.59) see the use of business plans as part of an educational paradigm that focuses on “planning and prediction”. Along with Blenker et al. (2011) they argue that

contemporary education is characterised by a view of entrepreneurship as a rational planning process that progresses in a linear manner through a series of stages. Scholars such as Kirby (2004), Johannisson (1992) and Benson (1992) suggest however, that entrepreneurship often involves intuition and not always rational decision-making. Read et al. (2009) echo this sentiment and emphasize the idea that entrepreneurial processes are seldom linear and predictable. Indeed, as Rogers and Freiberg (1994) point out, the same is true of modern life! To cope with the uncertainty of entrepreneurship therefore, scholars suggest that educators need to emphasize abilities associated with learning in and from action, for example: by reflecting on “disharmonies and anomalies” (Blenker et al. 2011) and through “action learning” (Honig 2004). The implication is that many of the practical challenges of starting a new venture (i.e. the ‘for’ entrepreneurship objective) can be solved by applying abilities associated with the ‘in’ or ‘through’ entrepreneurship objective.

In order to achieve the objectives associated with the broader goal of developing entrepreneurial attributes – or an entrepreneurial mindset, scholars suggest several methods. In the following paragraphs I group methods according to the general objective associated with them (for example: insight into entrepreneurship or increased self-efficacy). Nonetheless, it is important to note that this grouping is both intuitive and based on scholar’s own accounts, as there is presently little empirical evidence for the effectiveness of these different approaches to entrepreneurship education (Brockhaus, 2001; Kirby, 2004).

A key emphasis in many programmes of entrepreneurship education is on helping learners to gain insight into the nature of entrepreneurial life (Gibb 2002). Many scholars suggest that this is best done by getting learners to experience some part of this reality, either by participating directly in activity or by observing another person in this reality. Methods that involve learners’ participation include *projects* that require them to engage in some form of entrepreneurial activity in society, for example: creating a startup, or testing a product or service (McMullan & Boberg, 1991; Mwasalwiba, 2010; Neck & Greene, 2011). Where real-life practice is difficult to access, other scholars suggest the use of *role-playing*, *simulations* or *games* (Carrier, 2007; Honig, 2004; Hytti & Nieminen, 2013). The emphasis in these methods is on the creation of “life-like environments” (Gibb 2002) and an experience of entrepreneurial behaviour (Vanevenhoven, 2013; Winkel, 2013). These types of experience are what Jarvis (2010) terms “primary” experiences, in that they involve learning through the senses and not only cognitive reflection. Nonetheless, knowledge of entrepreneurial life may also be developed by creating “secondary”, or “vicarious” experiences (Bandura, 1965). Techniques for creating this type of experience include the use of *narratives*, *story-telling*, *films* and visits by practicing entrepreneurs – i.e. *role-models* (Blenker et al., 2011; Neck, Neck & Meyer 1998, cited in Carrier, 2007; Kirby, 2004). Blenker and Christensen (2010), and Katz (1995) discuss the role of practicing

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entrepreneurs in students' learning in particular detail, noting that they provide not only role models, but also opportunities for *participation* and *practice* in entrepreneurial activities such as problem-solving. This type of educational activity makes it easier for learners to identify and begin to imitate what Carrier (2007) terms "expert scripts".

Many of the educational methods noted above serve not only to provide learners with insight into the lifestyle of the entrepreneur, but also with the opportunity to practice entrepreneurial behaviour. Gibb (2002) for example: emphasizes the importance of teaching students how to *learn from relationships*, not least from key stakeholders. This behaviour can be practiced in many of the more action-oriented approaches and reflects the emphasis many scholars place on learning behaviour – for example: Honig's (2004) *action learning*, Neck and Greene's (2011) *reflective practice* and Blenker et al.'s (2011) *appreciative inquiry*. Many of these methods are closely integrated with approaches that seek to provide learners with first-hand experience of entrepreneurial life and are associated with Gibb's (2002) idea of need-oriented learning and Honig's (2004) concept of contingency-based teaching. As Rogers (1969, p. 162) points out, individuals often learn most effectively when they are "on the firing line facing immediate problems". Blenker et al. (2011) therefore suggest that it is important that learners be assisted in learning from experience and reflection, by providing them with *coaching*. This idea is also emphasized by Johannisson (1992), Deakins and Freel (1998), and Cope and Watts (2000) – who all emphasize the role of mentors in helping entrepreneurs to *learn effectively*. Carrier (2007) and Hjorth (2013, p. 52) also note the importance of providing learners with skills when they need them, and particularly emphasize education in the use of *techniques for creative thinking* and "*innovation process tools*".

The above paragraphs discuss educational methods that emphasize developing knowledge and behaviour through experience and reflection. As Blenker et al. (2011) point out however, the development of an entrepreneurial mindset is a challenge that although involving behaviour, goes beyond it and addresses concepts such as self-efficacy and identity. These scholars suggest that narratives and storytelling can be used to not only provide insight into existing models of entrepreneurship, but also possible entrepreneurial futures. They emphasize for example: the capacity to shift roles and identities, a theme that brings to mind Bird's (1995) discussion of role management as an entrepreneurial competency. Frequently, as methods increasingly attempt to address mindsets as opposed to vocational skills, scholars suggest educational techniques that are less clearly linked to traditional concepts of entrepreneurship. Benson (1992) discusses how *classical literature* can be used to stimulate independent thinking in students – and especially the capacity for intuition, which he associates with the study of Emerson's writing. Carrier (2007) also notes Neck, Neck and Meyer's (1998) discussion of how the film "Dead Poets' Society" can be used in teaching

entrepreneurship. These examples suggest that education which seeks to address factors associated with values and philosophy, or motivation and trait drivers may need to call on techniques that draw on sensemaking concepts such as metaphor (R. C. Hill & Levenhagen, 1995) and analogy (Hoggan, 2014). In the field of social entrepreneurship education; Smith, Kickul and Coley (2010) discuss methods for developing individual characteristics that are not directly expressed in behaviour or skills, for example: *empathy*. This leads us to the question of whether any particular educational approaches are linked to the development of social entrepreneurial ability.

2.1.4 Educating for Social Entrepreneurship

Social enterprises are often described as ‘hybrid’ firms, and despite the rise of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its emphasis of the triple bottom line, scholars suggest that social enterprises answer in a unique manner to a ‘double’ bottom line (Borzaga & Defourny, 2001). In other words, their success is not measured only (or even primarily) in terms of profit, but also by social or environmental impact. Scholars also note that social enterprises are often answerable to a different set of stakeholders than traditional firms (communities or interest groups, as opposed to owners)(Kulothungan, 2010). They are therefore subject to specific challenges with respect to governance, as they are expected to take decisions in a more democratic manner than traditional firms (Gunn & Durkin, 2010a). Furthermore, hybrid organisations often aim to diffuse social innovation, rather than maintaining it as a firm-specific source of competitiveness (Haigh & Hoffman, 2012). Importantly, while social enterprises tend to operate in several sectors simultaneously (for example: the private and not-for-profit sector), they are at times also engaged in addressing what Thomas Jordan (2011) refers to as “wicked issues”. In other words: challenges that involve multiple stakeholders, complex causality (often involving societal structures) – and even disagreement over the true nature of the problem.

In view of the challenges outlined above; scholars such as Howorth, Smith and Parkinson (2012) and Griffith (2010) suggest that social entrepreneurs do not need fewer skills than traditional entrepreneurs, but rather *more*. In other words, they cannot abandon traditional managerial competencies in order to focus on the unique challenges of social innovation. Instead they must add new abilities to the repertoire of the traditional entrepreneur. For this reason, surveys of the capabilities associated with social entrepreneurship³² often include abilities that are similar to the capabilities associated with traditional entrepreneurship (T. L. Miller et al., 2012). Scholars have suggested however, that additional abilities are needed; including the ability to manage a hybrid identity (W. K. Smith, Besharov,

³² The majority of these overviews are based on the contexts of North American or Western European social entrepreneurs.

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Wessels, & Chertok, 2012), skills in measuring social impact (Brock & Steiner, 2008; Kickul, Janssen-Selvadurai, & Griffiths, 2012), empathy (B. R. Smith et al., 2010) and the monitoring of policy (Buchanan, 2010; Gunn & Durkin, 2010c).

Despite the greater challenges associated with educating for social entrepreneurship, until now fewer scholarly articles have been published on 'education for social entrepreneurship and innovation' (ESEI³³) than for traditional (for-profit) forms of entrepreneurship education – even if the ESEI literature displays similar characteristics. For example: most ESEI scholars address the education of students in higher education (Kickul et al., 2012; B. R. Smith et al., 2010) – and the role of reflection and experiential learning is emphasized (Dees, interviewed by Howorth et al., 2012; Worsham, 2012, p. 448). The usefulness of including practicing [social] entrepreneurs in education is also noted – with the late J. Gregory Dees (ibid.) noting that *shadowing* is a useful method for helping students learn more about the day-to-day life of the social entrepreneur.

In their discussion of the competencies associated with social entrepreneurship; Smith, Kickul and Coley (2010) suggest that social entrepreneurs need to possess a distinct capacity for *empathy*. They underline the role of experiential learning in developing empathy – but unusually, their focus is not on helping students experience an aspect of entrepreneurial activity – but rather the situation of the disadvantaged. Smith, Kickul and Coley (ibid.) suggest that their use of the *Star-Power* simulation (or game) plays an important role in helping students develop empathy with disadvantaged individuals in contexts characterised by poverty. They describe this exercise as a simulation and relate it to the experiential learning cycle of Kolb, with particular emphasis on the role of concrete experience and reflection. Importantly they suggest that the simulation stimulates learning in several area including both the affective (learning about the emotions associated with poverty), the cognitive (learning about the structures associated with poverty) and self-concept (learning about one's own capacity to initiate change).

Brock and Steiner (2008) note that many university courses in social entrepreneurship include service-learning in their syllabi. Service-learning in the context of ESEI has to do with the linking of the learner to a real-life social problem or social enterprise. In this way the learner is able to experience many of the activities of the social entrepreneur first-hand. Examples include Syracuse University's student consultancy programme that links business school students in the United States with townships in South Africa – and Universidad de los Andes' programme (Colombia), in which students cooperate with social entrepreneurs in identifying and beginning to solve social problems (Brock,

33 For the sake of brevity, in this study 'entrepreneurship education' is at times abbreviated as 'EED', while 'education for social entrepreneurship and innovation' is abbreviated 'ESEI'.

2008). Bloom (2006) discusses Stanford's Social Entrepreneurship Collaboratory (SE Lab). Many of the pedagogical methods he describes are also identified by Howorth & Smith (2012), in their discussion of education for practicing entrepreneurs. For example: learner-centredness, co-creation, peer-learning and an interactive learning environment. In keeping with Fiet (2000c) Bloom (ibid.) also notes that theoretical frameworks are an important foundation that undergird the design of participants' ventures. Although he does not refer to Problem-Based Learning (PBL), his description of the Stanford approach is clearly similar and he notes among other things the important role played by "a design problem" as a focus for the practical application of theory.

Publications on the education of practicing social entrepreneurs are far less common than discussions that focus on the education of students. Carole Howorth and Susan Smith (2012) are an exception and discuss ESEI in the context of two British development programmes for entrepreneurs (in which social entrepreneurs participated). Howorth and Smith base their discussion on a blend of experiential and social learning theories – drawing for example on Schön's (1983) concept of the "reflective practitioner" and Lave and Wenger's work on "communities of practice" (1991; 1998). They underline the importance of a 'situated' approach to education and note the use of methods such as "coaching, action learning, business shadowing, and business exchanges" (p.376). In keeping with Johannisson (1992), Howorth and Smith also emphasize the role of peer-coaching among entrepreneurs and consequently, the vital importance of creating a climate of trust. In her doctoral dissertation, Smith (2011) discusses a related programme and adopts a networked learning perspective in addition to that of situated learning. She suggests that practicing entrepreneurs "co-construct" the curriculum of the programmes they participate in and that educators often take on more of a facilitative, rather than instructional, role. Drawing on Hodgson and Reynolds (2010) she notes characterises this type of learning as "relational", so that a key task of her "enablers" of education is to create a positive learning environment (pp.263-4).

Although Smith's (2011) discussion of the education of practicing entrepreneurs is not restricted to social entrepreneurs, several of her ideas appear to be relevant to both categories. Perhaps most important are her ideas on "learning spaces" and identity. She notes the existence of four types of socially constructed learning space: peer-to-peer, social, reflective and peripheral (p.226). Peer-to-peer 'spaces' are created through the dialogue of entrepreneurs with one another, on the basis of a shared situation. Social spaces may be created in the unstructured times around programme events – for example: in tea-breaks or on car journeys. Reflective spaces represent the engaging by individuals in reflection, either alone or in a group – while peripheral spaces involve the transfer of learning either into non-venture related areas (such as home or family); or into the future, after the programme. Smith also comments on the development of a learner 'identity' by

participants, as entrepreneurs gradually move from seeing themselves as “impostors” to viewing themselves as leaders and enterprise “delegates”.

2.2 A Theoretical Foundation for Learning

In the above sections the formation of the social entrepreneur has been discussed in terms of the abilities required for the task and the ways in which educational institutions have sought to develop these abilities in the individual. Clearly, a lot has been written about both entrepreneurial ability and education for entrepreneurship. It is therefore surprising that scholars suggest that we know remarkably little about which educational approaches work (Kirby 2004). Gorman et al. (1997) and Pittaway and Cope (2007) link this lack of progress to the failure of scholars to ground their work in disciplines that have a strong theoretical base – such as education, management learning and adult learning theory. My brief review of the literature suggests that their critique is justified and that many scholars prefer to describe an approach and its impact, without discussing *why* the approach succeeds or fails from a theoretical perspective. For example: Blenker and Christensen (2010) have written a useful article on the various roles that practicing entrepreneurs can play in entrepreneurship courses. They do not however, explain in theoretical terms why the inclusion of entrepreneurs might be useful – even if they make brief reference to “situated” and “action” learning. Honig (2004), and Neck and Greene (2011) on the other hand, do refer to underlying theories of learning (Piaget and Schön). They are however, more of an exception than a rule. It therefore appears that the field of entrepreneurship education is not yet fulfilling its potential as a research field, in that it presently does not borrow from theories of learning at sufficient *depth*, in order to explain outcomes. This in turn makes it difficult for scholars to ‘return the favour’ and contribute to the development of these theories.

Suggesting that much of the entrepreneurship education literature is weak in terms of theory, does not mean that it is theory-*less*. Many scholars emphasize the importance of experiential learning (Gibb 2002, Mwasalwiba 2010, Winkel 2013), suggesting that reflection is important (Neck & Greene 2011), or arguing that an “action-based pedagogy” is needed (Carrier, 2007, p. 156). It is clear therefore, that many scholars have developed what Rae (2004) refers to as “practical theories”: informed insights into the underlying causes of what they observe. Some researchers move beyond ‘practical’ theory and link their own experience to scholars whose work underlines the importance of experience and reflection (for example: Dewey, Kolb, Piaget and Schön)(Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004; Johannisson, 1993). However, with very few exceptions (for example: Honig, 2004; Pepin, 2012) scholars make only superficial reference to the content of these theories and do not take into account later developments or critiques. By using theory in this manner, scholars give the impression that their studies build on the ideas of others – but in reality they do not always allow these ideas

to challenge and develop their perspectives. In order to begin to rectify this situation, I suggest that it is useful to discuss programmes of entrepreneurship education (such as accelerators) from the perspective of the *learner*. Scholars of learning portray the individual as a person who engages in learning throughout their lifetime (Gagné, 1984). Education may therefore be reasonably framed as an intervention into the ongoing learning of an individual, in an attempt to *enhance* this learning – often in a particular area, with a particular end in mind. The effectiveness of the educational process is consequently difficult to assess, without reference to the learning of the individual.

In this study I adopt Mumford's (1999) definition of learning as “an emergent, sense-making process in which people develop the ability to act differently, comprising knowing, doing and understanding why”. This characterisation reflects the emphasis of other definitions employed by scholars of entrepreneurial learning³⁴, on the impact of learning on the individual's *capacity* for new patterns of action or thought – regardless of whether this ability is translated into behaviour. However, in order to discuss the learning of entrepreneurs from a more theoretical perspective, I suggest that it is important to move beyond the definition of learning, to discuss the theoretical constructs that undergird this field of study, namely adult learning. In particular, I suggest that one of the developments of Kolb's theory of experiential learning is particularly useful, namely Peter Jarvis' (2010) “existential” theory of learning. Jarvis' ideas are useful first of all because they take into account many contemporary ideas about adult learning. Furthermore, Merriam and Caffarella (1991, p. 259) note that his theory is “refreshingly comprehensive”, and that it takes into account the ‘social’ and ‘situated’ nature of learning. As already noted this emphasis is important, given that many scholars of entrepreneurship education discuss didactical techniques that scholars of learning would instinctively link to not only experiential, but also social theories of learning.

2.2.1 Dewey, Experiential Learning and Andragogy

Many scholars of entrepreneurial learning have noted that entrepreneurs tend to learn by experimenting and from experience – including failure (Cope, 2011; Jenkins, 2012; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001; Politis & Gabrielsson, 2005). Given these emphases, many publications make reference to scholars whose work emphasizes the role of experience in learning – and primarily to David Kolb (1984; 1975). However, Kolb is only one of several scholars whose work has contributed to contemporary ideas about experiential – and adult – learning. Kolb's ideas frequently draw upon the thinking of scholars such as John Dewey and Malcolm Knowles – and Jarvis is in turn influenced by all three scholars.

³⁴ For example: Cope and Watts' (2000) citation of Huber's (1991) definition.

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Consequently, it is important to briefly discuss the emergence of experiential theories of learning – and their main traits.

John Dewey was an American philosopher and educator whose work discusses how experience and learning relate to one another. His early work³⁵ was based on his experience as an ‘engaged’ scholar in the Chicago “laboratory” school. His later work³⁶ was written in the context of tensions between traditional models of education and more “progressive” ideas. Dewey (1938, pp. 28, 35) argued that learning is based upon the past experience of the individual, affecting not only the identity of the learner, but also the way in which they make sense of new experiences (his “experiential continuum”). Dewey suggested that learning consists of individuals moving through a series of “situations”, by which he referred to the interaction between the internal state of the individual and their external environment. He emphasized that educators too often focus on the learning environment, while paying little attention to the internal state of the learner (their “powers and purpose”)(*ibid.*, p.45). These ideas modify the role of educators, so that their tasks include being aware of the ‘direction’ of experience (the “long look ahead” *ibid.*, p.87) – and the creation of an environment conducive to positive experiences.

In addition to Dewey’s emphasis of the continuity of experience, he also discussed issues of “non-learning”, which Jarvis (1987) develops in his own writing. Dewey noted for example: the existence of “collateral” learning (the ‘accidental’ learning of enduring attitudes, habits and preferences) – and its impact on future experiences of learning. He linked this type of learning to the issue of *meaning*, in that he emphasized the importance of learning being meaningful to the individual in the present, and not simply as preparation for the future. This idea is echoed in the writings of other influential educators such as Rogers (1969). Rogers argued that learning is affected by the degree to which learners perceive subject matter to be relevant for their own purposes, an idea reflected in Gibb’s (2002) suggestion that entrepreneurship education be based on a “need to know” logic.

Despite the above contributions, the ideas that entrepreneurship educators most consistently appear to draw upon are those of Dewey’s “method of science”. In other words: his concept of progression and his view of learning as a social process. Dewey’s philosophy of learning centres on experimentation and reflection. He recommends that learners be encouraged to first of all take action, before observing the consequences of their actions and reflecting on how they might adapt their behaviour to create other outcomes. This logic is clearly reflected in Neck and Greene’s (2011) recommendation that the

³⁵ For example: *Democracy and education* (1916).

³⁶ For example: *Experience and education* (1938).

entrepreneurship education process be based on “doing then knowing”. Dewey’s ideas are also reflected in Blenker et al.’s (2011) advocacy of the “appreciative inquiry” technique, which is based on an understanding of learning as a social process. He suggests that individuals learn not only through experimentation, but also through their interaction as members in a community. Once again, this idea has implications for the role of the educator: positioning them as moderators of group processes and even group members. To this role Dewey added that of the ‘designer of progressive experiences’, which I interpret to mean that one of the educator’s roles is to lead the learner into developmental experiences (Dewey, 1938, p. 79). This infers that the enhancement of learning requires that the educator be able to envision a ‘next step’ which the learner not only has the capacity to attain – but which they are also motivated to attain, due to the relevance of the new challenge to their own purposes. Aspects of this idea are clearly seen in Blenker et al.’s (2011, p. 422) discussion of “progression” and “building blocks” in entrepreneurship education.

The significance of Dewey’s contribution to theories of learning is witnessed to by the fact that with the exception of Piaget, he is the only scholar writing before the 1970s, to whom researchers in the field of entrepreneurship education regularly refer to. In the 1970s however, an increasing interest was shown in education for *adults* (Freire, 1972; Knowles, 1970; C. R. Rogers, 1969) – and in *experiential* learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975). Dewey’s influence is easily traced in Kolb’s work, with clear similarities between Dewey’s cyclical “method of science” and Kolb and Fry’s “experiential learning cycle”. In contrast, Knowles does not appear to mention Dewey at all in his early writing, acknowledging instead his debt to Gagné and Maslow. Experience is however, a key factor in his discussion – as is the task of establishing “a climate conducive to adult learning” (Knowles, 1970, p. 54). Nonetheless, phrases such as “experience being defined as the interaction between an individual and his environment” (*ibid.*, p.51) strongly suggest that Knowles draws extensively on Dewey, while failing to acknowledge this dependency.

Knowles is rarely cited by entrepreneurship education scholars, but his ideas are nevertheless influential, with scholars such as Béchar and Toulouse (1991) employing his controversial term “andragogy” – and Neck and Greene (2011, p. 56) placing themselves “firmly” in the andragogy “camp”. “Andragogy” was the term that Knowles coined for the ‘science’ of adult education. He suggested that the study of adult education was founded on different factors than those upon which the study of child education (i.e. pedagogy) is based. These factors include the association of child education with a ‘transmittal of knowledge’ orientation to teaching, the self-directed nature of adult learning, the accumulation of experience as a resource for learning, a readiness to learn and the immediacy of knowledge application (Knowles, 1970, pp. 37, 39). When Knowles published his book on andragogy his use of the term was however, widely criticised. Several

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prominent scholars applauded his development of the field, but argued against his suggestion that learning in children is distinct from that of adults (Day and Baskett 1982; and Tennant 1986; cited in Jarvis, 2010, p. 129). Despite a recent revival in the use of the term (for example: Forrest & Peterson, 2006), Jarvis (ibid.) therefore concludes that Knowles' work has gained popularity primarily because of its ideological content (the self-directed adult) and its practicality. Knowles is nevertheless an important, if unacknowledged background figure and many scholars' discussions revolve around concepts that he was instrumental in developing. For example: Markowska (2011) identifies Bandura (1977) as a key influence on research that emphasizes the role of goals in self-directed learning – but it was Knowles who first discussed the role of learning contracts in 1970. It is also worth noting that Knowles (ibid., p.273) was one of the first scholars to discuss models of competency in relation to adult learning – a theme that has now proliferated within the literature on entrepreneurship education.

Despite their apparent unfamiliarity with the ideas of Knowles, many scholars of entrepreneurship education are clearly familiar with the work of David Kolb. Kolb drew on the work of Kurt Lewin (1951) on personality, leadership and teaching styles, and learning in small groups. Kolb developed a four-stage model of experiential learning that is regularly referred to by scholars of entrepreneurship education and learning (for example: Man, 2007; Politis, 2005). His model consists of a cycle that moves between concrete experience, observations and reflections, the formation of abstract concepts and generalisations, and the testing of implications of concepts in new situations / active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). Jarvis (2010) suggests that the model has remained popular because of its relative simplicity, but argues that it does not do justice to the complexity of learning. He also notes that many scholars ignore Kolb and Fry's (1975) suggestion that learning can begin anywhere on the cycle – for example: with the formulation of abstract concepts, rather than with concrete experience. By ignoring this possibility, the model may be used to support arguments that suggest that experiential learning theories are primarily about experimentation, or 'doing then reflecting'. This does not reflect the content of the theory.

In addition to his development of a model of experiential learning, Kolb is often associated with learning styles: the idea that individuals have different preferences as to how they learn. Kolb (1984) suggested that four learning styles (or types of learner) exist³⁷, that are each linked to particular stages of the experiential learning cycle. Entrepreneurship scholars such as Johannisson (1993) appear to draw on these concepts when they suggest that entrepreneurship is associated with action learning (i.e. learning that begins with "active experimentation"). What is problematic is that Kolb et al. (1986) subsequently associate each stage of the

37 The "diverger", "assimilator", "converger" and "accommodator".

learning cycle with a particular *type* of managerial competence, associating for example: affective competencies with the stage of concrete experience – and behavioural competencies with the active experimentation mode. This would imply that entrepreneurs who supposedly have a preference of experimentation, would become proficient primarily in behavioural competencies such as decision-making, but less good at relational aspects. Such an idea does not seem to be supported by studies of entrepreneurial behaviour that emphasize the importance of relational skills (Man, Lau, & Chan, 2002). Jarvis (2006a, p. 139) points out that if the framework upon which learning styles are based is an oversimplification, then there is a risk that the learning styles themselves are “even more suspect”.

Recent studies of learning (or thinking) suggest that learning ‘style’ is far more complicated than Kolb suggested. Sternberg and Grigorenko (1997) for example, have conducted empirical research that suggests that “thinking” style may be a more accurate term than “learning” style. They also underline the idea that styles are situationally dependent, vary across the individual’s lifespan, and need to be understood with reference to at least five factors (function, form, level, scope and leaning). In the entrepreneurial learning literature, Diamanto Politis (2005) suggests that entrepreneurs may transform similar experiences into different kinds of knowledge, on the basis of their preferred ‘mode of transformation’. Drawing on Sarasvathy’s (2001) theory of effectuation, she argues that some entrepreneurs transform experience into knowledge in an exploitative manner (emphasising reliability and predictive value), while others do so in a more exploratory manner (emphasising control and variety). Politis bases much of her theorising on the work of Kolb, but acknowledges that his work has been critiqued for its failure to take into account the role of context in the learning process. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that the value of Kolb’s ideas to scholars of entrepreneurial learning; lies not so much in the accuracy of his model, but rather in his directing attention to the role of experience and experimenting in learning. What entrepreneurship scholars need to be aware of however, is that the field of experiential learning has developed so much since Kolb, that it is no longer sufficient to suggest that education should be based on experiential methods. Weil and McGill (1989) point out that there are at least four main families of experiential learning theories with distinct assumptions and emphases – an idea reflected in the later work of Tara Fenwick (2001). In order to be credible as scholars of education, researchers of entrepreneurship education must therefore be more specific about the meaning and role of “experience” as it relates to entrepreneurship. We also need to build on theories of learning that take into account recent developments in the study of adult learning and education. I suggest that the work of Peter Jarvis provides one such update.

2.2.2 Jarvis: Developing Kolb and Others

As noted earlier, Peter Jarvis' "existential" model of learning is acknowledged as being one of the more comprehensive models (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). This is to a large extent a result of his attempt to integrate the work of others into his own thinking. Although he surveys many of the main learning theorists in a manner similar to Illeris (2003), what makes Jarvis' work interesting is that he also enlisted the help of *practitioners* of adult education. Motivated by his dissatisfaction with the limited applicability to adult education, of learning theories based on the behaviour of children or animals, Jarvis went 'on tour' in the mid-1980s. He conducted nine workshops in the United Kingdom and the United States, asking participants to analyse learning incidents in their own lives and to discuss their subsequent conclusions about learning. He then introduced Kolb's model and asked participants to either comment on its relevance – or, if they felt it was necessary – to reconstruct the model to better reflect their own experience. Based on the ideas of these participants³⁸, Jarvis created a model that reflects more of the complexity of learning. Despite this process he is somewhat critical of the model that he developed – suggesting for example: that it still does not capture learning in sufficient complexity, and that he has underestimated the role of emotions in learning (2006a, p. 12). Nevertheless, his model is a significant improvement on the work of Kolb, as it takes into account among other factors: the bodily sensations of experience and the influence of the social situation. I therefore suggest that Jarvis' model of adult learning is one of the more suitable models upon which to base a discussion of social entrepreneurial learning. Consequently, in the following sections I outline his model in more detail, paying particular attention to the distinctive way in which he depicts the role of the person, the social context, experience and the transformation of experience. Where relevant, I integrate the ideas of scholars of entrepreneurial learning into my discussion.

2.2.2.1 The Person

Central to Jarvis' understanding of learning is his understanding of the 'person'. Jarvis uses this term in a particular manner to refer not simply to the individual learner, but rather to emphasize the constitution of the individual as a "whole person: body, mind, self – life history" (Jarvis, 2006m, p. 8). Jarvis adopts a constructivist perspective on learning that emphasizes the idea that individuals' understandings of themselves and their environments are shaped by their interpretations of experience. In other words, *meaning* is a key idea in Jarvis' thinking. Consequently, he suggests that what individuals perceive is not *the* world, but rather their construction of it, their "life-world" (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 14). This is an important idea for entrepreneurship studies, as some scholars (most

³⁸ This phase of his study involved 200 practitioners.

notably Johannisson, 1992) argue that “the creation and communication of meaning” are vital aspects of entrepreneurial capability. In other words: it is entrepreneurs’ ability to envisage a *different* meaning with regards to existing resources that is the bastion of their success.

Despite Jarvis’ (2006) emphasis on the meaning-making of the individual, he rejects dualism (the sharp distinction between the body and the mind) and underlines the idea that it is the ‘whole’ person that learns: “learners are whole persons rather than a body or a mind; they are both material and mental” (ibid., p.13).

Jarvis suggests that individuals construct their selves on the basis of the meaning that they attach to experience and that these meanings are stored in memory to form “life history”. Importantly however, he suggests that many aspects of experience are not reflected upon before being stored in the individual’s memory, with this being a key difference between the learning of the child and the adult. Children rely to a greater extent than adults on what Jarvis terms the “preconscious”: in that the mind transforms sensations into memory without the individual being aware of this process. Preconscious processes of memorisation result in “incidental”, or “self-learning”: learning that constantly takes place throughout the life of the individual, but which they are generally unaware of. Jarvis associates this type of learning with tacit knowledge and suggests that attributes such as self-confidence, self-esteem, identity and maturity are learned in this way. With regards to *entrepreneurial* learning, Politis (2005) suggests that three specific aspects of the individual’s life-history influence the ways in which individuals transform new experiences into knowledge. She suggests that startup, management and industry-specific experience are especially important – as they often provide individuals with an understanding of problem-solving and a basis upon which to recognise opportunity.

In addition to Jarvis’ discussion of the influence of life-history on learning, he also suggests that individuals can engage in more conscious, ‘purposeful’ learning. This type of learning has to do with new knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values and even emotions – and involves an “appreciation of the senses” (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 25). He underlines nonetheless, that purposeful, or “intentional” learning is always accompanied by incidental learning.

Jarvis’ concept of the person is important for an understanding of his discussion of the learning process. This is because he believes that learning is associated with the transformation of experience (more of this below). In a very real sense, Jarvis’ perspective of the person centres on the idea that ‘you are your experiences’, with the term “biography” representing the individuals collected experience of meaning. His vision of learning is therefore one of an ongoing process of “becoming”, in which an iterative learning process begins with “the

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whole person in the world” and ends with “the changed whole person in the world”. This characteristic focus on the whole person is a trait that leads him to describe his approach as an “existential” theory of learning. His use of the term resonates with that of Neergard et al. (2012), who discuss the need for entrepreneurship education to address issues of identity, emotions and “deep beliefs”. It also reflects Rae’s (2005a) observation that a key aspect of entrepreneurial learning involves the development of identity – and that this development is not only a cognitive process, but also infused with emotion.

When Jarvis’ distinction between preconscious and purposeful learning is related to the theme of entrepreneurial capabilities, its relevance becomes clear. Many of the factors associated with entrepreneurial ability, such as Gibb’s (2002) “self-confidence and self-belief”; appear to be learned at a preconscious level – while other abilities may be learned using more intentional strategies. Both types of ability are nevertheless learned through experience, which suggests that scholars are correct in emphasising the role of experience in entrepreneurship education and learning. Here Erikson’s (2003) discussion of the development of entrepreneurial self-efficacy is useful. He draws on Bandura’s (1986) social-cognitive theory to suggest that entrepreneurs’ self-efficacy is developed through experiences of mastery, vicarious experience and social experience. Jarvis’ understanding of experience is however, not necessarily identical to that referred to in publications on entrepreneurial learning. It is therefore discussed in more detail below.

2.2.2.2 Experience

For Jarvis the concept of experience needs to be contrasted with its opposite, namely the situation in which individuals experiences harmony with themselves and their environment, and therefore take their “life-world” for granted. Here he draws extensively on the ideas of Schutz and Luckmann (1973). He suggests that the person constructs a relationship with four main elements in their world and that much of the time these relationships are taken for granted and not reflected upon, nor transformed in any manner. In the diagram below, he represents this taken for granted nature by an unbroken arrow. Two-way arrows represent two-way relationships (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 15).

Person to person:	I <> Thou (you)
Person to phenomenon (thing/event)	I > It
Person to a future phenomenon	I > Envisaged Thou or It
Person to self	I <> Me

As long as the person is in harmony with their taken-for-granted life-world, little learning occurs. Jarvis suggests that learning is linked to a particular category of

experience, namely *episodic* experience. He uses this term to distinguish episodes of awareness from the individual's collected 'biography' of experience (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 73). When individuals are confronted with a novel experience their sense of harmony with their life-world is interrupted and they must deal with this in some way. Jarvis terms this experience of disharmony *disjuncture* and suggests that it occurs "when our biographical repertoire is no longer sufficient to cope automatically with our situation" (ibid., p.16). He represents this interruption of harmony by placing a double slash between "I" and the factor to which "I" relates. For example:

Person to phenomenon (thing/event)

I //> It

When an individual encounters an experience of disjuncture, learning occurs through their *transformation of the experience*. In other words: by the attachment of meaning to sensation, so that the disjuncture is resolved. In order for this meaning to become part of our biography, Jarvis suggests that it needs to be practiced (or used) in some way. The more often the individual is able to use the newly acquired meaning, the better they commit it to memory. This mechanism provides a theoretical explanation for several of the recommendations of experiential learning – for example: its emphasis on learning by doing and its suggestion that knowledge must be seen to be relevant to the needs of the learner (C. R. Rogers, 1969, p. 158). It is also coherent with scholars' discussions of the role of critical incidents in entrepreneurs' learning (Jason Cope & Gerald Watts, 2000) – and the potential of failure to enhance entrepreneurial capabilities (Deakins & Freel, 1998; Politis, 2005). Jarvis' discussion of disjuncture is however, particularly relevant to Hjorth's (2011) emphasis of the role of "provocation" in entrepreneurship education. Indeed it is possible to argue that the main difference is one of perspective, with Jarvis emphasising the process of learning and Hjorth focusing more on the instrument that initiates the process.

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Jarvis models the simplest form of the transformational process describes in the preceding paragraphs in the following manner:

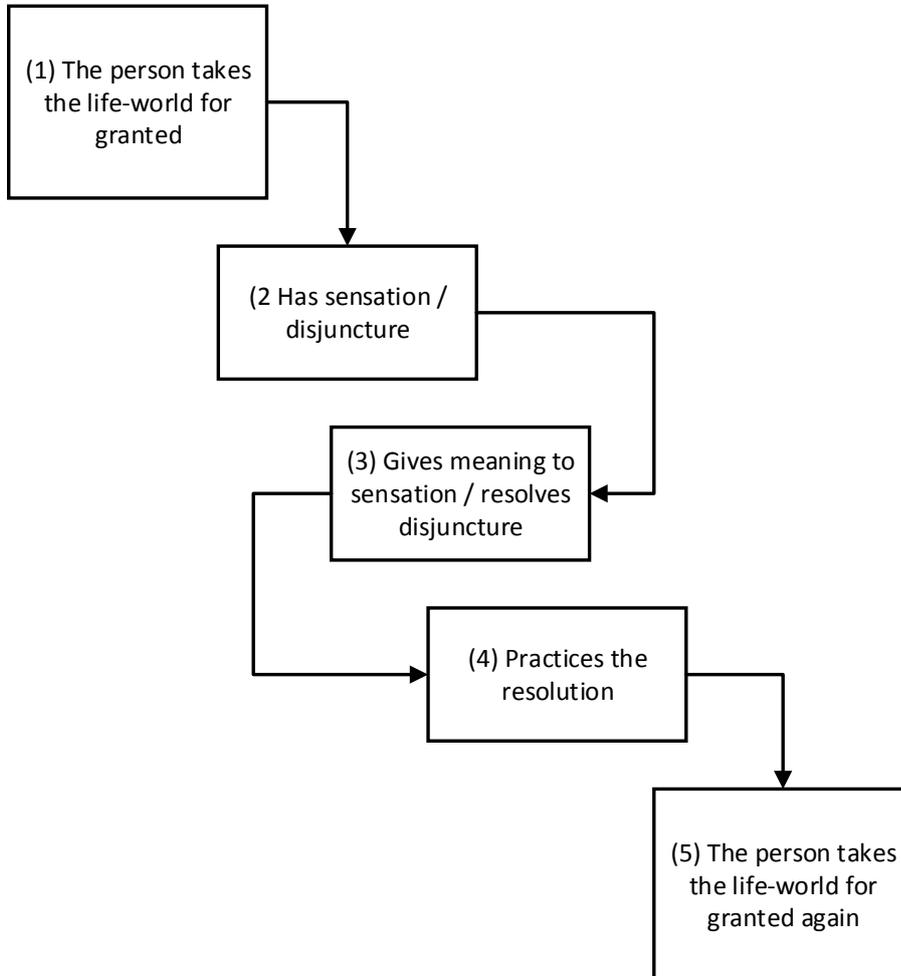


Figure 2-1: A basic model of learning from experience (adapted from Jarvis 2006)

Jarvis makes several important comments about this process. First of all he suggests that the disjuncture in box 2 is often associated with an individual's awareness of the fact that they are unable to carry out a task. If they are able to learn to carry it out (for example: by creating knowledge and skills), they commit this ability to memory, so that box 5 is associated with competence and tacit knowledge. Both of these processes are however "emotion-full". The initial disjuncture may awaken feelings of inadequacy and frustration, while a successful resolution may be associated with a feeling of self-confidence. What is important

in Jarvis' theory however, is that as the individual progresses through life it is the meaning *attached* to sensations that is memorised (and later recalled from memory), and not the sensation itself. In other words: when a disjuncture occurs it is transformed by the person into meaning. This meaning may take the form of, for example: knowledge, skill, emotions, values, and attitudes. When disjuncture occurs again in life, it is often in these meanings that we experience disjuncture, as the self is now more aware of the meaning than of the original sensation. This infers that the episodic experience is socially constructed by the individual, so that several different individuals may experience the same situation, yet interpret it in different ways. From the perspective of entrepreneurial learning, the person's tendency to attach meaning to sensations is at times problematic. Deakins and Freel (1998, p. 147) for example, suggest that entrepreneurs' learning is "cumulative and path-dependent" – so that entrepreneurs at times stubbornly stick to approaches that were once effective, but no longer relevant. As one of the entrepreneurs interviewed by David Rae (2005a, p. 329) commented: "we've worked out our own answers and we're going to stick to them." The tendency of individuals to stick with what they know (rather than explore new knowledge) is one of the factors that causes Hjorth (2011, p. 54) to emphasize the role of "deterritorialisation" and "decoding" in learning. By this he refers firstly to the "uprooting" of people from deeply engrained "habits and conventions" – and secondly, to the "freeing of people from investments in images and representations".

Before I move on to the way in which Jarvis suggests experiences are transformed into meaning, it is necessary to make a few more comments about the nature of experience. Jarvis suggests that experience is either primary or secondary, and that much of our learning takes place through secondary experience. *Primary* experience is associated with our senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and feeling). Consequently, when we relate to our life-worlds (person to person, person to phenomenon, person to future phenomenon, or person to self) we are able to experience the first two directly, through sensation. However, much of what we learn is *mediated*, or secondary – so that we are told about a phenomenon by a friend, we read about it in a book, or observe someone else carrying out an action. These experiences are also transformed and memorised, but the transformation nevertheless occurs in the context of primary experience. In other words, as we listen to a lecture (mediated experience) our senses still make us aware of the body language of the speaker and our own emotions, as well as those of others. These ideas provide a theoretical explanation for the emphasis experiential scholars place on the learning environment – for example: Roger's (1969) discussion of "the initial mood or climate of the group" (p.164). Moving on, Jarvis (*ibid.*, p.84) suggests that the exercise of skill is always a primary experience, so that the distinction between "theory and practice" can be portrayed as reflecting the contrast between primary experience (to which all of our bodily senses contribute) and secondary experience (in which fewer senses

are involved). Jarvis suggests therefore that experiential learning is principally oriented towards primary experience.

2.2.2.3 Transforming experience

Jarvis' discussion of the manner in which episodic experience is transformed into learning is illuminating, yet contradictory. The strength of his concept lies in his suggestion that learning involves the "whole person", so that experience is transformed not only by reflection, but also by action and emotion. In practice however, he devotes more space to the reflective, or cognitive element – as he readily admits (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 88). Nevertheless, his portrayal of the different ways in which experience may be transformed is useful and is depicted in figure 2.2. The figure depicts the various ways in which Jarvis suggests that disjuncture is transformed into meaningful experience – and subsequently integrated into the individual's biography. Importantly the figure depicts a process of learning, rather than non-learning (which Jarvis also discusses). Non-learning is briefly discussed later in this section.

In his early work, Jarvis (1987) suggested that nine routes to learning can be distinguished, three of which relate to what he terms "non-learning". Although he has developed his model further, it is worth noting that his basic premise remains the same. That is: the idea that although experience is the cornerstone of learning, the transformation of experience is not only achieved through conscious reflection (cognition), but also by activity and emotions. In other words: in theory an episodic experience might be transformed primarily by the individual's *emotions*, following the route 1A > 2 > 4 > 6 > 7 > 1B. The transformation of an experience through *action* would be represented as 1A > 2 > 5 > 6 > 7 > 1B and so on. In keeping with his concept of the "whole person" however, Jarvis suggests that the transformation of experience rarely follows a 'pure' route (i.e. only emotion, only action or only reflection). Instead it may be dominated by one aspect of learning (cognition, action or emotion), but will typically include another factor. Often a measure of reflection will be included, so that the transformation of an experience by an emotional process would be depicted as 1A > 2 > 4 > 3 > 6 > 7 > 1B. Jarvis suggests that this aspect of the learning process is especially important, as it can distinguish between the "rote" learning of a skill through action – and a learning process where both the 'how,' and the 'why' or 'when' of the skill is learned. This 'compound' effect on learning is similar to the 'complementarity' effect discussed by Erikson (2003), where 'mastery', 'vicarious' and 'social' experiences combine to enhance entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

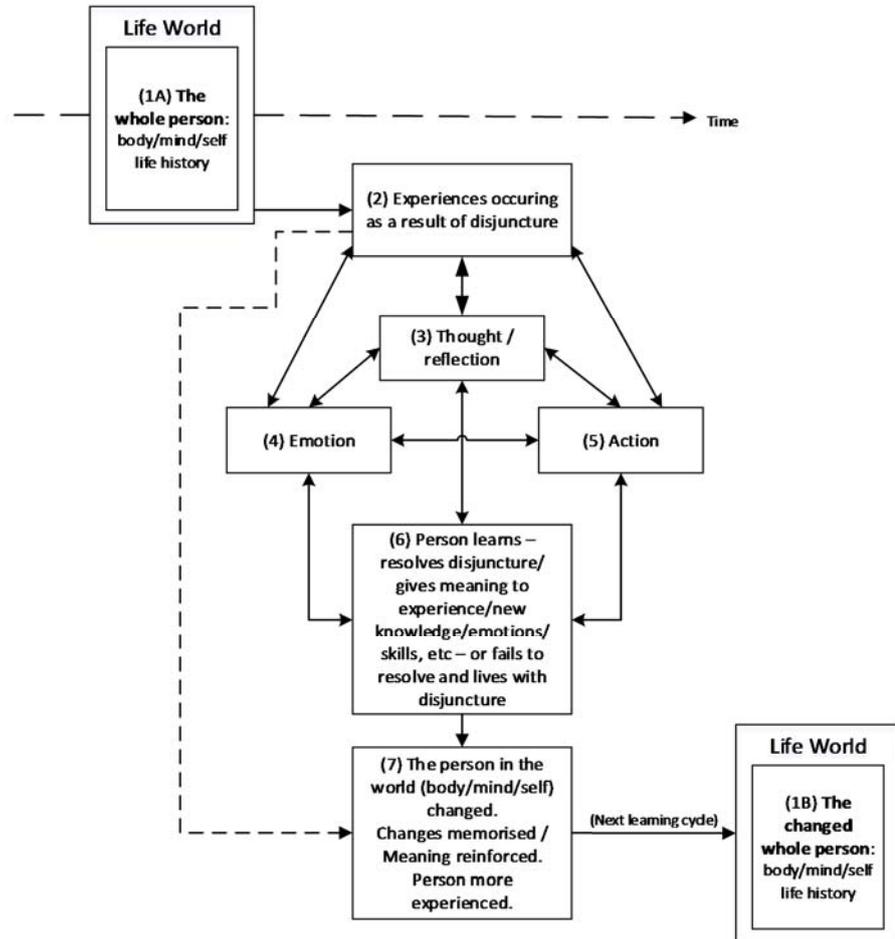


Figure 2-2: The transformation of experience (from Jarvis 1987, 2006)

The process of transforming experience through *reflection* is perhaps the most common perspective on experiential learning, with several variations apparent in, for example: the work of Freire (1972, 1998), Boud and Walker (1991), Mezirow (1997, 2000), Brookfield (1988) and Schön (1983). Jarvis notes the centrality of individuals' questioning of experience to learning and suggests that presumption (the taking of things for granted) is a barrier to learning. He also suggests that it is common to adopt a pragmatic approach to learning, whereby patterns of meaning that repeatedly 'work' for the individual are added to their biographies. Mezirow (1991) notes this in his work on transformative learning and suggests that if an individual is to continue learning, they often need to move beyond Dewey's reflection on the content of experience – to critically assess both their meaning-making processes and the assumptions their interpretations rest upon. Jarvis is more philosophical in his discussion of knowledge, noting for example:

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that it can be difficult to distinguish between knowledge and beliefs – even if beliefs are arguably more influenced by the individual's social environment. He does however suggest that the dynamic process of 'knowing' is made up of the constructed knowledge of the individual, as well as their beliefs, values and attitudes. He argues however, that when experience is transformed through reflection it is the *process* of thought that is in focus, rather than the structure of knowledge.

In Jarvis' writing, thought is conceived of as being oriented either backwards in time, or towards the future. He suggests that discussions of the role of reflection in experiential learning tend to focus on the past. This is clearly often the case, as witnessed to by the writing of scholars such as Mezirow (1997), Taylor and Cranton (2013), and Argyris and Schön (1974; 1996). Indeed, the work of Weick (1979) seems to imply that sensemaking's orientation to the past could be an instinctive human orientation. Importantly though for entrepreneurship scholars, Jarvis suggests that *intentionality* is an important, future-oriented factor in the transformation of experience. He refers to the ideas of Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) who point out that reflection can be directed at many different goals and that intentions "influence both the manner of reflection and its outcome" (p.24). Boud et al. (ibid.) note that Habermas (1974) recognised the importance of purpose in the learning process, terming it "critical intent" – and they point out that the work of Mezirow builds on Habermas' framework. Jarvis suggests that reflection that is oriented towards the future tends to focus on one of two things: either what we anticipate/plan to happen or what we would like/desire to happen (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 100). He also notes the existence of day-dreaming, an occurrence that he relates to the person's unconscious desire to avoid a repeat of "bad" experiences in the past. The existence of day-dreaming seems to suggest the existence of a subconscious form of future-oriented transformation of experience, a possibility that Jarvis relates to the "incubation" phase of creativity (i.e. the recognition that the mind continues to develop ideas on its own, even when the individual's attention is apparently directed elsewhere).

When the general concept of intentionality is related to the specific context of entrepreneurial learning, Politis (2005) suggests that the ideas of Brousseau et al. (1996) on career orientation are useful. These scholars suggest that several different types of career orientation exist: with individuals pursuing not only traditional 'hierarchical' progression (upwards in an organisation, seeking more power) – but also progression based on expertise and diversity. Politis suggests that individuals oriented towards power and expertise often adopt an 'exploitative' strategy towards learning (more analytical), while those who develop 'spiral' or 'transitory' career patterns tend to adopt more 'exploratory' strategies. A difficulty with the concepts of Brousseau et al (ibid.) is however, that all four of their orientations are oriented 'inward' to the individual. In the context of social entrepreneurship, where success is often defined in terms of the

well-being of others, it remains to be seen whether these concepts are adequate – or whether it is necessary to discuss a fifth type of career orientation.

To conclude this overview of how experience is transformed into knowledge through reflection, it is worth noting the existence of various *types* of thinking – and the significance of *styles* of thinking. Jarvis (2006, p.101) discusses several thinking types and positions several of these in tension with one another (memorising and interpreting, creative and critical, problem-solving and decision-making, directed and undirected, deductive and inductive reasoning). Although he does not go into detail about how these types operate in transforming experience, the value of his discussion lies in his arguing that many scholars who discuss the transformation of experience through reflection *only* do so by means of the critical, questioning approach that is characteristic of the Socratic method and of scholars such as Freire (1998) and Mezirow (1997).

David Rae (2005) observes that the transformation of experience is not only associated with cognitive dissonance, but also *emotional* dissonance. This reflects not only Jarvis' discussion, but also recent thinking in, for example: transformational learning – with Taylor (2007) noting scholars' increasingly awareness of the need to account for the role of emotions in learning. Jarvis is however, sceptical of Goleman's (1995) work on emotional intelligence, suggesting that he oversimplifies the role of emotions and is excessively biological in his approach, ignoring the role of the mind. Instead he relies primarily on the work of Cell (1984), who argues that emotions must be more than simply bodily sensations, as there are many more types of emotion than sensations. Jarvis (2006, p.109) therefore suggests that emotions can be understood as being composed of three components: "a judgement, a feeling and an action tendency". He argues that emotions tend to be self-oriented, so that experience is often interpreted in the light of its impact on the self (for example: our physical self or our self-worth) – so that it is transformed by an emotional, rather than cognitive response. Jarvis terms the work of emotions in maintaining a "significant self" their "functional" role, but suggests that emotions can also transform experience in a dysfunctional manner – for example: by interpreting the abilities of others in an envious manner, so that self-esteem is lost. Finally he suggests that emotions also transform experience in a "profound" manner, in situations where we experience something that is beyond our understanding (for example: mystery or beauty). Jarvis suggests that experiences such as these are often defined as religious experiences and that they can stimulate actions such as contemplation or worship. He emphasizes however the difficulty of defining the transformation of experience as *purely* emotional, or *purely* cognitive – noting that a profound experience usually involves all three aspects. In other words: the cognitive judgement that an experience is beyond the rational capacity of the individual, the resultant feeling of awe – and the subsequent action of contemplation. He underlines however, that emotional learning is stored in our

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memory of meanings (our “biography”), in the same way as cognitive learning. We draw upon this memory when we encounter new experiences and it affects the way in which we make sense of future, similar events.

The final way in which Jarvis suggests that experience may be transformed is through action. Indeed, as Jarvis (2006a, p. 111) associates himself with the experiential learning paradigm, he at times uses the phrase “I act, therefore I am”. He acknowledges that accidents can happen, suggesting that action is possible without thought. Nonetheless, he limits his discussion to action that is intentional – or conscious. Developing Merton’s (1968) ideas, Jarvis (1992) suggests that conscious action may take ten forms and that these forms may in turn be categorised as non-action, action and reaction. He also suggests that the level of an individual’s consciousness varies as they act (high to none) and that action is generally linked to one of three cognitive orientations. These are the future (planning) the present (monitoring) and the past (reflection). Entrepreneurship scholars often suggest that this form of learning is preferred by entrepreneurs, with Johannisson (1992) even going so far to suggest that entrepreneurship *is* action learning. As will be seen however, my own research suggests that this is not always the case and that entrepreneurs transform experience into knowledge not only through action, but also through reflection and emotions.

Remembering that the transformation of experience by action is initiated by a disjuncture therefore, Jarvis suggests that a *failure* to transform experience may result from three factors. Anomic non-action is the result of an experience that creates a gulf between individuals’ biographies and the situation that they cannot bridge. Preventive non-action involves a power/authority in the situation preventing the individual from taking action – and non-response is the unexplained failure of the individual to take action when a disjuncture is encountered.

When individuals do take action in response to a disjuncture, Jarvis suggests that their actions may be characterised as either experimental/creative, repetitive, presumptive, ritualistic or alienating. For each of these forms of action, Jarvis suggests that the determining factor with regards to learning is the accompanying level of consciousness. Experimental/creative action is inherently high in consciousness – while presumption involves little or no consciousness, because the individual assumes that an experience is identical to those in their biography and is unaware of any disjuncture. Jarvis suggests that variation in learning will often occur where the available ‘range’ of consciousness is high. He argues that this is particularly so with regards to action that is repetitive or ritualistic. Repetitive action is carried out to restore harmony³⁹ in the face of disjuncture, but Jarvis argues that if it is done in a conscious manner it can instead transform

39 In Jarvis’ model, harmony is associated with a lack of learning and development.

experience. For example: an apprentice who has carried out a task and failed to complete it satisfactorily might repeat the task the next day. Whether or not they learn from their failure will however be partly determined by the manner of their repetition (unthinking or highly conscious repetition). Here the relevance of the “future-present-past” aspect also becomes relevant, as the apprentice’s level of consciousness can vary on all three dimensions as he or she repeats the task: “What did I do wrong yesterday? How am I performing the task at the moment? What must I do next?”

A similar process to the above can occur in ritual, when actions are performed on the basis of tradition rather than in response to disjuncture. Jarvis suggests that although the action is not initiated by disjuncture, disjuncture may occur in the course of action – *if* the ritual is carried out in a thoughtful manner. Honig (2004) suggests that the creation of business plans is a “ritual” action – and clearly, the process of creating a business plan can be carried out in a manner that either enhances learning, or that simply involves ‘checking the boxes’. However, when individuals do not engage at all with a task and just go through the motions (i.e. with very low levels of consciousness), Jarvis suggests that no disjuncture takes place and that alienation will occur. When this takes place, individuals carry out actions in a manner that is not future-oriented and do not actively monitor their actions. In a situation of alienation (where “our awareness of the world is high, but we may not be able to change it”), Jarvis (2004, p. 110) suggests that incidental learning about the self may occur. This learning is often accompanied by strong emotions and the meaning attached to the experience may have a profound impact on the individual’s motivation to take action at a later date. This type of learning mirrors the initial intensely emotional experiences of failure described by the entrepreneurs whose learning is discussed by scholars such as Cope (2011) and Jenkins (2012).

A characteristic of Jarvis’ writing is his frequent and at times controversial discussion of the ‘dark’ side of learning (Le Cornu, 2005). He discusses for example, the phenomenon of “non-learning” (discussed later on) and in his discussion of the transformation of experience through action, he discusses not only “non-action”, but also “reaction”. Reaction involves either ‘retreating’ or ‘rebellion’ – where “retreat” may or may not involve disjuncture, but nevertheless involves the individual removing themselves from the situation. For example: a manager may be aware of the learning opportunities associated with their participation in a project, but due to the pressure of time or other commitments they might decline an invitation to participate. In Cope’s (2011) discussion of entrepreneurs’ learning in/through failure he notes that some individuals engaged in sports activities for a while, to ‘get away’ from their experiences. They did however return to these experiences at a later stage, suggesting that ‘retreat’ may at times be a means of postponing learning, rather than avoiding it.

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Jarvis defines “rebellion” as the individual’s action to change the situation rather than themselves. An entrepreneur faced with a change in customer preferences could for example, decide to focus on a new set of customers rather than adapt their product or service to the change.

Jarvis (1987) originally suggested that non-learning can take place as a result of either *presumption* (the assumption that a new situation is identical to one experienced previously), *non-consideration* (for some reason the individual does not focus attention on the situation and therefore does not learn from it) – or *rejection* (for some reason the individual rejects the opportunity to learn from a situation). In his later work however (2006, 2010), he comments on his increasing awareness of the role of incidental learning (i.e. subconscious learning). He therefore points out that the term “non-learning” is not entirely accurate and that the person may learn from experiences that they do not consciously direct their attention to. In his early writing he also acknowledges that previous meanings may be reinforced through the act of presumption, a process that is arguably also associated with learning.

2.2.2.4 The social context

The final part of Jarvis’ theory of learning that is important to discuss, is his treatment of the role played by the “social”. Jarvis understands learning as a science that is inherently inter-disciplinary, so that he adds perspectives from sociology to arguments that are grounded in psychology or philosophy. He suggests that learning always takes place in specific contexts and that the majority of these contexts involve relationships with other people. He therefore argues that when scholars write about “formal” or “informal” learning, they are not so much talking about a specific type of learning, but of different learning *situations* (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 54). He suggests that learning typically takes place in either individual, informal, non-formal or formal environments – and in these contexts it is characterised by either proactive or reactive behaviour on the part of the learner (Jarvis, 1987). He defines *informal* social environments as contexts in which the individual interacts with friends, acquaintances, etc. in a manner that is not formally structured. *Non-formal* environments are defined as organised educational activity that is provided outside of the formal system, for example: agricultural extension. Examples of *formal* social environments are school or university settings, such as classrooms. At this point it is interesting to reflect on Jarvis’ discussion of how individuals construct their life-world by experiencing not only themselves and others, but also ‘things’ and ‘events’⁴⁰. Actor-network theorists such as Latour (2005) and proponents of activity theory (for example: Engeström, 2000) discuss how individuals interact with non-human artefacts in far more detail than many of the more ‘main-stream’ scholars of adult education.

⁴⁰ See paragraph at the beginning of section 2.2.2.

Jarvis for example, acknowledges the possibility of his 'whole person' interacting with 'things', but does not go into detail with regards to how this interaction takes place – even if he does discuss the role of physical 'space' to a limited degree. In the context of entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education this is a lamentable omission, given the important role played by non-human artefacts such as business plans.

Jarvis (1987) suggests that the distinction between contexts of formal and non-formal learning lies primarily in the lesser degree of bureaucracy found in non-formal environments, even if non-formal settings are clearly still organised. In contrast, the difference between non-formal and informal environments lies in the general lack of pre-specified procedures or interaction in informal contexts. Jarvis suggests that individuals move between proactive and reactive learning behaviour in these environments, where proactiveness is associated with the learner taking the initiative in creating an opportunity for learning – as opposed to reacting to the initiative of somebody else. An individual could for example, display pro-active behaviour in signing up for a course, but while attending the course adopt a more reactive role. Jarvis suggests that individuals' motivation to learn may be affected by the extent to which they participated in the creation of the situation. In other words: whether they have acted as "agents" seeking to expand their pool of meaningful experience – or in response to "oppressive social structures", so that they are instead attempting to recreate harmony in their life-worlds (ibid., p.66). These factors (type of learning environment and proactivity vs. reactivity) are important for our understanding of entrepreneurial learning, as aspects of proactive and reactive learning behaviour may be associated with different types of learning environment. As noted earlier, much of the entrepreneurship *education* literature focuses on formal learning environments, where traditions of learning can create an expectation that learning will be reactive in character. As this study will show however, much of the learning that takes place in accelerators takes place in a *non-formal* environment. Naturally, in all three learning environments it is possible to identify aspects of the other two. A non-formal environment can contain formal structures – and in both formal and non-formal environments, periods of informality occur.

Although learning is affected by the individual's attitude towards education and by the characteristics of the learning environment, Jarvis suggests that the impact of social context on learning is also related to aspects of culture, time and space. Drawing on Berger and Luckmann (1967) he notes that learning in early life is associated with "primary" socialisation, by which he refers to the imparting of *culture* ("all the knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values and emotions that we, as human beings, have added to our biological base") to the child by significant others (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 55). He also suggests that learning styles are to a certain extent culturally-based, as seen in the contrast between Chinese and Western

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learning styles – where both cultures include questioning as a route to learning, but at different stages. Furthermore he underlines the foundational role of *language* in learning and the idea that much of our self-identity and understanding of our ‘location’ in society, is developed through socialisation. This implies that “entrepreneurship” is a cultural concept that is learned by means of language in a particular cultural environment. This idea is illustrated by Helene Ahl (2002) in her discussion of gender in entrepreneurial discourses.

As the person grows older they are increasingly affected by what Jarvis (again drawing on Berger and Luckmann, 1967), refers to as “secondary” socialisation. This type of interaction includes among other things, the learning of behaviour and roles that are associated with sub-groups in society. For example: in particular professions. Jarvis notes the importance of role-oriented behaviour and the existence of rituals in society that facilitate the move between roles – for both the individual and the people with whom they interact (for example: a college graduation ceremony). He underlines the idea that secondary socialisation involves a process of learning and goes so far as to suggest that Lave and Wenger’s (1991) concept of situated learning is “basically a description and analysis of secondary socialisation as a learning process” (Jarvis, 2006a, p. 61). Jarvis therefore underlines the importance of understanding the culture that individuals have grown up in and the cultures in which they operate, if we are to understand their learning. He does however argue that individuals are not only receivers of socialisation who engage in stability-enhancing “maintenance” learning, but also actors who are able to change the way they act within culture – and ultimately the culture itself. Drawing on Botkin, Elmandjra and Malitza (1979) he terms this type of learning “innovative learning”. He also draws on Putnam (2000) in suggesting that culture is not only a source of restrictive socialisation, but also an abundant source of resources that can contribute to the individual’s learning.

Jarvis suggests that in addition to culture, ‘space’ is part of the social context that influences learning. He distinguishes between physical and social space, suggesting that modern technology has increasingly reduced the impact that physical space has on learning. This idea is linked to the role of our senses in facilitating learning through secondary experience. Jarvis suggests that the increased capacity of media to convey information to more than just one of our senses (typically our hearing), has an impact on the number of opportunities we have for learning. He illustrates this idea by contrasting the use of radio to convey news of human suffering (the listener receives information through a single sense based on the meaning made by the journalist) – to that of television, where both seeing and hearing are involved – often accompanied by multiple interpretations of meaning. As Jarvis points out, the development of technology implies not only a change in the amount of material available as secondary experience, but also a change in the way in which this experience is transformed – with emotions

potentially playing a greater role. He does not however discuss the issue of information ‘overload’ and its impact on learning.

Jarvis’ discussion of space is brief and although he identifies the issue of social space (our culturally determined position in society or organisations), he does not discuss it at length. He does note however, that the ‘liquid’ nature of modern society means that individuals have less time to presume upon their life-worlds and to take roles and situations for granted. In a positive spirit he associates this with “more opportunities to learn” (ibid., p.65), but does not appear to reflect on the implications of his “proactive/reactive” framework. It is however possible that the pace of change in the modern world increasingly puts individuals on the ‘back foot’, in a reactive mode of learning. This trend might be expected to have an impact on the way in which we transform our constant experiences of disjuncture.

The third main factor in Jarvis’ discussion of the social context of learning is *time*. Jarvis suggests that time structures our experiences in the same way as space and emphasizes the idea that learning always takes place in the present – even if he points out that we can learn from the past with the future in mind! Drawing on Kierkegaard (1959) and Simpson (1995), he suggests that individuals experience time as it relates to the ‘self’ in two ways. Either as something through which they must move in order to achieve a goal (relating to Kierkegaard’s “external” history), or as a “constitutive” feature of their being (Kierkegaard’s “internal” history). Jarvis proposes that in the modern world, time is frequently dealt with in an “instrumental” manner – as something that must be overcome, rather than come to terms with. Simpson (ibid.) suggests that when individuals come to terms with time, rather than seeking to overcome it they begin to create “praxis”. This concept is linked to professional practice and Jarvis associates it with the reflective repetition of actions which transforms “knowledge into wisdom” and “skill into expertise” (Jarvis 2006, p.68). In somewhat convoluted philosophical terms therefore, Jarvis argues that despite the attempts of modern educators to overcome time by making knowledge explicit, there is no real substitute for *practice* – which he associates with [first-hand] experience, trial and error, and the gradual absorption of “working rules of thumb, or heuristics” (ibid.).

2.2.3 Critiques

Despite the strengths of Jarvis’ model of experiential (or ‘existential’) learning, it is not without its weaknesses. With the exception of scholars such as Paulo Freire (1972, 1998) and Moacir Gadotti (1996), many educational thinkers draw primarily on North American and European ideas – and Jarvis is no exception. In order to develop the work of Kolb and others, Jarvis toured the United Kingdom and the United States – yet apparently did not seek input from non-Western audiences. His ideas may therefore be subject to some of the critique

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levelled at other theories that adopt a more ‘social’ perspective on learning (such as situated learning and communities of practice). These theories have been critiqued for failing to take into account the issue of *power* in learning (Barton & Tusting, 2005) – and despite Jarvis’ discussion of non-learning, this appears to be an apt criticism of his work. In the context of accelerators that recruit social entrepreneurs from developing countries, some acknowledgement of the impact of privilege and poverty on learning would have been appropriate. As Gadotti (ibid., p.5) wryly comments: “the school has become an institution in conflict like any other”. The accuracy of his observation is illustrated by my discussion of some of the processes of learning in accelerators, in section 4.3.7: ‘Similar structures, dissimilar interaction’.

Alison Le Cornu (2005) suggests that Jarvis’ work is weak with regards to its treatment of time, its portrayal of the process of internalisation and the concept of non-learning. She suggests that Jarvis oversimplifies learning by depicting it as a ‘single strand’, sequential process. She argues that in reality, learning does not occur sequentially (in that a single occurrence of disjuncture is experienced and resolved before moving on to new experiences). Instead she suggests that individuals often experience several disjunctures at once and are constantly engaged in resolving these, at different levels of engagement. Le Cornu (ibid.) suggests therefore, that learning is ‘multi-stranded’ in character and I concur with her argument.

Peter Erdélyi (2010) does not discuss the work of adult learning theorists in depth, but his critique of the entrepreneurial learning literature is also applicable to the ideas of scholars such as Jarvis. Erdélyi (ibid., p.11) suggests that scholars of entrepreneurial learning have tended to adopt “anthropocentric ontologies”; emphasising primarily the ‘cognitive’ aspects of learning. His discussion makes it clear that he also identifies a clear ‘social’ theme in the literature. Nonetheless, he laments the absence of a ‘material’ perspective on learning and suggests that scholars include this viewpoint in future work. I believe that Erdélyi’s critique is justified and that insufficient attention has been devoted to the role of material objects in learning – not only in the literature on adult learning, but also in entrepreneurial learning scholarship.

Jarvis suggests that his theory of learning is ‘existential’ in that it has to do with the whole person (implying at least mind, body and emotions) – and not just singular aspects of the individual, such as the mind. In practice however, he often seems to give more emphasis to the role of reflection in learning. Jarvis does note that he only became aware of the significant impact of emotions on learning at a later stage in his career – and this may explain his failure to include these new insights into his writing. However, this weakness could also be a result of what Le Cornu (ibid.) terms his ‘weak’ portrayal of how learning is internalised. I tend to agree with Le Cornu, as Jarvis appears to have difficulty in showing exactly

how an experience of disjuncture is transformed into new knowledge, through (for example) emotions. Hjorth (2011) provides a more satisfactory account, by discussing the role of affect in creating an existential ‘space’ in which new ideas can develop.

Despite the relevance of some of Le Cornu’s comments, I disagree with the overall inference of her reasoning, which makes reflection the ‘king’ of the transformational process⁴¹ and appears to equate ‘consciousness’ with ‘reflection’. In doing so Le Cornu essentially neutralises Jarvis’ suggestion that transformation tends to take place primarily through *either* reflection, practice or emotions. My impression is that although the process of internalisation to some extent remains a ‘black box’, Jarvis is nevertheless correct in suggesting that reflection is but one of three ways in which the individual transforms experience into knowledge (or a ‘changed whole person’).

Jarvis discusses non-learning at length, but Le Cornu (*ibid.*) argues convincingly that regardless of the significance of the learning experience, some kind of learning is always taking place – even if experience only serves to reinforce lessons already learned. Once again I tend to agree with her argument and although she does not suggest a term for the type of [non-] learning described by Jarvis, it is possible that a term such as ‘insignificant’ learning might be appropriate.

2.3 Bringing it All Together

In my introductory chapter I stated that the purpose of this study is to ‘explore the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerator programmes’. In this chapter I have discussed entrepreneurial learning in terms of the ‘how’ of educational practice, philosophy and pedagogy – but also in terms of its ‘why’. In other words, by moving beyond educational practice to examine the underlying processes that influence its outcomes (i.e.: learning). By including theories of adult learning (such as that of Jarvis) in the study of social entrepreneurs’ learning in accelerators, it becomes clear that any study of the learning process in accelerators cannot rely solely on the entrepreneurship education literature. Instead, such a study needs to admit the possibility that it is the *interaction* of a programme of education with the learning behaviour of the entrepreneur that leads to their development. This implies that the study of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators will be incomplete, if researchers only focus on either the structure of accelerator education or the developmental experiences of participating entrepreneurs. A more complete picture will result if the two are studied in relationship to one another. This suggestion is in keeping with the ideas of

⁴¹ Le Cornu (2005) attributes “great significance” to the role played by reflection in transforming experience (p.10).

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Strauss (1993), who underlines the importance of focusing on interaction when studying the development of individuals and phenomena.

Building largely on Jarvis (2010), I suggest that entrepreneurship education develops the capabilities⁴² of entrepreneurs not only by creating relevant experiences of disjuncture, but also by helping entrepreneurs resolve disjuncture. In theoretical terms therefore, one aim of accelerators is to create and resolve a greater number of disjunctures among participating entrepreneurs, than would normally be experienced in the same period of time, outside of the programme. Naturally, it is to be expected that most of these disjunctures will relate to the new venture in some way. Furthermore, as noted previously, it is also conceivable that accelerators may develop entrepreneurs by creating a different type or depth of disjuncture than they ordinarily experience. Accelerator success may therefore be linked to both the quantity and quality of the ‘creative disjuncture’ that is facilitated.

Scholars of entrepreneurship education suggest several methods for creating and resolving disjuncture, many of which involve practical – as opposed to purely cognitive – tools. As noted in my introduction, a particular feature of accelerators is the involvement in the educational process of a group of peers: the accelerator cohort. A second feature is the short period of time in which education is delivered, a characteristic that contrasts with entrepreneurship education in both university and incubator settings. Consequently, in any study of entrepreneurial learning within accelerators, it is important to pay particular attention to the impact of these factors.

When the content of the literature discussed in this chapter is brought together in the context of an accelerator programme, the following synthesis of the process of entrepreneurial learning is derived (see figure 2.3). This figure depicts the interaction of education in a non-formal environment, with the intentions and behaviour of the individual entrepreneur. Consequently, although the diagram may give the impression that the entrepreneur is the primary focus of the synthesis, it is important to emphasize that the accelerator process develops by means of the interaction of the accelerator as an entity in itself (of which the entrepreneur is an integral part), with the participating entrepreneurs. Drawing on Dewey (1938), and Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985); the figure first of all takes into account the influence of the individual on the learning process. In other words the ‘internal’ factors that Dewey refers to as “purpose”, but which I refer to using the latter scholars’ term “intent”. At the same time, the accelerator

⁴² The concept of capabilities is congruent with my earlier definition of learning as the development of “the ability to act differently”.

programme is designed in a manner that seeks to both create and resolve relevant disjuncture in the experience of the entrepreneur.

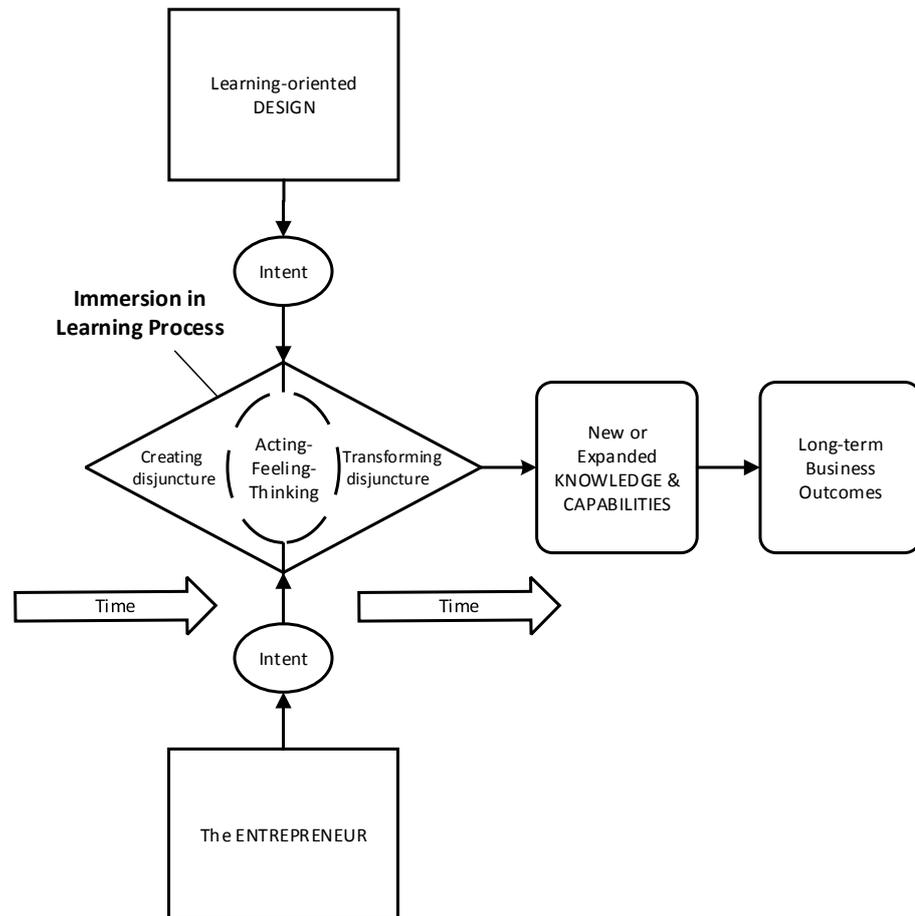


Figure 2-3: A Preliminary Model of Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators.

At this point it is worth noting that the educational process in accelerators depends not so much on a philosophy of didactics (effective teaching), but rather of dialectics (Gadotti, 1996; Hjorth, 2013). Entrepreneurs are encouraged by both accelerator staff and their peers, to test their ideas and to develop effective solutions to the challenges of their startups. At the same time, entrepreneurs are constantly providing feedback (conscious or otherwise) to accelerator staff about the relevance and effectiveness of both the programme content and the accelerator process.

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In view of the purpose of this study (see section 1.8) and taking into account additional insights gathered from the literature review in this chapter, several more specific questions are asked in relation to the process of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators. These were briefly mentioned in chapter one, but are outlined in more detail below.

2.3.1 Research Questions

In this chapter I have discussed the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ of social entrepreneurial learning. Previously I have stated that my general purpose is to *explore the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerator programmes*. But what does this mean in practice? As I explore the process of entrepreneurial learning, what am I especially interested in? Having discussed several of the theoretical fields that have a bearing on entrepreneurs’ learning, I suggest that the four research questions introduced in chapter one now make a little more sense. Before moving on to discuss my methodology and the results of my study, I therefore revisit them, briefly demonstrating how they are each a product of this chapter’s theoretical discussion.

An important first question has to do with the impact of social entrepreneurs’ experiences, orientations and intentions prior to the accelerator programme. Scholars such as Dewey (1938) and Politis (2005) argue that individuals’ experiences before interacting with educational activities play a critical role in their learning. If we are to understand the developmental process in accelerators (one of the ‘gaps’ identified by Hallen et al., 2013), we must acknowledge the possibility that entrepreneurs’ learning in accelerators may be influenced by experiences that accelerators have little control over. For this reason the first question that I ask in this study is:

1. In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators influenced by their experiences and intentions prior to entering the programme?

A second question responds to the critique of David Erdélyi (2010), that contemporary EL scholarship does not take seriously the influence of non-human objects on learning (i.e.: “the material”). This is a concern that is also evident in Engeström’s (2000) activity theory – which discusses the role of “instruments” in learning (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutiérrez, 2009). It is also apparent in Wenger’s (1998) discussion of social/situated learning, in which he discusses the important roles played by “boundary objects”. In accelerators entrepreneurs’ learning can be expected to be influenced by non-human aspects that include not only objects such as curriculum design, but also physical objects such as business plans, physical ‘space’ – and even time.

One particular aspect of the ‘material’ that I discussed in my introduction is the idea of a ‘non-formal’ learning environment. I have suggested that this type of learning environment makes it easier for practicing entrepreneurs to develop what Politis (2005, p. 400) terms “entrepreneurial knowledge”. I also argue that accelerators are an example of such a learning environment, as they display several of the characteristics of non-formal learning contexts (including less standardisation and the possibility of learners influencing programme goals). It is important to emphasize however, that although an educational programme may be more attractive to entrepreneurs and easier for them to participate in, this does not necessarily mean that it is *effective*. As Hallen et al. (2013) point out, some accelerators are effective while others are not. Their suggestion that differences in quality exist, but that these differences are “unclear and critical” (ibid., p.33) suggests that it is necessary to explore accelerator processes in more detail. This infers that it is important to create a ‘richer’ understanding of the entrepreneurs’ learning in accelerators, so that the interplay of the different factors may be more easily perceived. As Gibb (1983) has pointed out, one of the distinguishing traits of entrepreneurship education for practicing entrepreneurs is that it adapts to the needs and circumstances of the individual to a far greater extent than traditional (formal) education. Nonetheless, I have argued that relatively little is known about the processes and outcomes of the non-formal approach to education that Gibb and other scholars envisage.

Taking into account the possibility that material, ‘non-human’ factors (including a non-formal learning environment) may have an impact on learning, a second question addressed in this study is:

2. *In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs influenced by the non-human ‘objects’ (primarily educational design) that are associated with entrepreneurship education in accelerators?*

In my introduction I noted that a distinct characteristic of accelerators is their education of entrepreneurs in ‘cohorts’. In my ‘weaknesses, gaps and opportunities’ section (1.7.6) I described the inconsistency in the literature, in distinguishing between the different types of support roles found in accelerators (most notably between medium-term mentors and visiting coaches). Although the ‘people’ side of accelerators is in a sense an integral part of programme design, I suggest that for the purpose of analysis it is valuable to distinguish the ‘people’ side of accelerators from the ‘material’ side. Cohen’s (2013a) doctoral research provides initial evidence that different actors influence the creation of knowledge through accelerators, in different ways. As noted previously however, her study relies on *ex post* accounts of the accelerator process. It is possible that a study that gathers data during the accelerator process – and in a different context, will provide further insight about how different accelerator roles (for example: managers, mentors, coaches and peers) contribute to learning. If this is the case,

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then it is likely that an awareness of these different contributions would assist accelerator managers in designing effective programmes. Similarly, given the distinctive emphasis of accelerators on educating entrepreneurs as cohorts, it is important to learn more about the ways in which entrepreneurs interact with one another in the educational process. For this reason a third research question asks:

3. In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs influenced by their interaction with the different human actors within accelerators (managers, mentors, coaches and peers)?

A final research question has to do with accelerator *outcomes* – and is perhaps the one which both policy-makers and participants in accelerator programmes are most anxious to pose. Scholars have identified important outcomes for accelerators that focus on accelerating for-profit ventures; but as Lall et al. (2013) point out, our knowledge about the outcomes of programmes for ‘social’ enterprises is far more limited. If key stakeholders (such as policy-makers) wish to enhance the growth and effectiveness of social enterprises, then it is important to learn more about the learning generated by programmes that profess to accelerate their development. Similarly, social entrepreneurs who are considering applying to an accelerator need to know what they can expect to learn from participating. In other words, questions of investment beg answers that hint at expected results, regardless of whether the investment is made in monetary resources or in time.

My fourth research question is therefore addressed to the ‘outcomes’ part of my study:

4. In which ways does the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators affect their development and that of their enterprises?

In the next chapter I describe the way in which I gathered information about entrepreneurs’ learning in an accelerator programme. Among other things, I describe how an accelerator was selected for study and the methods used to collect and analyse information about entrepreneurs’ experiences.

3 Journeying into Method

[Duncan] "...if you feel worried or irritated about something; please write this down in the space below."

[Alice] "Frustration about not getting hands on the project. *Working on this...*"

In order to discuss the phenomenon of social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators I employed an interpretative, case-study methodology that involved the study of three accelerator programmes. The development of my method is discussed in this chapter, which is structured in the following manner. It begins with a 'soft' description of how the methods used to collect data were developed and refined in the first accelerator (sections 3.1 to 3.4). In these sections I also describe how I came to study the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators, and I discuss the practical and ethical challenges of conducting 'engaged' research. In section 3.5 I discuss my methodology by framing it as a case-study that is informed by ethnographic and narrative methods. Finally, in sections 3.6 and 3.7 (as well as part of 3.4) I describe the research process in the second and third accelerators. In these sections I present the 'hard facts' of my data collection for all three accelerators; including numbers of interviews conducted and their timing – as well as the 'nitty-gritty' detail of interview procedures and data analysis.

3.1 The Beginning of the End – or the End of the Beginning⁴³?

The sentences at the beginning of this chapter are taken from a comment by a participant in the first accelerator that I studied. The ironic phrase "working on this" refers to a questionnaire the entrepreneur was asked to fill in during week two of the eight week programme. Her response was just one of several signs of a growing reluctance among the entrepreneurs to participate in the research and evaluation process. This reluctance rapidly developed into an outright refusal on the part of several participants to take part in the type of evaluation activities that had been designed. At the very beginning of my study I was forced to abandon my research method and go back to the drawing board. But how did I become involved in the accelerator in the first place? And what happened next? This chapter describes the process by which I gathered data about accelerators. It aims to provide the reader with not only an understanding of the methodology used in this study, but also its development as I interacted with practitioners.

⁴³ Status Quo, from the album *In Search of the Fourth Chord*.

Consequently, the alert reader will note that the chapter provides not only information about methodology, but also some insight into aspects of the accelerator process. In particular, the difficulties associated with conducting a process study of accelerators reflect the intense, often stressful character of the programmes.

In order to understand how I came to study an accelerator programme for social entrepreneurs it is necessary to understand a little more about the background to this study and indeed, about my own background. I have lived and worked in developing countries for a large part of my life: growing up in Colombia in Latin America – and spending seven years working as an adult in Mozambique, southern Africa. I have spent much of my working life in what is often termed the ‘third’ sector, or civil society. In Mozambique for example, I was engaged in leadership training and community development. During these years I became increasingly interested in the roles businesses play in alleviating the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. Later when I was given the opportunity to engage in doctoral studies, it was natural for me to focus on firms that seek to create synergies between the creation of economic, social and environmental value. In the first years of my doctoral studies I therefore became engaged in the evaluation of a project run by *Coompanion*, a Swedish organisation that supports the development of social enterprises and cooperatives. The project helped me develop my skills in participatory research, but did not really address the type of social enterprise I was most interested in, namely ventures operating in developing countries.

As I worked with *Coompanion* and began to read more of the literature on social and sustainability entrepreneurship, I became particularly interested in the initiatives that the Swedish and British governments were sponsoring in the fields of ‘inclusive’ business and ‘business for development’. In particular, two programmes seemed to be focusing on the types of venture that I was interested in, namely the Swedish *Innovations against poverty* (IAP) programme and the British *Business Innovation Facility* (BIF) initiative. I contacted the managers of both programmes to discuss the possibility of conducting a study of the ventures that were applying for their funding – and eventually came into contact with a third organisation: the *Network for Social Entrepreneurship*⁴⁴ (NSE). This Scandinavian⁴⁵ organisation had just received notice that its application to the Swedish

⁴⁴ *Network for Social Entrepreneurship* is a pseudonym and in the remainder of this study is abbreviated as NSE.

⁴⁵ In this dissertation I endeavour to maintain the anonymity of the accelerator and its participants, by referring to the location of the programme as ‘Scandinavia’ – as opposed to providing a specific country name such as Denmark, Sweden or Norway. Fortunately, there are several development programmes for social entrepreneurs in all three countries and residents of all three countries move readily between them, often in connection with start-up or business activities.

International Development Agency (*Sida*) for project funding had been approved and it was therefore recruiting participants to its first social business accelerator.

Due to the fact that I had previously conducted evaluations for projects sponsored by the European Union and spurred by having recently been asked the “what’s in it for me?” question by a dubious social entrepreneur, I asked *NSE* if they had enlisted an evaluator to their programme. They had not and voiced an interest in my suggestion that I conduct such an evaluation, in exchange for being given access to the participating entrepreneurs. Following this initial expression of mutual interest by email, I travelled to their office to discuss my proposal in more detail with the accelerator manager, ‘Denise’. The outcome of the meeting confirmed our initial positive impressions and it was agreed that I should accompany the upcoming accelerator as an external researcher/evaluator. My initial contact with *NSE* was made in March 8, 2012 and the first accelerator began on April 10. After over a year of chasing social entrepreneurial ‘fish’, I suddenly faced the prospect of being suddenly thrown into a pond of them - with only three weeks in which to prepare.

3.2 Entrepreneurial Methods for Entrepreneurship Research

In the above paragraphs I have described very briefly what was in fact a prolonged ‘fish-chasing’ process, characterised by frustration and numerous dead-ends. Halfway through my doctoral studies I had a clear picture of *what* I wished to study (the process of becoming a social entrepreneur with a concern for developing countries). I was also fairly sure that the apparent scarcity of this type of venture and my focus on process implied a specific *how* of conducting my study (namely an exploratory, qualitative method). However, I was making little progress towards finding the *who* (i.e. nascent social entrepreneurs). Indeed, the only social entrepreneur I managed to interview declined to participate in any further research. Perhaps prompted by her mentor (who accompanied her to the interview), she pointed out that as a very busy individual engaged in starting up a new venture, she simply did not wish to prioritise an activity that did not provide a clear ‘payback’ to her startup. As I was to discover later on, the challenge of entrepreneurial ‘busyness’ was to become a recurring theme in my study.

Naomi Zigmond (2000) suggests that research is similar to detective work. My own experience is that it is perhaps more similar to the activity of the entrepreneur, particularly if Johannisson’s (1992) emphasis of entrepreneurship as organising and meaning-making is taken to heart. As I have written up my research I have reflected on the appropriateness of having to adopt an entrepreneurial *method* in order to be able to study the very phenomenon of

entrepreneurship. Briefly then, the entrepreneurial patterns that I have identified in my method include the following:

3.2.1 *Timeliness and Relevance*

The thinly-veiled “what’s in it for me?” reply of the busy entrepreneur who I failed to convince to participate in my study has returned to my thoughts time and time again in my study. My initial reaction to the entrepreneur’s question was to suggest that my research would perhaps be found useful in the long term. However, as I have engaged with the activities of the accelerators I have been forced to question this idea. I have had to consider the possibility that the difficulty of developing studies that are both relevant and timely may have more to do with traditions of research, than with practitioner expectations. I have come to agree with Argyris and Schön (1974) who suggest that it is critical that researchers not only produce theory, but also theory that is *timely* and that can be closely linked to managerial action. The very short time frame of ‘my’ business accelerators (eight weeks) made this an exceptionally difficult task, but challenged me to develop techniques that began to address this challenge.

3.2.2 *Alertness to Opportunity*

Having spent several years cultivating a familiarity with the Scandinavian social entrepreneurship networks, I was – to borrow Kirzner’s (1973) term – ‘alert’ to the possibility of conducting a study of nascent social entrepreneurship with the participants in these networks. This alertness enabled me to contact organisations and individuals – such as *NSE* – who possessed the ‘resources’ necessary for my researching venture. However, it was not enough to simply recognise the opportunity associated with the *NSE* accelerator, the opportunity needed to be exploited – and meaning conveyed to accelerator managers, in order for me to be granted access to the participating entrepreneurs. Without being able to ‘market’ the value of my research to accelerator managers I would have been unable to “recycle” the resources of the accelerator (the social entrepreneurs) into a “new pattern” (Johannisson, 1992, p. 1).

Before coming into contact with *NSE*’s accelerator programme I had expected to be able to create a tidy, well-structured study of nascent social entrepreneurs. In the end however, the diversity of ways in which these entrepreneurs interacted with my research initiatives forced me to take into account the fact that I was manifestly unable to rigidly control a research process that was based on interaction. Indeed, the only behaviour which I was able to predict and control with some certainty was my own. I realised that if I was going to be able to see my study through, I would have to adopt what entrepreneurship scholars term an ‘effectual’ approach to opportunities for data collection (Read & Sarasvathy, 2005). This did not mean abandoning all attempts at structure and planning, but

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rather recognising their limitations and being prepared to take advantage of other opportunities that were not apparent at the beginning of my study. As Saras Sarasvathy (2001) puts it, I was forced to become good at exploiting contingencies. As my study progressed I came to realise that the flexibility that I was forced to adopt with regards to data collection was not so much a limitation, but an advantage. Some of the advantages of the ‘entrepreneurial’ method that developed during my study are discussed below.

Without delving into the academic debate about whether opportunities are discovered or created, I believe that much of my study’s empirical ‘richness’ has developed from a disciplined alertness to opportunity, rather than any privileged foresight into the processes associated with accelerator programmes. This is particularly so given the significant differences in the type of *secondary* material⁴⁶ that I managed to access during the three accelerators. For example: in the first accelerator the management team recorded short interviews of the entrepreneurs and posted them on YouTube. These interviews provided additional information about the feelings and activities of the participants at different stages of the accelerator. However, these interviews were not carried out in the second accelerator. Instead an interested journalist conducted written interviews of a slightly different character for a social entrepreneurship website. A significant proportion of my data is therefore not only a product of a well-planned programme of data collection, but also the result of opportunities for insight or information that were available, but which needed ‘harvesting’. This reflects David Fetterman’s (2009) comment that the data gathering process requires that researchers develop a ‘sensitivity’ to both tone and timing – if they are to gain access to information they were not originally aware of.

3.2.3 Building on Partnership

A third characteristic of my research is its dependence on a dynamic partnership with the managers of *NSE* – and indeed with the entrepreneurs themselves. Although I would characterise my method more as ‘engaged’, rather than ‘action’ research; my study has nevertheless been characterised by dialogue, transparency and candour. By being willing to engage with the ambitions of *NSE* and by sharing managers’ desire to create a better accelerator, my impression is that they in turn have become willing to help me create a better academic study. Senior researchers often have the privilege of working in teams and can reap the benefits of several extra pairs of eyes and ears – and at least one additional interpretation of events. In business schools however, doctoral students are traditionally expected to ‘go it alone’ and risk having to rely entirely on their own efforts for data collection and analysis, and on artificial forms of reflexivity. By partnering

⁴⁶ I.e.: data that I did not generate through my own efforts. For example: through interviews, questionnaires, observation or focus groups.

with accelerator managers I believe that I have managed to overcome some of the disadvantages of 'single' scholarship. At times data has been collected by both accelerator managers and myself (for example during focus groups), and we have pooled our data at a later date. At other times I have shared my impressions with the same managers, only to be confronted with a different interpretation – or with data that seemed to contradict my ideas. In the following paragraphs, the 'nitty-gritty' of these partnerships is described.

3.3 The Best-laid Schemes o' Mice an' Men⁴⁷

3.3.1 Hitting the Road Running

Financing for the first *Booster* accelerator (A1⁴⁸) was provided by *Sida* at relatively short notice. 'Short' that is, when the substantial amount of effort necessary to recruit not only mentors and speakers, but also entrepreneurs is taken into consideration. It was also necessary to plan the research and evaluation process in this period. As the start-up date for the accelerator approached, what we believed to be a workable model emerged. *NSE* staff would be responsible for daily 'check-ins' with the participants (brief updates in a group context on the issues utmost in each entrepreneur's mind). They would also conduct a more informal Wednesday evening focus group each week, to dig a little deeper into the week's developments. I would conduct baseline interviews with each entrepreneur and then monitor their progress by means of a short online survey each Friday afternoon. I would also participate in the accelerator's activities two to three days each week as an observer.

Due to the late confirmation of financing, *NSE* staff were still planning the accelerator as the activities of the first week commenced. Consequently, as I noted in a subsequent report, both management and evaluator 'hit the road running'. Unsurprisingly, accelerator staff were primarily concerned with the core activities of the programme (workshops, mentoring, meetings with investors, etc.) – and with 'matching' the *Sida* financing with investment from other sources. As a result, in the first accelerator scheduled research and evaluation activities were unwittingly nudged out of the schedule. For this reason much of my data collection in the first accelerator was characterised by compromise and a contingency-oriented strategy of data collection. An example of this is the baseline interview that I had hoped to conduct with each entrepreneur in the first

⁴⁷ Taken from the poem "To a Mouse, on turning her up in her nest with the plough", by the Scots poet Robert Burns (written in 1785). By comparing the destruction of a mouse's nest by a plough to the unravelling of human plans by circumstances, the poem emphasizes the fragility of human planning.

⁴⁸ *Booster* was the name given to the accelerator programme run by *NSE*. In the remainder of this dissertation the first *Booster* accelerator is referred to as A1, the second as A2, etc.

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few days of the accelerator. Due to the tight schedule I only managed to interview two entrepreneurs in the first week, by meeting them in a break and over lunch, while they participated in a CSR fair at a nearby business school. The remaining five entrepreneurs were interviewed at different times – both face-to-face and by telephone – over the course of the next two weeks, with the final ‘baseline’ interview taking place on the Friday of week three. This ‘messiness’ was however, limited to the first accelerator and in the following two accelerators sufficient time for interviews was scheduled – and for the most part, managers and entrepreneurs stuck to the agreed timetable.

In a previous section I noted that ‘entrepreneurial busyness’ was a theme – and above all a challenge – that was to characterise much of my data collection. In new ventures the startup process is associated with an intense and prolonged period of hard work for the entrepreneurs involved. Consequently, many entrepreneurs are reluctant to dedicate time to discussing their experiences with researchers, or to filling in questionnaires. It rapidly emerged that the A1⁴⁹ entrepreneurs were no exception and indeed, many of them appeared to be even busier than the entrepreneurs I had met outside the accelerator. I associate this intensity with participants’ awareness of the unique opportunity the accelerator provided them with, to engage in developing their businesses. Many of them seemed determined to make the most of their time in the accelerator and appeared intent on maximising their use of each hour and every day. This at times involved avoiding ‘unnecessary distractions’ such as ‘pesky’ researchers.

3.3.2 Ethical Issues and the Dynamics of Interactive Research

The busyness of accelerator participants affected the research process in several ways. At a practical level the contexts that were often associated with ‘contingent’ interviewing sometimes resulted in recordings of poor quality. One baseline interview conducted in a café over lunch was so interspersed with the noise of cutlery and the conversations of other guests, as to be largely unusable. However, other apparently hopeless contexts functioned surprisingly well, as was the case with Barry’s 48-minute interview: conducted over his mobile phone as he travelled across the city by underground and car. By interacting with the *Booster* entrepreneurs in this way, I rapidly gained a sense of the intense character of the accelerator and became more aware of the activities around which I was scheduling my own activities. Consequently, I was given a first-hand taste of the ‘hustle and bustle’ that the social entrepreneurs experienced as they progressed through the accelerator. I suspect that much of this would have been lost, had I

⁴⁹ In this study for the sake of brevity, the accelerators that entrepreneurs participated in are referred to using the abbreviations ‘A1’, ‘A2’ and ‘A3’.

adopted a case-study approach characterised less by ethnography and more by the ‘clinical’ interviewing of participants outside of the accelerator context.

Despite the advantages of conducting interviews ‘in’ the accelerator environment, I was at times concerned about the ethical issues associated with my study. I felt the need to provide the entrepreneurs with more detailed information about the research and evaluation process, and about issues such as confidentiality. However, these issues were only really perceived to be important by *me* – and my attempts to engage in a dialogue about them tended to be met with either managerial compromise (“can you say something about the process in five minutes at tomorrow’s check-in?”) – or entrepreneurial incomprehension (“can’t we work it out as we go along?”). In hindsight it is also apparent that my regular attempts to start a conversation about confidentiality may have created an impression that confidentiality was in fact necessary (rather than an alternative to be considered). Possibly as a result of this, all but one of the entrepreneurs in the first accelerator asked to be identified by pseudonyms in my dissertation. In contrast, my presentation of the issue of confidentiality in the second accelerator resulted in all of the entrepreneurs asking to be known by their real names. When I subsequently shared this information with two of the participants from the first accelerator (Henrik and Barry), they readily agreed to the use of their real names. After discussion with my supervisors however, it was subsequently decided to anonymise both the accelerator and the entrepreneurs.

As the quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates, the process of developing a workable model for combining evaluation and research was both difficult and frustrating. I was particularly concerned about the ethical aspects of my research, particularly about the question of “informed consent” (Oliver, 2003). Nevertheless, this was not the only ethical issue at stake. I also faced the question of whether it would be ethical to ignore the wishes of the entrepreneurs and somehow force them into reading (or listening to) the information about ethics that *I* had prepared, at the time *I* considered appropriate and in the format of *my* preference. In the end I decided to respect the wishes of the entrepreneurs and to engage them in an ongoing dialogue about confidentiality over the course of the accelerator. This decision reflects an approach to the resolving of ethical questions pioneered by Steinmann and Löhr, which Preuss (1999) refers to as “discourse” ethics.

My decision to discuss the ethical questions associated with my research over the period of the accelerator, rather than in a single session at the start of the accelerator was one that was appreciated by the entrepreneurs. As Catrin (A1) commented in a focus group in week eight:

“I’d still stick to my comment that I’d find it easier just to have it as a frank group discussion, ’cos we are a small team. [...] I appreciate that you’ve listened to that feedback and we were able to do it in this format.”

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At the end of the first accelerator it was clear that not only had we reached a compromise about the *format* for discussing issues of confidentiality, but also that the entrepreneurs understood the issues at stake and were able to give me clear information about their wishes. In a discussion about confidentiality in the final week of the accelerator several of the entrepreneurs asked that I use pseudonyms for their names in my reports and dissertation, with only two asking to be known by their real names. Several entrepreneurs who requested anonymity appeared to base their wish on a desire for simplicity (avoiding administrative tasks such as signing contracts and responding to emails). The entrepreneurs also made it clear that they were willing to have their interviews used for evaluation or research, but not for marketing purposes.

Although one of the main challenges of conducting research in the accelerators involved resolving issues of confidentiality, another challenge had to do with the *consequences* of my research on the entrepreneurs themselves. Although only Andrew (A1) and Gabriella (A1) gave voice to entrepreneurs the impact of some of my interviews, it was apparent that asking questions is not an activity without ethical implications. As I asked social entrepreneurs about their backgrounds (and in particular about individuals who had influenced their development), I at times set in motion a sense-making process they had not previously experienced. Although I was asking questions in order for *me* to make sense of their backgrounds, by doing so I was highlighting pieces of the social entrepreneurs' lives that they continued to reflect upon. In several cases they later commented on the value they attached to the questions I asked, as it stimulated and facilitated their own processes of making sense of their lives. However, from an ethical standpoint it is clear that the reflective process that resulted from my interviews was uninvited, even if it was difficult to foresee.

3.3.3 Death by Evaluation

As the first accelerator progressed and the entrepreneurs began to engage more intensively with their business plans, visiting speakers and mentors; it became increasingly clear that the design of both the accelerator and the evaluation process was not entirely compatible with the activities of the entrepreneurs. This friction appeared to stem from two main sources. On the one hand, several of the accelerator staff came from professional contexts in which dialogue and reflection were an important tool in either initiating social change (Denise: Fairtrade), or in enhancing group dynamics (Frida: professional process facilitator). Their 'soft' expectations with regards to the role of team-building sessions contrasted with the 'hard-nosed' attitudes of several of the participants. These individuals had backgrounds in design and were impatient to get on with their startup activities. The contrast between the 'touchy-feely' orientation of the accelerator facilitators and the 'doer' orientation of the entrepreneurs is illustrated by Alice's matter of fact comment during a focus group run by the

process leader Frida. Her clipped response to Frida's colourful encouragement to reflect on the activities of the past week was:

"I don't reflect".

To be fair to Alice, the comment does not reflect the depth of her professional experience, but rather a pattern of behaviour or a style of learning. She developed her comment in the 'halfway' questionnaire in week four:

"Reflection is not a big fan of mine. I generally reflect after the work is completed. This is very new and somewhat uncomfortable for my way of working."

Further explanation was provided by her colleague Edward who pointed out that for a qualified designer, reflection is a natural component of professional conduct. To be asked to reflect in what he perceived to be a superficial manner suggested to him that the managers of the accelerator (and perhaps me) were not treating him with sufficient respect.

Although there was clearly an occasional clash of professional cultures during the first weeks of A1, a second reason for a mismatch between accelerator activities and the evaluation of the accelerator had to do with intensity and timing. In the first few weeks of the accelerator the entrepreneurs were quite simply being asked too many questions too often, when they had relatively little material to reflect upon. As the accelerator progressed they also came under increasing pressure to perform. For example: by making progress on their business plans and by practicing their 'pitches' (short verbal presentations of their business ideas). As they began to feel tired and stressed, they were confronted with additional demands by the accelerator facilitators and me – to fill in questionnaires and participate in feedback sessions. Unsurprisingly a reaction was not long in coming...

3.3.4 From Crisis to Consensus

I began this section with a quote from the Scots poet Robbie Burns, in which he compares the destruction of a mouse's meadow home by a plough, to the frequent failure of human plans to turn out as expected⁵⁰. As the first accelerator got up to speed in weeks two and three, it became increasingly clear that the plans conceived for the evaluation of the accelerator had also gone "agley" and needed to be changed. Several things prompted this conclusion. For one thing, the entrepreneurs began to engage less enthusiastically with the check-in sessions

⁵⁰ In the poem the strophe "The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men" is followed by the words: "Gang aft agley" – which means "go often awry".

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each morning and some chose to be absent from these sessions altogether, arriving instead just in time for the first speaker session of the day. The 'Friday feedback' questionnaires that I had posted online each week were also increasingly ignored, or only filled in with extremely short and uninformative answers. Furthermore, in ten days we planned to conduct halfway interviews and yet, as the end of week three neared, I had still not managed to schedule baseline interviews with two of the entrepreneurs. It was obvious that our programme evaluation needed radical revision. Consequently, after a convoluted combination of face-to-face and telephone conversations, a new approach was negotiated with the entrepreneurs and subsequently launched.

The new strategy for evaluating the accelerator was designed to take into account the pressure the entrepreneurs were experiencing. In a frank discussion with the accelerator participants a compromise was proposed, whereby the facilitators promised to drastically reduce the number of evaluation activities, with the expectation of more active participation in the few remaining events. What this implied in practical terms was that the planned halfway interviews were replaced by an online questionnaire, the 'Friday feedback' questionnaire was scrapped and the number of 'check-ins' was reduced from five each week to only two. This suggestion appeared to satisfy everyone and the mood of the group – which had begun to sour somewhat – appeared to return to its previous level of enthusiasm and collegial support.

3.3.5 On Emotions and Evaluation

Following the revision of the research and evaluation strategy, the remainder of the first accelerator passed relatively uneventfully and the entrepreneurs and accelerator facilitators participated in an engaged manner in both the halfway questionnaire (sent out at the beginning of week five), and the evaluation day in week eight. We then built upon our experience of conducting evaluation and research in an accelerator context, as the next accelerator was planned and subsequently launched. Before introducing that process however, it is important to comment on the impact of mood and emotion on the research process.

As has already been noted, the busyness of the entrepreneurs had a major impact on their willingness to participate in the evaluation process. What also became clear with the benefit of hindsight, is that this busyness – which produced feelings of stress among the entrepreneurs – also affected their perceptions of the accelerator. As the accelerator progressed many of the entrepreneurs experienced pressure to achieve goals that they had set for themselves, or which they felt were expected of them (for example: business plans, a sales strategy, etc.) This stress seems to have been particularly high in weeks seven and eight (as indicated by the 'stress diagrams' that the A2 and A3 entrepreneurs were asked to draw as part

of the final evaluation⁵¹). When the entrepreneurs were asked questions about the accelerator in week eight, the majority of their responses contrasted markedly with their responses in week four – negatively. They also tended to be harsher in tone and more unbalanced than the week four responses (i.e. critical comments were not complemented by positive reflections). In both accelerators the two main facilitators (Denise and Karen) were unprepared for what both I and they perceived to be a sudden switch in entrepreneurs' perceptions, and were bewildered and saddened by the sudden rush of critique.

My interpretation of the substantial dip in entrepreneurs' perceptions of the accelerator is that their feedback was to a certain extent coloured by emotion in the final week of the accelerator. Studies of management behaviour in other contexts suggests that individuals' behaviour is far from rational, and that emotions and performance have a significant impact on one another (Brundin & Nordqvist, 2008). In Brundin and Nordqvist's study, CEOs were observed to use anger to regain a feeling of control and power on their boards, and it is possible that such a process occurred towards the end of the accelerators. In other words: the pressure to perform and a feeling of not having performed as well as they had hoped, may have been counteracted by some entrepreneurs by an expression of anger – as communicated through the focus group in A1 and the final interviews in A2. In a sense therefore, the severe critique expressed towards the end of both accelerators may be coping behaviour prompted by stress (see for example the ideas of Anderson, 1977). This discussion is however, outside the realm of this dissertation. What *is* worth noting however, is the problematic nature of the impact of emotions on entrepreneurs' perceptions of the accelerator. If I had chosen to conduct a questionnaire-based study of the outcomes of accelerator programmes that only addressed participants in the final stages of the accelerator, I would clearly have risked gathering misleading data. By employing a qualitative study that took a more holistic, process-oriented perspective I reduced this risk substantially – even if I still faced the challenge of assessing *which* of the reported perceptions most closely reflected the long-term impact of the programme.

3.4 Research & Evaluation 2.0

An exciting characteristic of *Sida's* support to *NSE* was its provision for a series of accelerator programmes and consequently, for an ongoing process of learning and improvement. I discuss the development of the *Booster* accelerator in other chapters, as this chapter focuses primarily on method. Nevertheless, as *NSE* concluded the first accelerator and began to plan for a second, two factors are worth mentioning. The first has to do with my role as a carrier of organisational

⁵¹ See appendices.

knowledge, while the second has to do with the idea of a methodological ‘evolution’ over the course of the two (and subsequently three) accelerators.

3.4.1 Bridges for Knowledge

NSE is a small not-for-profit organisation that to a large extent relies on the voluntary activities of its members for much its operations. Founded in 2004 it tends to employ staff for its programmes as money becomes available, primarily through project funding. When *NSE* received news that its project application (which included an accelerator programme) had been approved, the board moved quickly to employ someone to run the programme. They hand-picked Denise, an ambitious woman with a background in Fairtrade – who also happened to be one of the individuals identified by a leading Scandinavian business newspaper, as one of the region's “super talents”. Denise agreed to run the first accelerator, but underlined her intention to leave immediately afterwards in order to travel to the United States and participate in the election campaign for Barack Obama.

One implication of this recruitment was that a significant amount of the organisational learning from the first accelerator was located in three main ‘places’: Denise’s memory, the written reports from the first accelerator – and in the memory of the accelerator’s evaluator (i.e. myself). Although the next accelerator manager (Karen) naturally had some contact with Denise prior to the second accelerator, she relied to a large extent on the documentation from the first accelerator (a significant part of which was provided by myself) and on what I could tell her about the lessons learned in A1. I therefore found myself taking on the unexpected (and for a researcher somewhat unusual) role of a ‘knowledge bridge’ between the first and second accelerator.

3.4.2 Evolving Method

One of the advantages of qualitative method is that it is not as dependent as quantitative methodologies on the careful replication of previous studies. As Guba and Lincoln (1982) point out, method in naturalistic inquiry⁵² is often *emergent*, with the design of the study developing continuously as data is collected and analysed. The “rolling, cascading, unfolding” design process (ibid.) is a result of two main factors in research, namely progressive focus and improvement. In many qualitative studies, researchers begin their work in an exploratory manner with relatively little theoretical pre-understanding about what is being observed. As data is gathered and analysed, understanding increases and particular parts of

⁵² Naturalistic inquiry is an approach that shares many, although possibly not *all* of the main characteristics of other qualitative research methodologies.

the data are subjected to more intense scrutiny and re-visited. This naturally infers that new questions will be asked and that new sources of data may be investigated. In qualitative research this is a natural and necessary part of the study, as Jennifer Platt (1992) points out. She notes out that although the study author often has “an initial intention”, “as the research is carried out, unexpected findings and new ideas develop” (ibid., p41). Consequently, the subsequent changes in questions asked as the study progresses do not present the same kind of challenge to research validity as such a modification would infer in a quantitative approach. It is also worth noting that the process described by Platt also characterised my research, which gradually progressed from being a general study of the development of social entrepreneurs, to being a more focused exploration of social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators.

The progressive focusing associated with qualitative studies is by far the most common reason given in the literature for researchers employing new techniques as a study progresses. What is less commonly discussed is the change of research design due to difficulties with the design itself. This is perhaps understandable, due to the pressure on academics to portray their research as well thought through in all areas. Nevertheless, my impression is that this pressure is likely to result in either a certain falsification of method (mistakes are glossed over in order to create a better impression), or in ‘mundane’ research (research into phenomena that we are familiar with). It is naturally easier to design functional research strategies for contexts that we are familiar with, than it is to move into unfamiliar territory. Many scholars however, would argue that it is in fact the unfamiliar that is likely to result in what Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) term “interesting” research.

3.4.3 Sharpening my Tools

As I conducted my study of the first *Booster* accelerator programme, it became clear to me that several of the tools I was using were not producing the results I had hoped for. By getting the entrepreneurs to provide me with weekly reflections on their progress through the accelerator (the Friday feedback questionnaire⁵³) I had hoped to be able to construct a rich process account of their experiences and development. Accelerator participants however, were clearly unwilling to devote time each week to this task. At the same time, I was not satisfied with the information I was gaining from the days I was spending at the accelerator. Participants’ reflections during the final evaluation day suggested that important interaction was taking place among the entrepreneurs, but that I was capturing relatively little of this interaction by observing their routine activities (which often consisted of participating in a seminar and then going to their computers and continuing work on their business plan). My impression was

⁵³ See Appendix 1.

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that the information generated by participant observation in the first accelerator was not worth the substantial investment of time involved (thirteen days, or 32 % of the total accelerator). Subsequently, I nevertheless concluded that this initial investment had been necessary in order to acquaint myself closely with the structure and character of the accelerator. However, I felt that it would be hard to justify spending a similar amount of time in the second accelerator.

In view of the above and taking into account what had been learned about the impact of entrepreneurial 'busyness' on participants' willingness to share their reflections, a revised research and evaluation strategy was designed. It was decided to make *NSE's* expectations about entrepreneurs' participation in the evaluation clearer, while at the same time reducing the number of instances when they would be asked to provide feedback. At the same time I still wished to be able to collect 'rich' data on participants' experiences – and for this reason it was decided to conduct interviews halfway through the accelerator and in the final week. This implied leaving out the initial baseline interview and forced me to rely more heavily on the documentation solicited from entrepreneurs by accelerator staff prior to the accelerator (such as their CVs and application forms). Accelerator staff would continue to hold regular 'check-in' sessions with the entrepreneurs and a focus group run by one of the accelerator staff would again take place in week eight. I also insisted on the inclusion of a short session about the research and evaluation process during the team-building days at the start of the accelerator. Finally, the number of days on which I visited the accelerator and spent time on direct or participant observation was reduced from thirteen to eight (and subsequently to seven in A3).

Table 3.1 provides an overview of the research and evaluation activities conducted in the three *Booster* accelerators. More complete details of the various questionnaires and interview guides are found in the appendices. In total forty-two interviews were conducted, distributed among the three accelerators as detailed below. Twenty interviews were conducted in A1 (thirteen with entrepreneurs and seven with managers and stakeholders). Eighteen in A2 (fifteen with entrepreneurs and three with managers) – and twenty in A3 (sixteen with entrepreneurs and four with managers). Additionally, three focus groups were held in the first accelerator, one in the second and one in the third.

Table 3-1: Research Activity during and after the Accelerators.

Research activity during the accelerators					
Accelerator 1		Accelerator 2		Accelerator 3	
<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
<i>week 1</i>	INT, DO, Q	<i>week 1</i>	DO	<i>week 1</i>	DO
<i>week 2</i>	DO, Q, FG	<i>week 2</i>		<i>week 2</i>	
<i>week 3</i>		<i>week 3</i>		<i>week 3</i>	
<i>week 4</i>	DO	<i>week 4</i>	INT, DO	<i>week 4</i>	INT, DO
<i>week 5</i>	DO, Q	<i>week 5</i>		<i>week 5</i>	
<i>week 6</i>		<i>week 6</i>		<i>week 6</i>	
<i>week 7</i>	DO, FG	<i>week 7</i>	DO	<i>week 7</i>	
<i>week 8</i>	DO, FG	<i>week 8</i>	INT, DO, FG	<i>week 8</i>	INT, DO, FG
<i>Key: INT = interview, DO = direct observation, Q = questionnaire, FG = focus group</i>					
Post-accelerator research activity					
<i>5/6 month follow-up</i>		Telephone interview			
<i>1 year follow-up</i>		Online questionnaire			

3.5 Making Sense of Method

In the above sections I have described the research process as it developed from a simple search for social entrepreneurs into a multi-faceted investigation of social entrepreneurial learning in a series of accelerator programmes. Although many academics may feel that they recognise particular philosophies of science and methodologies in the preceding sections, I feel it is important to be more explicit about the research process I engaged in. This is necessary not because it is inherently wrong to conduct research without claiming to follow a certain methodology, but rather because I am influenced by several genres of qualitative method. It is therefore not only necessary to acknowledge my debt to these schools, but also important to identify the methods I have used – in order that the adequacy of these methods be judged by appropriate criteria. Consequently, in this section I briefly describe the main methodological pillars that undergird my study. In the sections that follow I then provide more detailed information about the instruments used. To use a culinary metaphor: I begin by this section by describing the kind of cake that I am baking, before moving on to describe the particular ingredients that I have used.

3.5.1 Ontological and epistemological perspectives

In this study I adopt a critical realist understanding of knowledge and of how we are able to extend knowledge. This implies that I view reality as ‘stratified’, with researchers occasionally experiencing events in the “empirical” domain, despite the fact that events are continuously taking place in the domain of the “actual” – regardless of whether or not we observe them (Blundel 2007). These events are in turn the product of the foundational domain of the “real”, where natural objects exist independent of human perception. These unchanging objects possess “intransient” properties, many of which we are able to observe by the impact that they have on our experience. Our interpretation of how this impact occurs (by means that critical realists refer to as “mechanisms”) is however “intransient” (Danermark et al. 2002). In other words: our theories about how both natural and social structures function do not exactly correspond to reality.

In this dissertation I view reality from a critical realist perspective, but do not follow a strictly critical realist *method*. I do however use an abductive method in my analysis and as my study progresses, it is arguable that I engage in the retroduction process advocated by ‘pure’ critical realists. That is: the attempt to progress beyond the development of theory, to the distinguishing of the underlying properties and causal mechanisms that enable the processes defined in the theory to operate.

3.5.2 Case Study

To many readers it will already be clear that my study is qualitative in nature and based upon what Kumar and Ormiston (2012) term a case study “strategy”. In other words, on an approach to research that focuses on the collection of data from a limited number of individuals and contexts, in order to enable the “detailed and intensive investigation of a phenomenon” (ibid., p.107). Pervez Ghauri (2004) suggests that the case study approach is useful when relatively little is known about a phenomenon, suggesting that the strategy is appropriate for the study of accelerators. As my earlier discussion of the accelerator literature makes clear, scholars suggest that ‘quality’ is a key differentiator between high and low performing programmes, yet what exactly this ‘quality’ is made up of remains uncertain (Hallen et al., 2013). One way of beginning to clarify the content of ‘quality’ is to gather what Ghauri (ibid.) terms “sufficient information” about a limited number of cases, in order to be able to discuss these in detail. Cope and Watts (2000) note that entrepreneurial learning is such a complex phenomenon that it is most appropriate to study it using a qualitative methodology. Consequently, given the state of research on accelerators and my research purpose (to explore social entrepreneurs’ learning in accelerators), I deemed a qualitative, case study strategy to be an appropriate choice of method.

Among the several approaches to case study research that exist, my study would initially appear to be what Robert Stake (1995) terms an “intrinsic” approach. Intrinsic case-studies are studies that focus on a particular individual or organisation on the basis of the researcher’s interest in that particular person or group⁵⁴. They share many of the features of what Kumar and Ormiston (2012) term “single-case design”, in that they provide researchers with access to a case that is “unusual, extreme or something to which access is rarely granted”. My involvement with *NSE* provided me with the opportunity to obtain first-hand data about social entrepreneurs’ learning in accelerators over a relatively long period (three years). As both the phenomenon and the degree of access granted are relatively unusual, an intrinsic and single-case approach seems appropriate.

Although it appears useful to distinguish case study research as either ‘intrinsic’ or ‘instrumental’ in character, Stake (1995) admits that the distinction is not always easy to maintain. This was also my experience, as from the perspective of *NSE* my choice of case was based on intrinsic logic (my task as an evaluator was to assess the effectiveness of their accelerator). However, from *my* perspective, I was adopting an instrumental approach by choosing a number of entrepreneurs

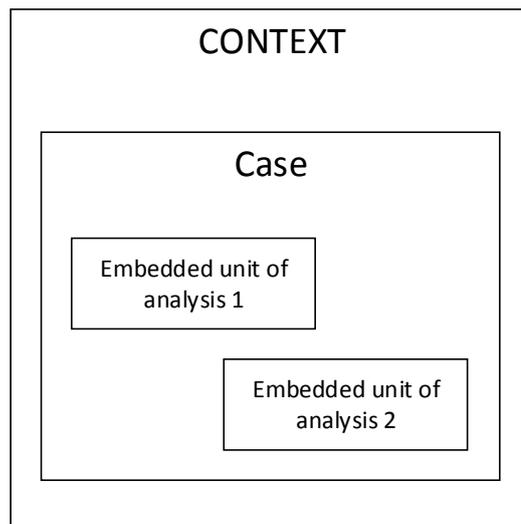


Figure 3-1: Single-case design with embedded units of analysis

to study, in order to learn more about their learning. This reasoning reflects the technique of ‘theoretical sampling’ discussed by Kathleen Eisenhardt (1989). In other words: individual entrepreneurs were identified who I believed would help me develop theory about learning in accelerators. My experience suggests that in this particular instance, Stake’s discussion of intrinsic and instrumental cases is not particularly useful. Instead, I suggest that the work of the COSMOS Corporation more accurately reflects my own approach – as seen in figure 3.1 (COSMOS Corporation cited in

Yin, 2011, p. 8). In their discussion they note the existence of a particular type of single-case study, in which the ‘case’ involves several secondary units of analysis

⁵⁴ An instrumental case-study on the other hand, focuses instead on a particular phenomenon and the individual or group is chosen because the researcher believes they can provide useful data about this phenomenon.

– which are nevertheless not identified as cases in themselves. This approach reflects my own approach, in which the accelerator is the context for the case itself (social entrepreneurial learning), while the individual actors ‘within’ the accelerator are portrayed as ‘embedded units of analysis’. This perspective reflects what Perren and Ram (2004) term a focus on “multiple stories milieu explanations” – and also their “entrepreneurial personal story explorations” perspective.

Both of the perspectives mentioned by Perren and Ram (*ibid.*) adopt a subjective view of phenomena studied (usually a social constructivist perspective), with the first approach paying more attention to the creation of meaning through interaction – and the second privileging the subjective experience of the individual entrepreneur. As I have noted previously, my study attempts to include both perspectives: reflecting the uncomfortable reality of learning, as something inherently individual (it is the person who incorporates new experience into their ‘life world’) – yet also social (or collective) in terms of process and underlying structure. Andrew Abbott (1992, p. 65) notes that this type of case study⁵⁵ incurs “fuzzy realities”, by which he refers to the idea that cases are “engaged in a perpetual dialogue with their environment, a dialogue of action and constraint that we call plot”. He argues that a strength of his “case/narrative” approach is its allowance for cases to be ‘transformed’ during a study – so that research may begin as a study of – he gives the example of “craft” – but conclude as a study of “profession”. This flexibility enables researchers to be ‘true’ to their data in a manner which more quantitative case-study approaches may not allow.

3.5.3 ...with a Hint of Narratives and Ethnography

Kumar and Ormiston (2012) suggest that the case study approach is a ‘strategy’ available to researchers and not necessarily a detailed prescription for method as such. Their observation is reflected in Eisenhardt’s (1989) comment that relatively little has been written about the analysis of case study data. Consequently, scholars have considerable room for manoeuvre when it comes to the gathering and analysis of data and may even run the risk of mixing methods in an inappropriate manner – as Perren and Ram’s (2012) discussion of subjective and objective case study paradigms illustrates. Nonetheless, Kumar and Ormiston (2012) argue that a strength of case study research is its use of multiple data collection methods. Under the general ‘umbrella’ of a case study strategy therefore, I have loaned techniques for data collection and data analysis from the methodological fields of ‘narratives’ and ‘ethnography’.

⁵⁵ Abbott discusses an approach very similar to my own, which he terms the “case/narrative” – a sub-type of which is “multicase narratives”.

The content of my theoretical framework underlines the centrality of entrepreneurs' experiences of accelerator programmes to my study. Many scholars have argued convincingly for the centrality of experience to not only learning in general (Dewey, 1938), but also adult learning (Knowles, 1970; Kolb, 1984). Furthermore, in the field of entrepreneurial learning several scholars have underlined the centrality of experience to the learning achieved by entrepreneurs (Jason Cope & G. Watts, 2000; Minniti & Bygrave, 2001). Even organisational scholars who adopt a more cognitive approach to the analysis of organisations note that managerial sensemaking is predominantly based on past experience (Weick, 1979). Given the apparent importance of individual experience to the learning process, I deemed it appropriate to on the one hand, gather entrepreneurs' own accounts of their learning in accelerators (narratives) – while at the same time observe their day-to-day activities in the accelerator context (ethnography). However, it is important to emphasize that I have *adapted* narrative and ethnographic methods to the realities of my own study and that I have not followed what staunch supporters of either methodology would consider to be a 'pure' approach. This is not unusual and Gubrium and Holstein (1999, p. 561) note that “in the practice of fieldwork there is considerable overlap” between the two approaches. Indeed, they suggest that each perspective fruitfully “tames” the “excesses” of the other; by questioning each method's reliance on ‘only the narrated experience of the subject’ or ‘only the interpretation of the ethnographic observer’. Consequently, rather than following only one method to the exclusion of the other, I use ethnography to provide reflexive perspective on the insights offered by entrepreneurs' narratives – and vice-versa. I also seek to assure “the reader/enquirer of the research” that my study is both trustworthy and credible⁵⁶, by providing a *transparent* description of my method (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 272). In the following sections this is done by discussing on the one hand the collection of data about social entrepreneurial learning – and on the other hand its analysis. Where narrative and ethnographic methods have informed my work, this is commented on in the text.

⁵⁶ These terms are often used as the key indicators in qualitative studies of criteria similar to those of “reliability” and “validity” in quantitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6 Collecting Information about the Accelerator Process

Although the central ‘case’ in this study is the learning of the social entrepreneur, ‘learning’ as such is a difficult phenomenon to infer simply through observation. This is particularly so in view of the fact that I have defined learning as the ‘potential’ to act in a different manner. To be certain that an individual had acquired a particular capability after education would require close observation, often over a long period of time (requiring resources few researchers have access to). Furthermore, some capabilities are of a cognitive or emotional nature, making them difficult to assess in an accurate manner. In view of these challenges I depend to a large extent on individuals’ own accounts of their experiences in and after accelerators, in order to discuss their learning. At times these accounts have been long and fall comfortably into the ‘classic’ definition of narratives as “stories” (Labov, 1972). At other times long accounts have not been volunteered and I have had to construct my own narrative of an individual’s experience of learning, though their responses to a series of questions. As Catherine Riessman (2008) notes however, both types of response on the part of the *Booster* entrepreneurs (and my construction of textual accounts based on their responses) may be classified as “narrative”.

In my study I have made extensive use of interviews in order to both obtain and construct narratives. I conducted two to three interviews with most of the social entrepreneurs and at least two interviews with managers in each accelerator. I have also made extensive use of direct observation and focus groups. Furthermore, as explained in previous sections, I made a failed attempt to get participants to maintain weekly diaries (this was the goal of the ‘Friday feedback’ questionnaire). Consequently, as I also maintained a journal (field notes) I ‘tick all of the boxes’ with regards to the techniques that Johnstone (2007) associates with ethnography. However, as noted previously I am more concerned with being transparent about my method, than with locating my method in a specific genre.

Despite her discussion of the usefulness of obtaining and constructing narratives from interview material, Riessman (2008, p. 62) notes that there is a risk that researchers neglect the role of context in the development of narratives – so that stories are at times “presented as if they dropped from the sky”. Dawson and Hjorth (2012, p. 339) share this concern and underline the role of narratives in not only highlighting relational processes, but also “the context they are embedded in”. Riessman’s observation is in keeping with the emphases of most case study strategies and is a timely reminder that this study is as much about entrepreneurship education in accelerators (the *context* of entrepreneurs’ learning), as it is about the learning of the entrepreneurs themselves. In this study,

the use of interviews and focus groups has therefore been complemented with direct observation and secondary data (including entrepreneurs' *curricula vitae* and applications to the accelerator) – as well as additional interviews with stakeholders of the accelerator (such as *Sida* personnel, *NSE* board members and accelerator managers).

3.6.1 Interviews

Interviews are the primary source of data in many case studies and form the backbone of most narrative-oriented methods. Unsurprisingly therefore, they also play a central part in my study. When interviewing I tried to develop an overall understanding of the 'story' of entrepreneurs' learning in the accelerator, by eliciting responses based on four thematic areas. These were "background", "experience halfway through the accelerator", "immediate impressions at the end of the accelerator" and "reflections several months after the accelerator". It is worth noting however, that slightly different tools were used to collect data on some of these themes in accelerators one and two. This was primarily a result of the revision of the method in the light of my experience of conducting research in the first accelerator. The main changes made were firstly: the integration of the 'background' and 'halfway impressions' themes into a single interview – and secondly: the adding of an individual interview to the focus group exercise in the last week of the accelerator, in A2. This change was made because of my impression that the entrepreneurs were providing longer, richer explanations of their experiences during *interviews* (as opposed to the online questionnaire). They also seemed to be more forthright in their observations in the context of a one-to-one interview, than in the context of a focus group – at which some of the accelerator staff were present. To summarise therefore: in both accelerators the same general themes were covered during data collection, but slightly different tools were used to cover them.

The interview format used in my study was primarily the "in-depth"- approach discussed by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). In practice this meant that prior to the interview I prepared a list of themes or issues that I wished to learn more about from the interviewee. During the interview this "topic guide" (*ibid.* p.117) served as a reminder of the general issues that I wished to address. The list also provided me with a 'back-up' orientation, should the interviewee provide me with an overly prolonged or irrelevant response that threatened to get us both lost. For example: in the first interview in A1 the concepts I used to orient the interview were "identity", "social learning", "community of practice" and "social / sustainable entrepreneurship". Here I was informed by Bowen's (2008) discussion of the role of sensitising concepts in data collection and analysis, as well as by Dick's (1990) convergent interview method. Dick's method reflects the values of narrative methods, in that it emphasizes the importance of asking an effective opening

question, followed by a prolonged effort at keeping an informative conversation going by asking probing, follow-up questions.

The above paragraph describes a somewhat ‘ideal’ format for interviews. Naturally I was not always able to follow this format due to the behaviour of the interviewees themselves. Several entrepreneurs (primarily Edward and Alice in A1) provided very short answers to my questions and seemed to be intent on getting the interview over as quickly as possible, which resulted in fairly short interviews of around 20 minutes. Others showed no signs of slowing down at 45 minutes. However, it is important to note that the content of my interviews was also affected by my interaction with the managers of the accelerators. For the most part, an interview session was scheduled for a particular date and I prepared a preliminary set of interview topics/questions, which I then sent to the accelerator coordinator. This was not done for their formal approval, but rather in a spirit of openness which I hoped would be reciprocal. This often resulted in the coordinator adding questions to the interview guide, even if I at times managed to dissuade them from including too many extra questions. One example of this was the adding of a question to the interview guide for the interview at the end of the accelerator in A2. The accelerator coordinator asked that I include a question about her own performance, as well as a brief assessment of several of the visiting speakers.

The interview guides used in my study are found in the Appendices section.

3.6.2 Questionnaires

Although interviews increasingly became my preferred research instrument over the course of the accelerators, I employed questionnaires at several stages in the first accelerator and for a follow-up one-year after the conclusion of all three accelerators. With the exception of the ill-fated ‘Friday feedback’ initiative (which was designed to be more of an online diary), internet-based questionnaires were initially adopted due to the difficulties encountered in setting up interviews. As the research process stabilised (in A2 and A3), I relied almost entirely on interviews to gather material about entrepreneurs’ experiences of the accelerator – and used a single online questionnaire to gather ‘hard’ data about finance- and growth-related outcomes. This questionnaire was sent to entrepreneurs twelve months after the end of the accelerators.

The online *SurveyMonkey* tool was used to administer questionnaires and a subscription invested in to provide access to some of the software’s more advanced analysis tools. In A1 I assumed erroneously that many entrepreneurs would find it easier to answer questions online, at their own convenience. This did not prove to be the case, even if several entrepreneurs clearly made an effort to fill in the surveys at the halfway point and for the one year follow up. With

few exceptions respondents tended to provide very brief answers and often skipped entire questions. When an individual failed to respond to a questionnaire, a reminder was sent either by me or by the accelerator coordinator. At the one year follow-up stage for the first accelerator, the entire process for the sending out of the questionnaire (i.e. emailed link and reminders) was administered primarily by the accelerator coordinator. This resulted in a slightly quicker and more complete response rate. The one year follow-up for the second and third accelerators was administered by me, as accelerator staff were busy preparing for accelerators three and four.

The questionnaires used in my study are found in the Appendices section.

3.6.3 Direct Observation

In previous sections I have underlined the importance of embedding the individual experience of entrepreneurs into the contexts in which they are active. Without at least some knowledge of the structures and interactions individuals refer to in interviews, researchers have little basis for interpreting their accounts as ‘normal’, ‘unusual’ or even ‘interesting’. For this reason I spent a substantial amount of time in both accelerators observing the interactions of the entrepreneurs with one other, with visiting speakers and with the activities of the accelerator. This observation activity was reduced somewhat in the second accelerator and third accelerators (from thirteen full days to eight – and seven), when I felt that I was familiar with the programme’s routines and content.

In qualitative research it is common to distinguish between direct and participant observation. In ethnography for example, with its emphasis on understanding culture, researchers are often called upon to participate in a particular setting in order to experience it first-hand. In the accelerator programmes that I studied it was obviously difficult for me to participate as a nascent social entrepreneur. Consequently, for the most part I engaged in ‘direct’ observation – even if I occasionally helped out with tasks such as setting up equipment for a public pitch, or even assisting with feedback on entrepreneurs’ pitches. By behaving as yet another person in the accelerator context who wished the entrepreneurs well⁵⁷ (rather than as an impassive ‘fly on the wall’), I was able to create closer and more positive relationships with both managers and entrepreneurs. This relationship was a factor that made it easier for participants to share their experiences with me, not only during the accelerator, but also afterwards. Consequently, I still interact with several entrepreneurs by email or on Facebook. Gabriella (A1) and Nelson (A2) in particular have often taken the initiative to send me unsolicited, but welcome updates on their startups. The development and importance of this type of rapport has been documented by researchers such as Scott-Jones and

⁵⁷ Note that this behaviour reflected a genuine engagement and was not feigned.

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Watt (2010). They suggest that it is important that researchers ‘earn the right’ to access by demonstrating both “commitment to collaboration” and seriousness about collecting data that will benefit those observed.

The development of a relationship from the role of ‘neutral observer’ to that of ‘committed confidant’ is illustrated by my chat with Henrik towards the end of the first accelerator. The conversation might be interpreted as suggesting that the ‘fly on the wall’ has become somebody with a perspective that might be worth listening to. The conversation is best understood if readers are aware that Henrik is a fashion-conscious, young entrepreneur whose product is T-shirts produced in the shanty towns surrounding the garbage dumps of Brazil.

Duncan: “So, what’s happening?”

“Oh, I’m planning for a presentation. I’ve been invited to the meeting of all the top managers of [name of a prestigious Swedish bank]. – I just don’t know how I should dress. I’m going to be mixing with the “suits” and I don’t know if I can go like this...” [looks at Duncan apparently expecting a response]

Duncan: “Um... why not? I think that the reason you’ve been invited is because you represent something different. They’re probably fed up with only meeting other managers in suits! And anyway, in a sense you are your product – why not take the chance to expose the product you’re trying to sell?”

“Yeah, that might make sense...”

Although I occasionally interacted with the entrepreneurs in a ‘participatory’ manner in the first accelerator, my interaction with the entrepreneurs in the second and third accelerators was generally more formal. This was primarily due to the clearer structure created for the research process, which positioned me more obviously as an occasional visiting evaluator. Often my direct observation involved sitting in on seminars and taking notes about participants’ questions, comments and interactions with one another. I also took note of apparent moods and body language. Prior to such a seminar I would introduce myself to the speaker and inform them of my presence and the reason for my being there.

In the above paragraph I have described my reliance on note-taking for capturing entrepreneurs’ behaviour and interaction. An alternative would have been to video such interaction (Chambers, 2000). Although this might have provided valuable additional information, I felt this would have been intrusive enough to interfere with the normal group process. I judged note-taking to be a more natural behaviour in a seminar situation and therefore less likely to affect the behaviour of the entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, I concluded each day by recording (and occasionally writing down) additional impressions of the time that I had spent at the accelerator. I recorded happenings and comments that I had not

managed to write down at the time of observation, as well as my own feelings and recollections from the day. Consequently, several evenings a week my fellow travellers on the train home were treated to the sight of a lone man walking up and down the most isolated part of the platform, speaking into a little black box⁵⁸.

3.6.4 Focus Groups and Check-ins

During both accelerators *NSE* staff conducted several focus groups with the participating entrepreneurs. These were designed primarily to get feedback from them about their experiences of the accelerator – either at the halfway stage (in A1), or at the end of the accelerator (all three accelerators). An additional, more informal focus group was also held in week two of A1. At least two ‘check-ins’ were held each week (or one ‘check-in’ and one ‘check-out’). These brief meetings involved gathering the entire group of entrepreneurs and inviting them to either provide the group with a very brief status update, or to bring up an issue they felt needed addressed.

During the longer focus groups I took on the role of a passive observer, taking notes on either a lap-top or with pen and paper. Often these sessions involved the use of post-it notes and flipcharts, and where these were used I took photographs of the individual notes and each page of the flipchart that had been used. I also made a careful note of the colours used by each entrepreneur in order to be able to link written comments to individuals. Prior to this, the entrepreneurs were informed that I was taking notes of their comments and that it was important for *NSE* to be able to identify the comments with each individual, in order to be able to respond appropriately.

When I was able to participate in a check-in/out session I made notes about participants’ comments after the session. Occasionally individual entrepreneurs were unable to attend a focus group. When this occurred an online questionnaire was used to gather their responses to the main focus group questions. This was only done in A1 however, as the use of interviews in the final week of A2 and A3 made it possible to get feedback from the entrepreneurs, even if they had been absent from the focus group. On a few occasions entrepreneurs came up to me after a check-in session and provided me with an explanation of issues that had been brought up, apparently concerned at the conclusions that I might draw based on limited information. I made an additional note of these interpretations.

⁵⁸ My recorder.

3.6.5 Secondary Data

Although I obtained a substantial amount of ‘contextual’ information from observation, I was also able to access several other sources of data about the entrepreneurs and the accelerator itself. With regards to the accelerator, in addition to my interviews with managers and key stakeholders I requested (and was given) a copy of the project application and access to the accelerator’s online, shared folder (via *DropBox*). I was also provided with copies of the entrepreneurs’ CVs and their applications to the programme.

An intriguing aspect of doing research in *NSE* was the variety of short-term sources of information that emerged over the course of the accelerator. As mentioned previously, most of these sources were one-off happenings that were not repeated in the next accelerator. For example: in the initial weeks of the first accelerator, the coordinator Denise filmed short five-minute interviews with individual entrepreneurs and posted these on YouTube. This was not done in the second accelerator, but instead another person interviewed one entrepreneur each week and posted her summary of the interview on the webpage of a network for social innovation. In the second accelerator, a nascent social entrepreneur doing work experience at *NSE* collected data to use in a filmed documentary about one of the participants. Many of these unexpected opportunities for additional data collection provided me with not only additional material about the entrepreneurs and their experiences, but also information about their interpretations of these experiences. This was also true of the filmed pitches that the A1 entrepreneurs created, where it was interesting to compare their sales rhetoric with the startup reality discussed on a day-to-day basis. This contrast underlines the perceptiveness of Erving Goffman’s (1959) analysis of human interaction as intentional and directed towards an audience.

3.7 Analysing Information about Learning in Accelerators

3.7.1 Recording and Checking of Data

During my study of the *NSE* accelerators I collected data in various forms, the majority of which I later converted into written text. All interviews were recorded on a small digital recorder and the resultant sound files sent to either Scandinavia or the United Kingdom for transcription. Some researchers suggest that it is useful to combine analysis with transcription (Riessman, 2008). My personal preference however, is to do one thing at a time and I prefer to devote my energy to a focused analysis, rather than what – in *my* case – tends to become a prolonged combination of transcription and mediocre analysis. Furthermore, as transcription is a very time-consuming activity for me, I have difficulty in carrying

it out quickly enough to produce the ‘timely theory’ that I discuss in the next section.

After transcription I listened to the interview recordings while reading the text of the interview, checking the recording for accuracy and inserting notes about tone or other characteristics (such as pauses and laughs), where these were missing. I also inserted a paragraph at the beginning of each transcription describing the context in which the conversation was recorded. The majority of the transcriptions proved accurate, but one Scandinavian firm tended to paraphrase interviewees’ replies and their documents required more editing than those produced by other agencies. I also had my own recorded reflections transcribed, as well as one recording of a focus group and all of the short YouTube interviews. After checking the transcriptions for accuracy, I replaced the names of the interviewees with pseudonyms and sent a copy of the transcript to the interviewee for checking and comments. This was a useful step, as several of the entrepreneurs in the second accelerator had heavy accents that both the transcribers and I at times found hard to understand. Hence Kenny’s comment upon reading the transcript I sent him:

“So good to hear from you and to also get a copy of the interview. I just rushed through it and saw some little corrections, I guess you had issues understanding my African accent. Is it possible before me to work on it and send it back to you at this time?”

All of the data sources that were available in textual format were imported into the *NVivo* qualitative data analysis (QDA) software package. Although *NVivo* can be used to automate some aspects of data analysis, I did not use this function and relied instead on the software’s ‘manual’ coding functions for data analysis. However, I also found *NVivo* to be a useful tool for managing data and maintaining an overview of the information available for analysis.

3.7.2 *Timely Theory: Sounding-boards & Reports*

In a previous section I commented on the importance to my study of my ‘engaged’ position in relation to the managers and entrepreneurs with whom I interacted. Andrew Van de Ven (2007) suggests that two criteria for engaged research of high quality include relevance and impact. However, few scholars discuss the way in which *time* affects both of these variables. My research on accelerator programmes provides a stark illustration of the influence of time on the development of research findings. For my study of the NSE accelerators to have any impact on their development, the maximum period between the carrying out of field research and my provision of a report on my findings was eight months. For interviews or focus groups conducted halfway through the eight-week accelerator, a period of two weeks was the desired ‘turn around’ time.

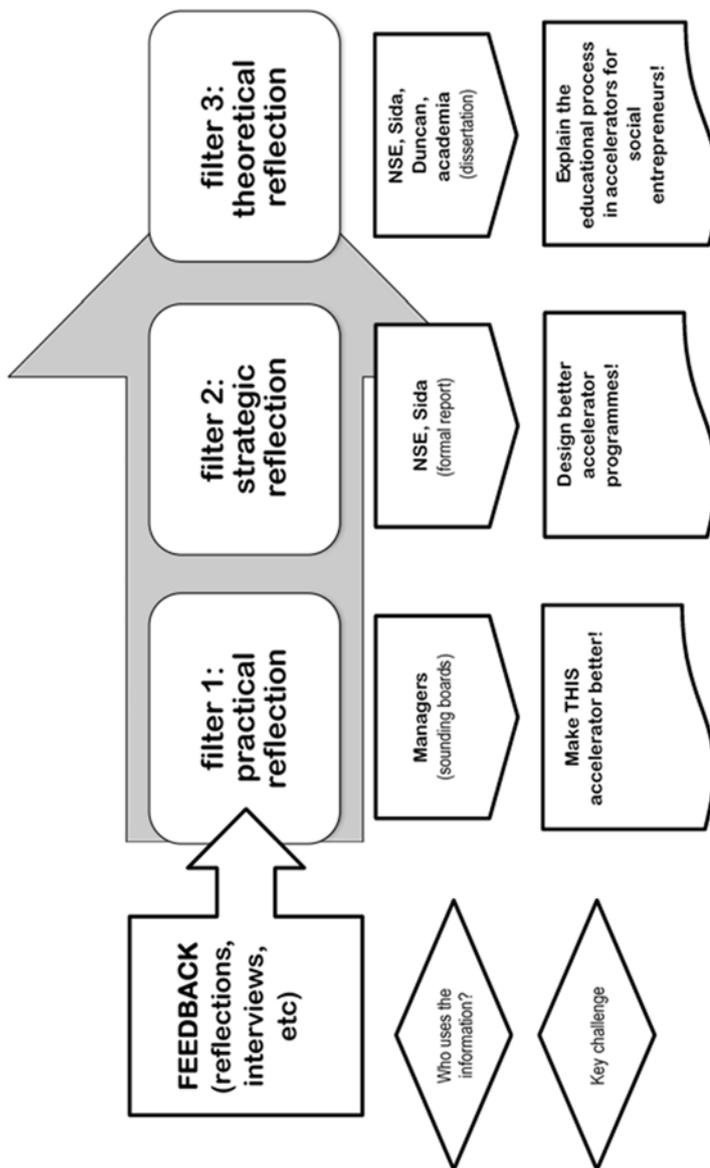


Figure 3-2: Characteristics and targets of 'timely' theory

The pressure to provide timely feedback to accelerator managers pressured me to deliver coherent results at an early stage, a pressure that in turn encouraged me to develop instruments that were capable of creating synergies between practitioners' expectations and the demands of academic research. The analysis process that resulted is illustrated in figure 3.2; which depicts the progression of data analysis from short-term, practitioner-oriented feedback to reports of a more long-term, theoretical nature.

In practice the different kinds of feedback generated by my study resulted in distinct styles of report. At the 'practical reflection' level I produced preliminary written documents that I termed "sounding boards" (more of these below), while at the 'strategic' level I produced more formal reports, often one to two months after the conclusion of an accelerator. One of the more long-term, theoretically-oriented 'reports' is represented by this dissertation.

The reports I provided at the 'strategic' level clearly played an important role in terms of organisational learning for *NSE*. Karen (the A2 coordinator) commented that she had referred to one such report repeatedly while planning the second accelerator. Indeed, the three themes with which I summed up the impact of the first accelerator ("friends, focus and feedback") were used as a slogan to advertise the second programme. Nonetheless, among these different types of analysis it is perhaps the 'sounding board' that merits special attention.

At several instances during the three year period in which *NSE* ran their accelerators, I provided managers with informal reports about the accelerator process. I called these reports 'sounding boards'. These reports were intended to provide practitioners with initial explanations of what I had observed. Importantly however, the sounding boards also provided me with opportunities to obtain additional interpretations of what I had observed. Before sending this type of report to the accelerator coordinators I underlined the preliminary nature of my interpretation. I also emphasized my expectation that they in turn would provide me with feedback regarding either their disagreement with my explanation, their wish to complement my explanation with additional information, or their ideas for an alternative explanation.

In practice this process proved to be a valuable tool for two main tasks. First of all, by making a follow-up phone-call the routine response to a report (i.e. the sounding board), I minimised the possibility of what I had written being misunderstood. I had used the sounding board tool in previous evaluations and was painfully aware of the fact that what I believed I had expressed clearly in a report, was not necessarily what readers understood. More importantly for my research, the follow-up discussion provided me with an opportunity for reflexivity and triangulation. Reflexivity contributes to the analysis process by helping the researcher consider other possible interpretations of what has been

observed (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000). Triangulation increases the credibility (or validity) of the writer's explanation of a phenomenon, if their interpretation is shared by a number of other well-informed people (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003; Stake, 1995). In my discussion of the sounding board reports with accelerator managers my ideas were both critiqued and affirmed. A concrete example of a critique of my interpretation involved my affirmation of a comment made by one entrepreneur about the behaviour of another participant. As both of us had lived for several years in Africa I felt that I understood where they were coming from and felt they probably knew what they were talking about. However, when I commented on the issue to the accelerator coordinator her response was entirely different. *Her* impression was that the entrepreneur who had made the comment had a negative mindset. This comment forced me to question and reassess my own interpretation (which was that the entrepreneur had made a valid observation about the motives of one of their colleagues).

3.7.3 Applied Thematic Analysis

3.7.3.1 Different Methods for Analysing Narratives

Riessman (2008) notes that narrative accounts may be analysed in several different ways; including thematic, structural, dialogic/performance and visual analysis. In the context of family business research, Dawson and Hjorth (2012) suggest a model that integrates the main emphases of the first three approaches. Nonetheless, Zorn (2001; cited in Johnstone, 2007, p. 114) suggests that thematic analysis is particularly useful in ethnographic studies that focus on how individuals talk about “ongoing relational episodes”. My interest lies not so much in discussing the way in which a typical ‘story’ of social entrepreneurial learning is built up in the *Booster* accelerators (a structural perspective) – and I am not overly concerned with discussing how different stories are ‘performed’ for the listener (the dialogic/performance perspective). The latter type of analysis is of course relevant, as at times the social entrepreneurs clearly ‘directed’ their narrative performances in order to achieve certain goals (for example: their YouTube interviews often aimed to spread information about their participation in the programme). However, I chose to employ this aspect of narrative analysis as a supplementary tool to enhance the reflexivity of my study, rather than as the main method of analysis. Instead I chose to focus on identifying the principle *themes* that emerged from entrepreneurs’ accounts of their experiences in the accelerators. This approach is similar to that of Ewick and Silbey (2003) – who not only adopt a thematic analysis in their own study, but also engage with the shorter, ‘episodic’ type of narratives that characterise much of my own data. It is also somewhat similar to the approach known in non-narrative circles as ‘content analysis’, although Joffe and Yardley (2004) underline that thematic analysis pays more attention to the ‘qualitative’ aspects of a text.

The thematic approach to data analysis that I adopt draws not only on the ideas of scholars of narrative – such as Riessman (2008), Mishler (1995), and Gubrium and Holstein (2009); but also on the work of more general scholars of qualitative methodology (for example: Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In keeping with these scholars' ideas therefore, my own analysis began in a relatively unstructured manner with a reading and re-reading of the texts produced during data collection. My analysis then moved gradually from a 'face-value' understanding of entrepreneurs' experiences, towards a more conceptual understanding expressed in more theoretical language – and finally, to the comparison of the experience of the individual with the experience of others. This gradual progression reflects Abbott's (1992) discussion of the value of moving from the analysis of a "single-case narrative" to that of "multicase narratives" – and his emphasis of the need to create insight about 'plot' ("the loose causal order that we generally regard as explanatory")(p.64).

As I attempted to develop my own approach to conducting an analysis of the *Booster* narratives, I noted several issues that I felt needed to be prioritised. The first issue had to do with data management. Many scholars of narrative discuss data analysis, but pay little attention to the challenges associated with *managing* the large amount of data associated with a comprehensive study. It appeared to me that there was a risk of me focusing on the most obvious data in my study (interviews), while neglecting other data sources that might provide important additional insight. I associated this risk with the difficulty of gaining an overview of the entire data set. As I developed my method I therefore included this capacity for data management on my 'wish list'.

A second issue that I felt I needed to address was the issue of maintaining a coherent view of entrepreneurs' narratives 'as a whole', while at the same time conducting the detailed thematic analysis advocated by scholars such as Ritchie and Lewis (2003). As I had previously experienced the 'drowning in data' phenomenon when analysing data using a grounded theory approach, I was wary of approaches that threatened to make it easy to see only 'trees', but no 'forest'. Consequently, a second item on my wish-list was the development of an approach that would facilitate the move from micro analysis to an interpretative, yet coherent account of social entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators.

3.7.3.2 Adapting the Framework technique to narrative analysis

The wish-list described in the preceding paragraphs was developed over a period of many months, during which I experimented with several methods of analysing the data that I had collected in *NVivo*. In the end I decided to adapt the *Framework* approach that has been developed in the United Kingdom at the *NatCen* centre for social research and subsequently integrated into the *NVivo* software package.

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Framework is an approach to the analysis of qualitative data that was pioneered by Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (2003). The method these scholars recommend has been substantially influenced by grounded theory, but the software they developed to assist in their analysis is adaptable for use with other methodologies. *Framework* is distinctive in that it facilitates the creation of a matrix presentation of data on which both case⁵⁹ and theme are visible simultaneously. This makes it easier for researchers to avoid the Achilles heel of grounded theory, namely the risk of creating a large number of codes that eventually risk becoming distanced from their original embeddedness in specific contexts. The software has the additional advantage of forcing analysts to begin theorising at an early stage, as the process of summarising data involves identifying the key issues in each section of the text. The table below provides a brief overview of the analytical steps that are included in my adaption of the *Framework* method.

Note that although table 3.2 may give the impression that data analysis is a linear process, in reality the process is very iterative. It involves not only moving backwards and forwards between stages, but also between levels of analysis (the whole vs. the detail). In subsequent paragraphs I describe these steps in more detail.

Table 3-2: Principle steps in my Adaptation of Framework Analysis

<i>Step</i>	<i>Description</i>
1. Familiarisation with body of data	Reading of main body of interview transcripts. Selection of a single individual for initial analysis.
2. Familiarisation with single interviewee	Reading and re-reading of interview transcripts for a single individual, writing notes in text. Brief summary of notes.
3. Preliminary framework creation	Use of notes from (2) and research questions to construct basic analytical framework. Use of gerunds.
4. Creation of “meaning units”	Coding of sections of text into both existing and new categories. Use of gerunds.
5. Summarisation of themes	Creation of short summaries of the main content of the text in each thematic category ⁶⁰ . Initial theorising.
6. Creation of case narratives	Construction of complete descriptive and explanatory account of each individual's experience.
7. Comparison of cases	Comparison of cases to one another on a thematic basis to highlight similarities and differences.

⁵⁹ By this Ritchie and Lewis (2003) refer to the individual respondent.

⁶⁰ This may be done outside of *Nvivo*, or within the programme using the ‘Framework Matrices’ tool.

My adaptation of the *Framework* technique begins with two steps that have to do with the researcher familiarising themselves with the data that they have collected about individuals' experiences. At this point the goal of the analysis is to gain an initial understanding of the type and characteristics of the data, so that the material on a series of individuals can be analysed in more detail at a later stage. As the analysis of this individual will help form the initial analytical framework for the analysis of the remaining interviews, it is useful to try and identify a case which is fairly similar to the others (what Benner, 1994 terms a "paradigm" case). In this way, the resultant analytical framework will hopefully be able to cope with the majority of the data from the remaining cases. If an 'extreme' case were selected, the analyst risks having to create an entirely new framework at a later stage, which involves unnecessary work.

Once a representative case has been selected for analysis, the researcher embarks on a second process of familiarisation. This involves the reading and re-reading of the transcripts for a single individual, in order to become familiar with their overall characteristics and content. This foundational activity reflects the analytical process of hermeneutical method, where there is a constant move backwards and forwards between the 'part' and the 'whole'. At this stage of my analysis I employed the annotation tool in *NVivo* to make initial notes about my thoughts about what the entrepreneurs were saying. I found this exercise to be particularly useful in preserving an overall sense of the 'whole', prior to engaging in a more detailed analysis of the text. These initial notes were then briefly summarised in a few paragraphs using the "memo" tool in *NVivo*⁶¹.

Having made initial notes about the empirical material that is to be analysed, my adaptation of the *Framework* approach involved creating an initial thematic framework on the basis of the study's research questions and common sense (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Ritchie and Lewis (ibid.) recognise that most analysts are inevitably going to have to code for textual groupings that involve several themes which could have been predicted prior to the coding process. For example: text involving baseline data such as the household composition of the interviewee and prior experience, but naturally also interview excerpts that are clearly related to the study's research questions. This reflects Guest, MacQueen and Namey's (2011) discussion of how texts are 'segmented' as part of the process of developing an effective codebook.

In my own adaptation of the *Framework* tool to narrative analysis I integrated the initial predictive framework recommended by Ritchie and Lewis (2003), with the more inductive technique suggested by Guest et al. (2011). This involved first of all the creation of an analytical framework from the general themes raised by my

⁶¹ My use of the memo tool at this stage should not be confused with the more theoretically-oriented stage of "memoing" in Grounded Theory.

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research questions, as well as more obvious themes about entrepreneurs' backgrounds. In my study some basic themes that I created on the basis of my research questions included "The road to SE and the accelerator" and "Learning process". I then complemented this framework with sub-headings and concepts that I had identified as interesting – or that often occurred in my reading of the first interview transcript (for example: "Top-down Large enterprise perspective" as a sub-heading under "Non-learning"). Often this required the creation of entirely new headings in a 'garbage can' folder entitled "Other".

The third step in my adaptation of the *Framework* technique involves both the creation of additional themes (based on the note-taking done during the initial reading of the transcript) and the incorporation of these themes into new or existing clusters. This step is similar to the inductive thematic analysis described by Dawson and Hjorth (2012), in their third analytical phase of "exploration". During this stage I read the transcripts again and categorised (or coded) the text into distinct thematic units. At this point I did not attempt to link these units to theoretical, disciplinary concepts. Instead I simply read the text and labelled different sections as belonging to either one or more existing themes, or to a new one. As this was done, the notes taken in step 1 naturally provided clues as to the themes that might be constructed from the text. This process requires discipline on the part of the analyst – so that new themes are added to the framework as they occur to the researcher, rather than being unnaturally forced into existing headings. At this stage I also took care not to 'splinter' the text too much so that I lost a sense of its overall character and context. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2000) point out, it is important to preserve a long enough portion of the text, in order to be able to 'listen' to it. My experience suggests that their advice is sound and that the key to useful analysis at this stage is to capture *sections* of text as far as possible, rather than single words or short phrases.

The fourth step in the original *Framework* approach is that of summarising data. During this step researchers are advised to analyse the accounts provided by each individual; studying the data that is associated with each theme and summarising this data into a short description. This usually entails the analyst gathering together all the different snippets of information the person has provided about (for example) their interaction with other entrepreneurs. The researcher attempts to glean the most important kernels of information from these textual extracts and to re-formulate them into a concise description. Using the *NVivo* software this is done in a manner that links the summary to the original texts, making it easier for the researcher or an external investigator to re-visit the scholar's interpretation. In practice I found this difficult to do and as a result, the majority of the thematic summaries recommended by Ritchie and Lewis (2003) were not conducted in *NVivo*, but rather integrated into a longer narrative about each of the four social entrepreneurs about whom I tell what Van Maanen (1988) terms a "realist tale".

The final two steps in my adaptation of the *Framework* technique involve the construction of a longer account of the individual's experience and the comparison of their experience with that of others. At this stage the usefulness of thinking about what needs to be included in such an account at an early stage becomes apparent. Based on the summaries already created for each theme, the researcher constructs an account of the individual's experience that includes not only all of the main themes that emerged during the analysis, but also illustrations from the transcripts themselves – and from additional sources of data, such as the researcher's field notes. This chain of evidence is an important source of the credibility and plausibility that Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest are indicative of sound qualitative research. It is also a characteristic of my research that illustrates the usefulness of combining ethnographic and narrative methods. By adding detail about entrepreneurs' behaviour and the contexts in which they lived and worked, a further dimension is added to the richness already present in their own narratives. In my study I constructed a 'realist' tale for four social entrepreneurs who represented not only the three accelerators that I studied, but also a particular category of participant. By 'realist' Van Maanen (1988) refers to a genre of ethnographic writing in which scholars portray the experiences of those they study in a manner that largely removes the field-worker from the account in an attempt to give the tale an authentic, objective 'feel'. He contrasts this approach with narrative strategies that are "confessional" and "impressionist" in nature, in giving the field-worker a more obvious, interpretative role in the final account – or in couching the tale in more colourful, dramatic terms. Arguably however, the initial sections of this chapter are 'confessional' in nature, and I have therefore judged that the purpose of this study is best served by adopting the more 'realist' perspective of the traditional ethnographer.

The final, but most prolonged step in a multicase narrative analysis is a *comparison* of the experiences of several individuals to one another, in an effort to capture the key factors associated with these experiences. *NVivo's* framework tool for conducting matrix analyses facilitates the process of comparing different aspects of entrepreneurs' experiences to each other, as the software enables the analyst to quickly access the thematic summaries for each case and to display these side by side on one or more computer screens. In practice (as noted above), I felt unable to create summaries of all the entrepreneurs' experiences in the manner advocated by more experienced *Framework* users and relied on more traditional methods. For example: by creating simple tables to classify entrepreneurs' comments, and by leveraging my familiarity with the entrepreneurs to intuitively identify similarities and differences.

3.7.4 Digging Deeper – and Differently

In order to dig ‘deeper’ into entrepreneurs’ experiences I found it useful to adopt not only another perspective on narrative analysis (the dramaturgical perspective⁶²), but also several of the perspectives discussed by Patricia Benner (1994). Dramaturgical analysis builds on Erving Goffman’s (1959) suggestion that individuals tend to both ‘perform’ and ‘enact’ their narratives. This implies that researchers need to ask for *whom* the person is telling their story – and to what *purpose*. The listener/reader also needs to be sensitive to the way in which the individual is describing themselves, as this ‘enactment’ hints at an ideal they may be striving toward.

Benner, despite coming from a different methodological background (phenomenology), suggests several very useful points of analytical departure that I find helpful in thinking about how to approach entrepreneurs’ narratives in a ‘different’ manner. Drawing on her work with Judith Wrubel (1989), Benner (1994) suggests that five aspects of human experience may be usefully explored in qualitative analyses. These include first of all, *situation*: the recognition of the situatedness of the person both in the present and also historically, as well as the questioning of the character of their situation (as either harmonious or “breakdown”). Secondly, *embodiment* is identified as insight into the embedded nature of cognition and experience in relation to the individual’s physical body. *Temporality* focuses on the lived experience that the individual has of time and *concerns* has to do with the meaning-filled orientation of the individual in a situation. Finally, investigation of *common meaning* looks at shared, taken-for-granted linguistic and cultural meanings that guide, and at times limit how events and behaviour develop. Due to the characteristics of the phenomenon that I am studying (entrepreneurial learning), I believe that Benner’s tools pose more relevant questions to entrepreneurs’ texts than the more traditional ‘pentad’ questions (act, agent, agency, scene and purpose) of Burke (1969).

The above paragraphs describe several additional perspectives that I adopted as I analysed my empirical data. These perspectives enabled me to go beyond the face-value statements of interviewees and to think of alternative explanations. This involved not only a deeper dig into my data, but also a ‘different’ dig. The importance of digging differently in qualitative research is emphasized by Alvesson and Sköldböck (2000), who argue that researchers need to be ‘reflexive’ with regards to their interpretations of events. In my approach to narrative analysis this reflexivity is mirrored in my attempt to find a middle-ground between what Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 106) term a “hermeneutics of empathy” and a “hermeneutics of suspicion”. Nonetheless, Alvesson and Sköldböck (ibid., p.273) suggest that reflexivity is best practiced by conducting

⁶² Reissman (2003) refers to this perspective as “dialogic/performance analysis”.

analysis at four levels; namely by interacting with the empirical material, interpreting it, interpreting it critically and reflecting on how one's own text was produced. Although I have found it difficult to employ all of these levels consistently in my analysis, I have attempted to include aspects of them at regular intervals in my analysis and write-up. In particular I have attempted to recognise how my role as an evaluator affected the information entrepreneurs provided me with. It is clear that many of them perceived me as someone who could influence accelerator managers into providing them with resources they wished to obtain, particularly in the second accelerator. As I analysed the interviews I attempted to bear this in mind, among other considerations.

3.7.5 Critiquing the Method

All research designs involve choosing a method because of its advantages, while also acknowledging and attempting to compensate for its flaws. Case study strategies, narratives and ethnography are not exceptions, and Riessman (1994), Dawson and Hjorth (2012), and Van Maanen (1988) discuss several of their weaknesses. A common weakness has to do with generalizability – by which I refer to the possibility of drawing conclusions about entrepreneurial learning in other accelerators, based on this study. This study's advantage is its attention to detail and the potential it offers to reveal the 'micro' processes of social entrepreneurial learning. This is however, achieved at the cost of generalizability – for as Riessman (*ibid.*, p.70) points out: "sample sizes in narrative studies are small, and cases are often drawn from unrepresentative pools". Case-studies, narratives and ethnography can all contribute to the development of theory; but care must be taken when applying the findings of this study in other contexts. Closely related to this aspect is Dawson and Hjorth's (*ibid.*, p13) discussion of the temptation that narrative analysts must resist, to attach too much significance to "the idiosyncrasies of a particular case".

A second weakness of a qualitative case strategy is its interpretative nature, which often requires scholars to engage in a 'double-hermeneutic' of interpreting an individual's interpretations. In the context of entrepreneurship, interpretative approaches that focus on the narratives and activities of the entrepreneur can reinforce traditional portrayals of the entrepreneur as a heroic *individual*. This is a particularly valid criticism when studying accelerators, given the group-oriented nature of these programmes. A further criticism of my particular adaption of narratives/ethnography could be directed at the evolving nature of the method itself – in that the techniques used and even some of the questions asked were slightly different in the first, second and third accelerators. As Johnstone (2007) points out, ethnographic method is by nature unpredictable and 'cyclical' (as opposed to linear) in terms of process. While this flexibility may enable researchers to obtain unique data, it does make it difficult (if not impossible) to replicate ethnographic studies. Nonetheless, the alternative – involving the

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consistent use of research instruments developed early on in the study – would risk avoiding what Alvesson and Sandberg term ‘interesting’ research. In other words, by prioritising issues of replicability and face validity researchers are often bound to study phenomena that we are already somewhat familiar with.

With regards to the dependence of qualitative methods on interpretative techniques, Van Maanen (1988) notes that researchers have to make choices as to how they present their data. By choosing a ‘realist tale’ as I have done, I lose some of the transparent reflexivity apparent in what he terms “confessional” tales – and much of the colour associated with “impressionist” tales. Regardless of the way in which I tell my ‘tale’ however, it is important to remember that I am interpreting actors’ words and actions – and that another person might interpret these in a different manner. Nor can we be certain that entrepreneurs’ portrayals of their own learning are entirely accurate. As Norman Denzin (2000, cited in Riessman, 2008, p. 188) points out, narratives are reflections *on* the world, not *of* it. Consequently, it is important that this study is read bearing in mind that the methods employed are associated not only with certain strengths, but also corresponding weaknesses. Nonetheless, at the end of the day the main judge of a method’s appropriateness must be its ‘fit’ (Creswell, 2007). Drawing on Cope and Watts (2000), I argue that the complexity of social entrepreneurial learning requires a qualitative, interpretative methodology. With regards to my use of narratives as a base for theory building, Dawson and Hjorth (2012, p.3.) argue that the approach is particularly useful when a study’s goal is to extend knowledge by understanding “not only the results of what happened but also their making”. Finally, I suggest that the study of social entrepreneurial learning is ‘nascent’ in character and that consequently it is appropriate to adopt a method that involves an “open-ended” approach to the collection and analysis of data (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). In the next chapter I begin to explore this nascent field: the world of social entrepreneurial learning in the context of accelerators.

4 Social Entrepreneurs & Accelerators

4.1 Chapter Overview

In this dissertation the learning of social entrepreneurs is studied in the context of an external intervention into their learning, in the form of an accelerator programme. This chapter introduces both the social entrepreneurs who participated in the three accelerators studied – and the accelerators themselves. As 24 social entrepreneurs participated in these accelerators, I have deemed it unrealistic to describe each of their learning processes in detail. Instead I have chosen to first of all provide a brief overview of all of the social entrepreneurs who participated in the accelerators that I studied. I then describe the accelerators that they participated in, before discussing the learning of only *four* individuals in more detail. My employment of a few individuals as “exemplars” of social entrepreneurial learning is common practice in qualitative studies (Benner, 1994). In case studies theory is often developed “through the richness of [...] contextualised accounts and the level of precision in [...] description” (Dawson & Hjorth, 2012, p. 340). Consequently, in this study the learning of four entrepreneurs is related to the context in which their learning takes place (the accelerators). For this reason I describe the programmes that they participated in before I discuss their experiences. The accelerators serve as a backdrop to my more detailed description of the four processes of social entrepreneurial learning that emerged as social entrepreneurs interacted with the accelerator.

4.2 The Social Entrepreneurs – Part I

In chapter one I noted the distinguishing characteristic of the entrepreneurial ‘cohort’ in accelerator programmes. In this dissertation three accelerators are studied, each of which recruited a different mix of social entrepreneurs (see table 4.1). In subsequent paragraphs I refer to these three accelerators using the abbreviations ‘A1’, ‘A2’ and ‘A3’. The intention of the *Booster* accelerators was to accelerate the development of social entrepreneurs whose products or services targeted countries in the ‘developing’ world. This ambition resulted in a progressive narrowing of the accelerator recruitment process as time went by. As a result, the A1 programme recruited a higher proportion of Scandinavian social entrepreneurs, while the A2 and A3 programmes both recruited primarily non-Scandinavian entrepreneurs. The composition of the accelerator cohort is one aspect of the context in which the individual’s learning takes place. Consequently,

the social entrepreneurs are described below as individuals situated in a particular cohort.

Despite its ambition to recruit entrepreneurs who were working on ideas that were clearly linked to the developing world, the majority of the entrepreneurs in the first accelerator did not actually reside in a developing country. Most of them were instead developing a product or service *for* these contexts (Gabriella, Catrin, Andrew, Barry), or developing an idea that was intended to *facilitate* a process associated with development work – such as raising funds (Alice and Edward). Henrik was the only entrepreneur who had been living in a developing country immediately before coming to the accelerator – and even then, only for a year. In section 4.4 I suggest that several different categories of social entrepreneur participated in the *Booster* accelerators – and these categories are described in more detail later. At this point suffice to say that four of the seven social entrepreneurs recruited to accelerator one (A1) came from the ‘knowledgeable improviser’ category and were ‘expatriates’. The ‘indigenous’ category of social entrepreneur was entirely absent from A1. With the exception of Catrin, all of the A1 entrepreneurs were Scandinavians or had strong links to Scandinavia (Andrew and Gabriella were both married to Scandinavians). All of the social entrepreneurs participated in the accelerator on their own, with the exception of Alice and Edward – who came as a team. Three of the seven participants were female.

In contrast to the first programme, the second accelerator was dominated by the ‘indigenous’ category of social entrepreneur (six of nine participants). However, in contrast to the first programme only two of the nine participants were female. All of the six ‘indigenous’ social entrepreneurs were male and came from East and West Africa. In contrast to A1 however, only two of the entrepreneurs were not resident in the countries they were targeting with their enterprises – and one of these (Marie) had recently returned from south-east Asia after residing there for many years. Marie, Heidi and possibly Jamal were thus the only ‘Westerners’ in A2, with Heidi coming from North America, Marie from Norway – and Jamal an immigrant from south Asia who had lived in Scandinavia for more than a decade. As will be seen in the section ‘Similar structure, dissimilar interaction’ the different backgrounds of the social entrepreneurs influenced how they interacted with one another. Differences in ethnicity and gender were at times reinforced by the accelerator structure and affected entrepreneurs’ interaction with one another. Four of the nine social entrepreneurs belonged to the ‘confident entrant’ category.

Table 4-1: Overview of the *Booster* Social Entrepreneurs

Name / Enterprise	Acc.	Provenance	Cat.	Enterprise focus	Status at start**
Gabriella / Brottle	A1	Scandinavia*	KI-E	construction / recycling	ideation (-2)
Alice / Goodlink	A1	Scandinavia	KI-E	web service for targeted giving	concepting (-1)
Andrew / C-Cure	A1	Scandinavia*	KI-E	employment / combatting spam	concepting (-1)
Catrin / Imbani	A1	Western Europe	CE-E	cross-border money transfer for migrant workers	concepting (-1)
Edward / Goodlink	A1	Scandinavia	KI-E	web service for targeted giving	concepting (-1)
Henrik / Garbage Garments	A1	Scandinavia	I-E	youth employment on rubbish dumps	commitment (0)
Barry / CellSun	A1	Scandinavia	V-E	small-scale renewable energy	validation (1)
Jamal / AgriTech	A2	Scandinavia*	I-E	agriculture / energy	ideation (-2)
Miriam / Better Work	A2	Scandinavia	KI-E	garment workers' rights / safety training	concepting (-1)
Steven / Bibl. Communitaires	A2	Central Africa	CE-I	community libraries	concepting (-1)
Lewis / BioVolt	A2	East Africa	V-I	renewable energy	commitment (0)
Heidi / Bottle Art	A2	North America	CE-E	female employment / recycling	validation (1)
Kenny / Afri-Text	A2	West Africa	I-I	English-language training	validation (1)
Nelson / Pistols to Ploughs	A2	West Africa	CE-I	employment for child soldiers	validation (1)
Peter / AfriPads	A2	East Africa	CE-I	sanitary pads from renewable materials	validation (1)
Isaac / MobiClin	A2	East Africa	V-I	mobile health care	scaling (2)
Nadia / Femicharge	A3	Western Europe	I-E	women's employment / energy	concepting (-1)
Olga / Rough Diamonds	A3	Western Europe	KI-I	combatting human trafficking	commitment (0)
Patience / FairCare	A3	East Africa	KI-I	health care for sex workers	commitment (0)
Rebecca / Spread IT	A3	East Africa	KI-I	community IT training	commitment (0)
Thomas / TourFair	A3	East Africa	V-I	ethical tourism	validation (1)
Willis / AfriChoc	A3	West Africa	CE-I	employment for child soldiers / fair-trade cocoa	validation (1)
Vinay / Surpower	A3	South Asia	KI-I	renewable energy	validation (1)
Zayd / Puretech	A3	Middle East	KI-I	water recycling / purification	validation (1)

* Denotes an entrepreneur resident in Scandinavia who immigrated as an adult.

** Stage categories from Startup Commons (2014)

The third accelerator was similar to the second in that a large proportion of the participants (four of the eight) were recruited from African countries. However, in contrast to A2 the third cohort consisted of as many men as women – and only one of the non-African entrepreneurs came from a Western background. The remaining entrepreneurs came from Eastern Europe, the Middle-East and South Asia. Moreover, most of the entrepreneurs belonged to the ‘indigenous’ category of social entrepreneur – and five of the eight participants could also be described as ‘knowledgeable improvisers’. Only one of the social entrepreneurs in A3 belonged to the category that I term ‘expatriate’ social entrepreneur.

In terms of venture *stage*, I draw on the typology developed by the *Start-up Commons* (2014) to categorise the progress already made by the social entrepreneurs when they entered the *Booster* programme. This typology consists of three over-reaching stages (pre-startup, start-up and growth). The typology is divided into smaller sub-stages and numbered, with some stages ‘bridging’ the gaps between the three main stages (see figure 4.1). “Pre-startup” is for example, subdivided into “ideation” (-2) and “concepting” (-1), with “commitment” (0) providing the bridge to “startup”. “Start-up” is associated with “validation” (+1), with “scaling” (+2) bridging over into the “growth” phase – in which the final stage of “establishing” (+3) is found. As table 4.1 shows, the first accelerator recruited a considerably larger proportion of early-stage (‘pre-startup’) social entrepreneurs, than A2 and A3. In both A2 and A3 about half of the entrepreneurs recruited were at the ‘startup’ stage of development, with the other half fairly evenly balanced between the ‘inception’ and ‘inception>survival’ categories.

PRE-STARTUP			STARTUP		GROWTH
ideation (-2)	concepting (-1)	commitment (0)	validation (1)	scaling (2)	establishment (3)

Figure 4-1: Startup stages, from Startup Commons (2014)

The typologies mentioned above and the impact of the different constellations of entrepreneurs on the accelerator process are discussed in more detail in the sections entitled ‘Similar structure, dissimilar interaction’ (4.3.7) and ‘The social entrepreneurs – Part 2’ (4.4). I now move on to describe the *context* for this study of social entrepreneurial learning, namely the three *Booster* accelerators.

4.3 The Accelerators

4.3.1 Background

In this dissertation I explore the social entrepreneurial learning of three cohorts of social entrepreneurs who participated in an accelerator run by a Scandinavian third sector organisation. This organisation, the *Network for Social Entrepreneurship*⁶³ (or *NSE*) is a member-based, not-for-profit. It was founded in 2004 primarily in order to give more structure to the growing network of individuals who were interested in promoting social entrepreneurship in Scandinavia. The organisation's website identifies *NSE's* mission as that of "promoting, inspiring and empowering" social entrepreneurial activities – and its vision as: "a world where social entrepreneurship competes with traditional business, and is seen as a norm rather than an alternative way of doing business".

Isabelle, one of the *NSE* board members, describes the development of the network as involving two stages. The first stage, from 2004 to 2010, was based primarily on networking and on the voluntary activities of its members. This stage is associated with regular networking activities. For example: the monthly meeting of social entrepreneurs at the *SocNet* office, initiated in 2006. It also involved the participation of network members in think-tanks that focused on the role of the private sector in development. Members also made several visits to developing countries to engage in a dialogue on social entrepreneurship. This dialogue was carried out in partnership with other third sector organisations including the Swedish organisation *ForumSyd* and *Pioneers of Change* in South Africa. At the same time, network members were engaged in activities relating to social entrepreneurship in Scandinavia, setting up for example an annual three week introductory course on the subject and pioneering the *Youth for Change*⁶⁴ project in 2010. The latter project was later developed into an independent social enterprise and focuses on increasing the participation of young people in solving social challenges in their local environments.

The *Youth for Change* initiative, despite not being *NSE's* only successful initiative, was to a large extent a watershed project. Isabelle suggests that it marked a change in mindset within *NSE*, as board members were forced to make the choice between scaling up the network's activities and limiting the amount of activities the organisation was involved in. Isabelle had been an *NSE* member for several years and as demands on the organisation increased, she also became the first person to be employed on a part-time basis. Her recruitment coincided with the

⁶³ This is a pseudonym.

⁶⁴ Despite the existence of an organisation with this name in California, this is a pseudonym for one of the projects run by *NSE*.

election of Frank as new chairman to the *NSE* board in 2011. Frank recollects seeing his task as chairman as that of helping *NSE* make the move from a network to an organisation. This was done by focusing on a scaling up of the things that they had “semi been doing for years” and by transforming “loosely created” partnerships into formal agreements where possible.

One of the partnerships prioritised by the network was their dialogue with the *Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)*. *NSE* had maintained contact with *Sida* since its founding and had partnered with the agency in arranging several seminars. In 2010 they had also applied for funding to set up a more formal head office with a salaried director. This application was rejected due to having too broad an aim – and also because it did not focus primarily on developing countries. Nevertheless, following the success of *Youth for Change* the *NSE* board believed that they had increased evidence for the organisation’s capacity to nurture successful social entrepreneurs. They were also aware of *Sida*’s increasing interest in the role of the enterprise in development, as seen in their launching of the *Business for Development (B4D)* programme and the matched-funding initiative *Innovations against Poverty (I.a.P)* (*Sida*, 2010). *NSE* therefore put together a new application for funding. This application focused more exclusively on the establishment of a function within the organisation that would create “a support function and incubator activity for entrepreneurs whose innovations actively promote the combatting of poverty” (*NSE* 2011). The three year project for which the organisation sought funding was titled “*Boosting Social Entrepreneurship*” (*BSE*) and the accelerator associated with the project subsequently became known as “*Booster*”.

Funding for the *BSE* project was granted by *Sida* in late 2011. Fascinatingly, the application does not include any description of the creation of a series of accelerators for social entrepreneurs, even if it is clear from my interviews with board members that this was a key part of the intended programme. Instead the application describes several different forms of support, including: mentoring, individual advice and support, a web-based virtual community for social entrepreneurs, and ongoing workshops and seminars. Consequently, my impression is that although the idea of an accelerator was one that may have existed when the application was made, it only matured significantly during the period between the sending in of the application and the approval of funding. Evidence for this is given by Isabelle’s comment that the accelerator idea developed after the application was sent: “the application focused on the [programme’s] purpose and the need for such a programme”. Frank’s comments reflect the board’s search for a method that would “accelerate the entrepreneurs who already had ideas, but needed a crash course in the business aspects [...] or other elements of being an entrepreneur”. It does seem however, that Frank was a driving force with regards to the final choice of instrument, as he describes a personal process of learning about accelerators that included taking on board

impressions from programmes such as the *Unreasonable Institute* and *Echoing Green*. He summarised the end result as a process of adaptation: “we tweaked the idea of long-term incubation to short-term acceleration with scalability”. What this involved in practice is described in the following section.

4.3.2 Designing for Development

4.3.2.1 Accelerator I

At several points in this dissertation I describe the gradual process of emergence that characterised the first accelerator programme. In other words: the move from a conviction that social entrepreneurs needed to be supported, to the development of more specific ideas about *how* to support, the sourcing of funding for a programme of support – and finally, the recruitment of somebody to run the programme. The ‘somebody’ who was recruited to run the first accelerator was Denise, a young woman with a background in the *Fairtrade* movement. She was given the task of designing a programme around several key factors that Frank and other *NSE* members believed to be vital to the acceleration process. These factors are briefly described below.

A core idea of accelerators is obviously *acceleration*: the development of targeted ventures in a more rapid manner than would otherwise have taken place. Isabelle referred to this key accelerator role as one of “leverage”. She also talked of the accelerator process in terms of a “catalyst” and suggested that one of its functions was “quality assurance”. In other words, the task given to Denise was to design a process that both increased the pace of venture development, while also ensuring that the development taking place was sound and healthy. Frank made it clear that “healthy” implied a move towards financial viability: the development of business propositions that would be attractive to investors. However, he allowed for the possibility that the accelerator might not be able to bring all the social entrepreneurs to this stage:

“The idea is how can we make these startups investor-ready, like include businesses that can stand on their own two feet [...] ensuring that they understand that they can stand on their own two feet, or are at least equipped with the questions that they need to answer in order to become standing on their own two feet.”

In order to create ‘leverage’ both Frank and Isabelle identified several key functions that they believed the accelerator needed to fulfil. They also had ideas about how these functions could be provided. Frank suggested that the accelerator would provide social entrepreneurs with access to new knowledge (“high quality lecturers”), individual coaching (“coaches, mentors”), an expanded network (“events”) and investment (“investors”). Here the design of the *Booster*

accelerator was clearly influenced by the social business accelerator of the *Unreasonable Institute*. Their program focuses on two main themes, namely: the development of the entrepreneur and their venture – and the linking of the entrepreneur to investors, by means of effective pitching and investor-oriented events. The British *School for Social Entrepreneurs* describes a similar approach to learning that involves five components. Four of these (witness sessions, expert sessions, mentoring and action learning sets) were also adopted by *NSE* in their own accelerator (SSE, 2013). The similarity of the *Booster* programme to other short-term programmes underlines the relevance of this study. It is probable that insights from the *Booster* accelerators will be useful in enhancing the learning associated with other programmes that share many of its ingredients.

Despite the influence of other programmes on the design of the *NSE* accelerator, the two board members who exerted most influence on its design – Frank and Isabelle – drew extensively on their own experiences and values as they identified the key emphases for their own programme. As already noted, one such emphasis was that of quality assurance. Frank suggested that one of the functions of the entrepreneurial cohort should be that of assessing and improving the quality of one another's ventures:

“Giving them a space [...] to be with one another and to learn and question each other about the quality, the focus, whatever element of their business.”

Isabelle was equally adamant on this point, reflecting on her own experience in incubators and emphasising the importance of “mangling” one's business idea in an “intense” environment. Nonetheless, Frank and Isabelle also attached special weight to the function of the accelerator cohort as a provider of much-needed companionship and peer feedback. They both referred to the ‘loneliness’ of the entrepreneurial experience as a point of departure for their reasoning, as illustrated by Frank's comment:

“I think peer support for any business person or entrepreneur is often left lacking. We often work alone in our own spaces.”

Building on this observation, they emphasized the importance of creating networks and relationships to combat this isolation. As Isabelle reasoned:

“I think there is an impact in the area of the network one builds in a programme like this [...] A clear advantage of the accelerator will be its intensity. We are our own bosses in our own operations - but we need a relation to other entrepreneurs who can understand our idea, but still view it from the outside.”

To summarise therefore, the first accelerator was designed with one eye on the *Unreasonable Institute* – and was intended to provide new ventures with the

leverage necessary to move significantly closer to ‘investor readiness’. In order to do this *NSE* intended to first of all help participating entrepreneurs improve their businesses by means of new insight (visiting speakers) and a critical appraisal of their ventures (by their mentors and peers). Moreover, the accelerator was intended to extend the networks of the entrepreneurs by means of events and interaction – and by extension, their access to both social and financial capital.

4.3.2.2 Accelerator 2

The second accelerator lasted for eight weeks (the same as A1), but in contrast to the first was held in the Scandinavian winter – from January to March, 2013. Two factors that affected the timing of the second accelerator were the ambition of *NSE* (as expressed in the application to *Sida*) to hold two accelerators a year – and the negative experience of several entrepreneurs after they graduated from the first programme. The first accelerator finished just before the Scandinavian summer – and hence the period in which many Nordic businesses go into ‘sleep’ mode. At this point they tend to maintain necessary activity, but do not generally initiate anything radically new. Several entrepreneurs commented on the demotivating experience of moving from the ‘high’ of the accelerator experience, to the torpidity of the Scandinavian summer period, when many of the people they wished to make contact with were simply not available.

The second accelerator differed little from the first in terms of content and also lasted for an eight-week period. Due to the change in programme coordinator (as described in my methods chapter); the new facilitator, Karen, was naturally hesitant to change anything major without first experiencing the programme. However, although she maintained the overall content of the A1 programme, Karen had more time to prepare the second accelerator. She was therefore able to structure the accelerator in a manner that was more strategic in terms of the learning process, rather than convenient in terms of fitting into speakers’ schedules. The revised timing of the second accelerator is depicted in table 4.2 of the ‘Structure and content’ section.

A major change in the design of the second accelerator was the timing of the programme. Programme managers took note of a comment I made in a report, where I noted that finishing the accelerator just before the Swedish summer holidays had a demotivating effect on some of the entrepreneurs. The new accelerator was therefore scheduled so that it began in January and finished at the end of March. Unfortunately, the majority of the entrepreneurs in the second accelerator cohort were recruited from Africa – which created new challenges. For example: difficulties in arriving on time in the mornings due to the late sunrise (and a lack of birdsong to indicate that dawn had come) – and several practical issues associated with the unpreparedness of several of the participants for the harsh Scandinavian winter.

4.3.2.3 Accelerator 3

The structure and content of the third accelerator were only slightly revised from the second (see table 4.2). Three changes to the programme were however made. First of all, due to the composition of the third cohort (mostly social entrepreneurs from developing countries), the timing of the accelerator was changed back to that of A1 – i.e. April to June. A second, important change was the recruiting of two volunteers to the accelerator management team for help with practical issues. One of these (Jemma) was given the exclusive task of planning networking activities and suggesting contacts for each of the social entrepreneurs. Finally, due to the pregnancy of Karen (the A2 accelerator manager) the responsibility for the day-to-day running of the accelerator was handed over to Frida. Frida participated in A1 and A2 as a process leader and was recruited to *NSE* shortly after the end of the second programme.

4.3.3 Structure and Content

4.3.3.1 Accelerator I

The structure of the first *Booster* accelerator (A1) was initially planned by the newly recruited manager Denise, in a manner that interwove education, networking and practice in a fairly balanced manner *throughout* the eight-week accelerator. As will be described later, this routine was altered in the final weeks of the programme. The first accelerator lasted for eight weeks and took place in a large Scandinavian city between April and June, 2012.

The accelerator began on a Tuesday with a two-day team-building session at a small conference venue attached to a business centre for alternative health practice. On the second day a speaker from a British social venture took centre stage, as the entrepreneurs began to transfer their focus from the dynamics of the group to the dynamics of their own ventures. On the Thursday of week one, the entrepreneurs participated in their first networking event, manning the *NSE* stand at a CSR fair held by a well-known business school in the region. On the Friday they travelled for the first time to the hot-desking venue *SocNet*, which was to be their workplace for the next seven weeks.

Beginning on week two, each week then followed a fairly similar pattern. Two educational sessions with external speakers were held on Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays; with Tuesdays and Fridays dedicated to the social entrepreneurs' own work – or to individual coaching sessions. Networking activities were scheduled throughout the accelerator, with some arranged by *NSE* (such as the 'Social Entrepreneurship Evening' and the final graduation event). Additional networking activities were arranged by organisations not formally connected to *NSE* and the entrepreneurs participated in these on a more informal basis. These activities, which included the international SOCAP conference on impact

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investing, were integrated into the accelerator schedule rather than planned to fit in with a particular stage of the programme.

As noted previously, the general ‘logic’ and direction of the accelerator was influenced by the structure of the *Unreasonable Institute’s* programme. This structure focused very much on helping entrepreneurs attain ‘investor-readiness’. In other words, *NSE’s* ambition was that by the end of the accelerator the entrepreneur would be able to present their startup effectively (their “pitch”), while also backing their presentation up with a credible business plan. At the same time, the accelerator maintained a clear focus on developing countries and on the field of social entrepreneurship. The combination of these emphases led to the content of the accelerator being characterised by four main themes, namely: ‘social innovation’, ‘building a viable business’, ‘funding’ and ‘marketing’ (my summary). The content and timing of these themes is shown in table 4.2.

Several things are worth commenting on in relation to the table. First of all, the table does not capture one of the important characteristics of the accelerator, namely the *iterative* nature of the programme. At several points in the accelerator, speakers who had visited the programme and given a talk on a certain subject (for example: business models), returned to the accelerator several weeks later for a follow-up session. In this way they were able to accompany the development of the social entrepreneurs’ thought processes and their practical application of session content. Something else that is not apparent from the table, is the emphasis in A1 of pitching activity and social media. More formal attention was given to the verbal presentation of the social entrepreneurs’ businesses in weeks one and five, but in reality each week of the accelerator included some activity that required participants to explain their business idea to somebody else. Similar attention was paid to the role of social media in promoting the new ventures. Consequently, an emphasis on blogging and other techniques for creating an internet presence, was something that was particularly noticeable throughout the first accelerator.

A final factor that does not emerge from the table’s simple thematic description is the ‘who’ of the accelerator content. Many of the speakers who visited the A1 programme had a background in entrepreneurship, sustainable business or corporate social responsibility. With the exception of a guest from the British social venture *WeCreate* and two Scandinavian entrepreneurs working abroad, all of the speakers were based in Scandinavia – even if several of them had extensive experience in developing countries. Many of the speakers had previously been members of *NSE* and with few exceptions were not presently engaged in starting ventures directly addressing the challenges of the developing world. A fairly typical speaker was one who had engaged in social innovation at some stage in their career, but who was now employed in either a larger organisation in the area of sustainability, or as a consultant.

Table 4-2: Thematic content and timing of Accelerator activities.

Theme	Content	A1	A2	A3
Social innovation	Social entrepreneurship	Wk.1		Wk.1
	MDGs / CSR governance	Wk.2		Wk.1
	Sustainable business	Wk.4	Wk.3	
	Business in developing markets	Wk.4	Wk.3,8	
	Measuring social impact /SVP	Wk. 6	Wk.2	Wk.2,3
Building a viable business	Business plan	Wk.2	Wk.2,8	Wk.1,7
	Business models	Wk.3,5	Wk.3,7	Wk. 2,4
	Financial management		Wk.3	Wk.4
	Scaling		Wk.7	
	Customer focus / sales		Wk.7	Wk.5
	Leadership			Wk.1
	Project Management			Wk.3,7,8
	Legal aspects / Int. property			Wk.4
Funding	Social finance / I.a.P	Wk.1	Wk.5,6	
	Crowd & equity funding	Wk.3	Wk.5	Wk.4,5
	Funding strategies	Wk.3	Wk.5	Wk.4,5
	Understanding investors	Wk.7	Wk.5	
	Grant writing			Wk.5
Marketing	Communication strategy	Wk.2	Wk.6,8	Wk.1,6
	Web sites	Wk.3		Wk.7
	Social media	Wk.3,7	Wk.5	
	Brand management	Wk.6	Wk.6	Wk.6,7
Other	Presentation and pitching	Wk.1,5	Wk.6	Wk.7,8
	Entrepreneurial networking	Wk.2	Wk.4	
	The entrepreneurial process	Wk.3		
	Building innovation capacity	Wk.4		
	Intercultural communication			Wk.2
	Excel & PowerPoint			Wk.2
Events	Mingle w/ NSE board / kick-off	Wk. 1	Wk. 1,	Wk.1
	Night of Impact / SE bar	Wk. 3	4	Wk.5
	CSR Fair / E'ship Day	Wk. 1	Wk. 4	Wk.1, 6
	SOCAP conference	Wk. 5		
	Lunch w/British Council			
	SE presentation in borough		Wk. 2	
	Study visit to social enterprise		Wk. 6	Wk. 3
	Study visit to business lab			Wk. 3
	Speed-dating w/mentors			Wk.4
	Graduation / investor mingle	Wk. 8	Wk. 3,8	Wk.8

As the first accelerator progressed and the entrepreneurs made progress on their business plans, they became increasingly aware of the impending end of the programme. Many of them experienced this as stressful and complained about the continued intensity of the scheduled programme of visiting speakers. For this reason, towards the end of A1 the decision was taken to cancel several sessions in order to free up more time for individual activity. However, in order to counteract the risk of having a 'content-less' last few weeks, the entrepreneurs were asked to clarify their needs for expertise and additional coaching.

Accelerator managers subsequently catered to these needs on a more individualised basis than at the beginning of the programme: running a few sessions with smaller groups, or helping the entrepreneurs to get into contact with relevant experts on an individual basis.

4.3.3.2 Accelerator 2

The second *Booster* accelerator was fairly similar to the first in structure, although as will be seen, it generated very different interaction and outcomes. Consequently, in both this section and subsequent sections I do not provide a detailed description of the characteristics of the second programme that remained more or less unchanged from the first. Instead I focus on the features of the second accelerator that were *different* from the first.

In contrast to the first accelerator, A2 devoted three full days of the first week to team building. The second accelerator again sourced several speakers from the United Kingdom, even if these were not the same ones engaged in A1. The general content of A2 and the timing of the different themes are depicted in the middle column of table 4.2.

As more time was available for planning in the second accelerator, it was easier to schedule speakers in a more logical manner than in the first accelerator. In A1, accelerator managers were at times forced by speakers' schedules to fit them in on dates that were not optimal from a pedagogical perspective. In contrast, in A2 there was a clearer progression from theme to theme throughout the programme. This is clearly seen in table 4.2, where the 'funding' theme in A2 is scheduled primarily in week 5, whereas in A1 the sessions on this theme were more splintered and took place in weeks 1, 3 and 7. The schedule for A2 also illustrates the learning that took place between the two accelerators. In A1, managers invited the speakers that the entrepreneurs appreciated the most, back to the programme to provide follow-up and a more in-depth treatment of their topics. In my evaluation of A1 I had suggested that fewer speakers be used in future accelerators and that more effort be spent on providing continuity. Accelerator staff adopted this suggestion and in the A2 schedule it is possible to see how a particular subject is introduced early on in the programme and then systematically followed up at a later stage. For example: "business plan" was introduced in week 2 and followed up in week 8 – and the topic "business models" was introduced in week 3 and then followed up in week 7.

In the second accelerator participants were exposed to 'external' events a little less than in the first. For example: the accelerator did not coincide with local events such as a university CSR fair, nor with regional events such as the SOCAP conference on social investment – which was opportunely located in southern Sweden in week 5 of A1.

4.3.3.3 Accelerator 3

The final accelerator surveyed in this study was similar to A1 in terms of timing (starting in mid-April and ending in mid-June) and resembled A2 in terms of structure and content. As in A1, the programme took advantage of other organisations' events to maximise networking opportunities for the entrepreneurs. For example: the A3 social entrepreneurs attended an entrepreneurship day held by a business school in the city. A study visit was also arranged to a successful social enterprise based in Scandinavia, but operating in Africa – as well as to a business 'lab' with a focus on emerging markets. In A3, a seminar on writing grant proposals was included for the first time and a highly-appreciated session on project management was also introduced. A 'speed-dating' event was arranged so that the social entrepreneurs could get input from the mentors of their peers – and several practical sessions on software skills (Microsoft Excel and PowerPoint) were also arranged. Slightly more time was also devoted to the financial aspects of social entrepreneurship. The general content of A3 and the timing of the different themes are depicted in the right-hand column of table 4.2.

4.3.4 Place

In the following paragraphs the physical spaces in which the *Booster* social entrepreneurs lived and worked are described. The *SocNet* working environment that was common to all three accelerators is described first, before the additional 'secondary spaces' associated with each particular programme are discussed.

4.3.4.1 SocNet

The *Booster* social entrepreneurs spent a large amount of the accelerator period at *SocNet*, a hot-desking office environment developed for enterprises with a 'social' orientation. The *SocNet* concept is international and over 30 centres exist in the world, primarily in the northern hemisphere. Several centres have also been started south of the equator, even if the organisation has not yet created an effective presence among developing nations. All of the centres in the world are linked via a virtual platform and networking for social impact is a core idea in *SocNet* activities. The web publicity provided by the 'hotel' that hosted the *Booster* entrepreneurs describes its vision as involving a desire to create spaces that:

"combine the best of a trusted community, innovation lab, business incubator and the comforts of home. Spaces with all the tools and trimmings needed to grow and develop innovative ventures for the world. But above all, spaces for meaningful encounters, exchange and inspiration, full of diverse people doing amazing things."

What being located at *SocNet* implied in practice for the *Booster* social entrepreneurs was primarily access to both the centre's physical facilities and the centre's network of entrepreneurs for an eight-week period. Renting space at a *SocNet* facility usually means not only working in an open-office environment, but also 'hot-desking' (the practice of using whichever workplace is available each day, upon arrival at the centre). In the first accelerator this practice was slightly adjusted, so that the entrepreneurs only hot-desked within a limited physical space that was dedicated to the accelerator. This space was however, not physically cut off from the rest of the *SocNet* working area – so that the entrepreneurs were still able to network at will with the other *SocNet* residents. Coffee-breaks and lunch were generally taken in an unstructured manner, in the small kitchen area used by all of the *SocNet* staff and residents.

4.3.4.2 Accelerator 1

Many of the social entrepreneurs who participated in A1 lived in the city area, or had friends in the area. Three of the participants however, did not live in the city. Two entrepreneurs re-located from other European countries for the eight-week period (Alice and Catrin) – and one (Henrik) travelled all the way from Brazil to participate. After a few weeks, Henrik moved in with Edward to reduce his housing costs. The existence of these 'secondary' spaces is worth noting, as learning activity and interaction are not processes that begin when entrepreneurs enter their 'office' and immediately cease when they leave it. In contrast to the second accelerator, only two entrepreneurs shared 'secondary' space upon leaving *SocNet* – the formal working environment that I refer to as 'primary' space in future discussions.

4.3.4.3 Accelerator 2

The second accelerator began in the same location as the first and also made the move to the *SocNet* on the Friday of the first week. Due to the fact that the majority of the participants came from developing countries in Africa, *NSE* managers rented an apartment for them in a suburb of the city. All of the social entrepreneurs who shared this apartment were male. Of the remaining entrepreneurs one was male (Jamal) and lived close to the apartment rented for the African entrepreneurs. The other two were female (Marie and Heidi), with Heidi renting a room for the duration of the accelerator – and Marie staying at her home in the city. The journey from the African entrepreneurs' apartment into the city centre (where *SocNet* was located) took around an hour and often involved a change of buses or trains. The African entrepreneurs found the journeys to and from *SocNet* taxing, not least because of the inhospitable weather and the darkness associated with Scandinavian winter mornings and afternoons. They did however spend much of the day in the same 'primary' space as the social entrepreneurs in A1 and A3 – at *SocNet*. In contrast to the A1 social entrepreneurs however, the *Booster* cohort in A2 no longer occupied a specific space at *SocNet*, but were expected to engage in 'genuine' hot-desking: choosing

a new working space each day from all of the available work-stations. With regards to ‘secondary’ space, only the African entrepreneurs met one another regularly in contexts outside of *SocNet* (primarily at their apartment). As will be discussed in section 4.3.7, this contributed to a distinctive group dynamic.

4.3.4.4 Accelerator 3

Managers revised the accelerator’s accommodation ‘strategy’ for the third accelerator and reduced the travel time of the social entrepreneurs by renting accommodation closer to the city centre. Once again the entrepreneurs were hosted by *SocNet* and their ‘primary’ space was structured in much the same way as for the A2 cohort. An equal number of men and women was recruited to the third accelerator and consequently, the cohort was housed in a ‘male’ apartment and a ‘female’ apartment. Social entrepreneurs shared rooms (two and two) and all four of the male participants stayed in the apartment provided for them by *NSE*. Only three of the female entrepreneurs made use of their apartment however, with Nadia staying with her boyfriend in the city. Among the male entrepreneurs, Thomas also had relatives in the city and spent some time visiting them at weekends. In terms of ‘secondary’ space therefore, the accommodation of the A3 social entrepreneurs was organised according to gender. As with the A2 cohort, the way in which this space was organised affected the group dynamic. This is discussed in section 4.3.7.

4.3.5 Mentors

4.3.5.1.1 Mentoring Roles and Routines

Prior to the start of the accelerators each entrepreneur was allocated a mentor with whom to interact during the eight-week programme. An attempt was made to link entrepreneurs with mentors who had experience of at least some aspect of the entrepreneur’s enterprise. For some individuals this meant that their mentor had personal experience of starting their own business, while other mentors had experience in the particular industry in which the entrepreneur was expecting to niche themselves. The role of the mentors was intended to be that of the ‘specialist’ with regards to the particular enterprise that they were allocated. In other words, the mentors were expected to coach the entrepreneurs in a manner that led to the development of their enterprises, on the basis of their unique insight into the needs and objectives of a single entrepreneur.

The mentors were recruited from the *NSE* network and from the region in which the organisation has its head office. Several of the mentors were members of the *NSE* board, or had a history of engagement with the organisation. The entrepreneurs were introduced to their mentors at an evening dinner in week 1 of the accelerator and were then expected to make their own arrangements for the structuring of their interaction. The majority of the entrepreneurs

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subsequently met with their mentors every two weeks for the duration of the accelerator, although it is important to underline that they also maintained regular contact by other means – such as email, Skype and social media.

Mentors tended to fulfil five main functions. Firstly and perhaps most importantly, they functioned very much as proactive ‘counsellors’ or ‘sounding boards’. First of all, as individuals with whom the entrepreneurs could discuss the development of their enterprises. And secondly, as individuals who – as they became acquainted with the enterprise – provided the entrepreneur with their impressions of its strengths and weaknesses, as well as their ideas of what the entrepreneur could do to develop their firm. This was the experience that Nelson (A2) had with his mentor:

“She told me, ‘Right now Nelson I know that you have the business strategy beside the not-for-profit strategy, but this is what you need to focus on’. And she helped me develop the idea and we developed it to the best”.

The above quote illustrates the mentor’s role in assessing the health of the new enterprise in a holistic manner and in helping entrepreneurs prioritise. Nevertheless, many of the entrepreneurs also used their mentors as sounding-boards for some of the more specific tasks associated with the accelerator, such as sales pitches. In other words, mentors were expected to provide feedback not only about the ‘bigger picture’, but also about the smaller ‘pieces of the puzzle’ – such as pitches to investors, web pages and funding strategies.

A second role the mentor played was as a provider of relevant contacts, particularly in the cases where the mentor was active in the same industry as the entrepreneur. For example, as Henrik commented several months after the end of the accelerator:

“I’ve found a really good contact at Sweden’s biggest clothing brand, via my mentor.”

A third role that some mentors played was that of the ‘provider of structure’. One of the challenges of the accelerator was its intensity and the diversity of impressions thrust upon participants in a relatively short space of time. Naturally some entrepreneurs had difficulty in keeping so many ‘balls’ in the air at once and appreciated their mentor’s role in maintaining focus and a sense of stability. Heidi for example, noted that her mentor complemented her in this area and helped to get more out of their sessions by ensuring that tasks were both clarified and focused upon:

“When we’d like work on stuff, she was always really good at focusing, ‘cos I can be really bad at that, like especially if we’d go meet for coffee, then I could talk to you for an hour and then be like, ‘Oh... I’ve got to go to work’. But she

was really good at being, 'Okay. Yeah. Let's... what are we going to work on today? And how...' You know what I mean? She was good like that."

A fourth function filled by several of the mentors was that of the 'enthusiast' or 'cheerleader'. For entrepreneurs coming in from their 'islands' it was emotionally strengthening to have at least one other person showing enthusiasm for and even commitment to their startup. Even where entrepreneurs later expressed disappointment regarding the mentorship process, they felt initially moved by the experience of no longer having to 'go it alone'. In Heidi's words:

"I used to get really happy when she's 'we' talking about that glass, to have someone else... that is like working, what seems, with you. You know... that feeling."

Nelson described his interaction with his mentor in a similar manner, pointing out that her contribution was not only of an advisory nature, but also of a more emotional, affective character:

"She has passion in what I'm doing"

A final function that some of the mentors filled was that of a 'role model' for the entrepreneur. For some of the less experienced entrepreneurs and for those entrepreneurs with a background in not-for-profit organisations; their mentor provided an example of professional, for-profit leadership. Steven for example, describes his mentor as not only pushing him to achieve, but also 'teaching' him through not only his example, but also his expectations. Steven's case is described in more detail in a later section.

4.3.5.1.2 Experiences of the Mentoring Process

Despite the efforts made by managers to match participants with suitable mentors, the entrepreneurs in both accelerators had mixed feelings about the effectiveness of the mentoring part of the programme. These feelings were linked to several factors, namely; the level of engagement of the mentor, the usefulness of their network to the entrepreneur and the relevance of their experience to the entrepreneur. For the most part entrepreneurs were satisfied with their interaction with their mentor if they were able to provide either relevant contacts, or relevant feedback (based on credible experience). However, in the absence of both of the above participants tended to rate their mentor negatively, regardless of their enthusiasm or investment of time in their enterprise.

In all three accelerators entrepreneurs expressed satisfaction with mentors who created sufficient time in which to interact with them – and dissatisfaction with individuals who they felt did not. Nelson for example was appreciative of the fact

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that his mentor was clearly making an effort to engage with him, but also showed an awareness of the fact that not all mentors were similarly committed:

“She is willing to help with more of her own time.”

“She was always... whenever we set an appointment she was always coming, always coming, I did not have to look for her. Other fellows that have a good mentor... suddenly they would change their appointment – and mentors are too busy! I don’t know, but [name of mentor] was not like that, she would always come.”

The above observation suggests that one of the factors that made several individuals relevant as mentors (their startup experience), at times proved to be their ‘downfall’ – as some accelerator participants perceived them as not having enough time. This created either frustration on the part of the entrepreneur, or uncertainty – or both. Although the frustration is perhaps easiest to understand, it is important to note that entrepreneurs also expressed uncertainty about how to interpret their mentor’s behaviour. This uncertainty affected their own behaviour, primarily in making them more hesitant to engage with the mentor. For example, Gabriella’s on her interaction with her mentor suggests that she feels on the one hand that her contact with her mentor is useful, but that she is also unsure of what her mentor feels with regards to her own enterprise:

“I wrote here [referring to a Post-It note] um, I need to keep on talking with [name of mentor]. In fact, if I commit on a point we must ...we have to do it! So, I don’t know, but it’s like... my ability to convince him... to keep on. I think he’s really worried. He’s really... [clicking fingers] right now, he’s really... busy”.

As noted earlier, an important factor in the entrepreneurs’ assessment of their mentors’ contributions had to do with their networks. Clearly, an important role of the mentor is not only their ability to advise the entrepreneur, but also their ability to put the entrepreneur into contact with individuals or organisations that can help their enterprises develop. Many of the mentors were able to do this, particularly in the first accelerator – where many of the social entrepreneurs had strong ties to Scandinavia. In the second accelerator however, where the majority of the participants came from developing countries, the limits of the *NSE* network began to make themselves felt. Karen (the A2 manager) commented on this in a follow-up interview, but it was also clear from some of the entrepreneurs’ comments that they had hoped to be able to grow their networks a little more through their mentors. Heidi for example, was clearly not impressed with her mentor’s ability to help her out with relevant contacts:

“Well, I didn’t get any connections from her, as far as import/export. She had someone she thought maybe would do some freelance packaging design for me, but it didn’t work out. She thought she had someone who might help edit a video – once I go back and make a tape and then they just clip it together, it didn’t work out... Um, she did know someone at import/export who didn’t have any information that was relevant for me.”

In a previous section I noted that accelerator participants were generally understanding when their mentors were unable to provide them with *one* of the two main benefits of business mentoring (advice and relevant contacts). Fortunately therefore, many of the mentors proved adept at rapidly assessing the character and stage of the entrepreneurs’ startups and were consequently able to provide useful feedback. In this area however, it became clear that several factors contributed to making the mentors’ assessments of the entrepreneurs’ ventures a challenging task. Comments from the entrepreneurs several months after the accelerator underline the importance of this assessment in helping mentors adapt their input to the situation and context of the entrepreneur. Their comments suggest that the relevance of mentors’ advice revolves around their familiarity with four enterprise-related factors, namely: the *stage* of the startup, the *sector* in which the startup intends to operate (for-profit, hybrid or not-for-profit), the *industry* in which the startup operates and the social *context* of the startup.

4.3.6 Coaches

One of the contributions of this study is its provision of a deeper understanding of the different ways in which long-term ‘mentors’ and short-term ‘coaches’ enhance the learning of social entrepreneurs⁶⁵. As noted earlier, Susan Cohen (2013b) notes that external experts engage with the entrepreneurs in an accelerator for different lengths of time, but uses the term ‘mentor’ for all these actors. I suggest however, that it is useful to refer to experts who spend only a short period of time with the entrepreneurs, as *coaches*. In this section I describe entrepreneurs’ experiences of interacting with these individuals, focusing particularly on the characteristics they associate with ‘good’ coaching. As I do so I acknowledge the tendency of entrepreneurs to assess coaches on the basis of the *relevance* of the content they bring to the accelerator. In other words, entrepreneurs’ assessments of how coaches perform reflect to a certain extent on the efficacy of accelerator design. Even if coaches are experienced and knowledgeable, if entrepreneurs do not perceive the subject a coach has been asked to talk about as relevant, they are often unenthusiastic about their input.

⁶⁵ Clearly in an eight-week accelerator, ‘long-term’ has a very different connotation than it does in other contexts. In an accelerator someone who sticks around for eight-weeks shows a ‘long-term’ commitment, whereas a speaker who only visits for one or two days is ‘short-term’.

In A1 this was reflected in the contrasting comments⁶⁶ about coaches made by experienced entrepreneur Barry and the less experienced, profession-oriented entrepreneurs Gabriella and Alice:

(Barry) “I have come so far with my business that many activities are not very valuable. However, they sometimes give me new ideas and activities that develop practical skills – like yesterday’s theatre session with Gordon which was great and very rewarding [...] I was too far ahead with my business to fit into what the programme could offer”.

(Gabriella) “I could not have reached so much information and so much interesting feedback from people with the right knowledge, if I had kept on working on my own”.

(Alice) “It’s a really well thought-through schedule”.

Gabriella and Alice’s comment lends support to one of the factors that Hallen et al. (2013) associate with accelerator success, namely programmes’ ability to engage high quality speakers for a limited period of time. Barry’s response however, suggests that excellent speakers do not guarantee relevance and that what coaches talk about, needs to be aligned with the needs of entrepreneurs’ ventures. As noted previously, this is largely a product of accelerator *design* and has been discussed elsewhere in this study (for example, in 4.3.3 ‘Structure and content’). Consequently, in the remainder of this section I will limit my discussion to the factors that affect coach effectiveness, that do not relate to content.

4.3.6.1 Experts vs. Entrepreneurs

In *Booster* three main categories of coach had contact with accelerator participants: experts that met the entrepreneurs only once or twice, experts that interacted with the entrepreneurs continuously throughout the accelerator – and individuals with personal experience of social entrepreneurship. In this study the term ‘experts’ is used to refer to individuals with specialist knowledge in a particular area of entrepreneurship. For example: in marketing or crowdfunding. For the most part these experts visited the accelerator on two separate occasions: once for an entire day to give a lecture and hold individual sessions with each entrepreneur – and once for a morning or afternoon session several weeks after their first visit. Frequently the social entrepreneurs were given a task to complete by the speaker, such as improving their online presence or creating a ‘pitch’ on a crowdfunding website. The second visit was intended to provide feedback on the completed task.

⁶⁶ The comments are written responses to an online questionnaire and have been edited for grammar and spelling to enhance readability.

At the end of the first accelerator it was clear that entrepreneurs were challenged by the intensity of the programme, while also complaining about speakers' tendency to cover the same material in their lectures. My impression was also that they were having trouble putting all of the 'pieces' of the entrepreneurial 'puzzle' together. In my report I therefore recommended that *NSE* tackle these issues by slightly reducing the number of visiting speakers and by encouraging a few key speakers to visit the accelerator regularly during the eight week period. The *NSE* managers took this on board and in the second and third accelerators one of the coaches who the entrepreneurs had appreciated the most ('Jackie'), was asked to engage in a longer series of workshops. Although much of Jackie's expertise lay in the field of financial management, she also talked about business models. Accelerator managers hoped that this combination of expertise would allow participants to make sense of the topics covered by other speakers, by relating them to a 'helicopter' perspective of their enterprises. Although my recommendation was initially based on intuition, later interviews suggest that the challenge of transforming the specialised input of a large number of experts into a coherent whole was a task that even more experienced entrepreneurs found difficult. Many of the social entrepreneurs continued to find sensemaking a challenge, despite the steps taken to alleviate the 'splintering' effect engendered by covering many different areas of entrepreneurship in a limited period. As the 'experienced' entrepreneur Thomas commented, halfway through the third accelerator:

"So, now you have different coaches giving you different segments of the business plan, but it is only your own responsibility to put them together, and that's where the coaching could be helpful, to make sure all these elements are coordinated well in the business plan".

Although an important role of the programme's mentors was that of helping entrepreneurs see the 'forest' rather than just the 'trees', at times it was clear that coaches who had first-hand experience of social entrepreneurship also helped with this task. Marie for example, described the contrast between the 'expert' coaches and one of the social entrepreneurs who visited the programme:

"I think it's really good that it wasn't just them, even if they've been fantastic [names several of the expert coaches] - that it wasn't just those who were really business-oriented, but also those who were sources of inspiration – Mattias and Barry. They tore down the structures a little [...] if I'd have had to do it by the book nothing would have happened – I need a freer way in".

Marie's reflection on the role of Mattias (the social entrepreneur) is similar to that of several other entrepreneurs, who describe his role in simplifying the complex picture of social enterprise built up by the accelerator – and making the task appear feasible. An unintended consequence of introducing entrepreneurs to a large number of experts, is that the resulting complexity can produce a feeling of

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inadequacy: many entrepreneurs begin to feel overwhelmed. Consequently, it appears that social entrepreneurs such as Mattias play an important *emotional* role in accelerators. On the one hand, this role has to do with the development of a feeling of ‘do-ability’ among accelerator participants. For example: Rebecca (A3) described Mattias’ contribution as:

“Giving inspiration and courage to start out, be a practical entrepreneur.”

Other entrepreneurs used terms such as “amazing” and “inspiring” to describe Mattias’ sessions. However, when participants described the impact of his visit in more detail, a second emotions-oriented contribution emerged, namely that of ‘feeling understood’. Often the need for this only emerged when it was absent from the accelerator, as evidenced by Kenny’s (A2) comments:

(Duncan) “If you could choose a mentor again, what would they give you?”

(Kenny) “I would choose a mentor who... who really is an entrepreneur, not who works... in respect of the father⁶⁷, he works in telecom. You understand. I would choose a mentor who is an entrepreneur. Like, he talks business. So this time he will not only tell me technical things for example – he will tell me business management. He will advise me. He will see my struggle, he will see my pains. [...] He will understand... he will appreciate my efforts... more. [...] If you don’t like business, for example, I tell you what I’ve been through in my course of being an entrepreneur. You will not value it, you will think it’s nonsense”.

Kenny’s comments are similar to those of other entrepreneurs such as Henrik (A1) – who described the value he would have attached to being able to discuss his enterprise with someone who has: “done what I’ve done. From the start, from zero, with the same resources”. For Henrik, his mentor’s lack of entrepreneurial experience was to some extent compensated for by his meeting with Mattias⁶⁸. However, it seems significant that several entrepreneurs bring up the subject of emotional pain and failure when they discuss mentors and coaches. Referring to Mattias’ visit, Olga (A3) wrote:

“The most important part was examples (concrete) from his venture and failures he had.”

Olga’s comment mirrors not only an appreciation of Mattias’ pedagogy (the use of examples), but also of his imperfection. The pictures painted by practicing, fallible social entrepreneurs often contrast with the idealistic portraits

⁶⁷ Individuals from sub-Saharan Africa often refer to other men as “father”, as a sign of respect.

⁶⁸ This is described in more detail, in the in-depth case study of Henrik that follows in section 4.4.

constructed by other experts – in that they tell a story of success despite shortcomings. For many entrepreneurs the ‘humanity’ of visiting entrepreneurs is an important factor in reinforcing their intentions to engage in entrepreneurship (Hytti & Heinonen, 2013). Well-intentioned expert coaches who describe ‘best practice’ risk creating feelings of inadequacy among accelerator participants and may reflect an assumption that education for venture development is primarily a cognitive process. The experiences of the *Booster* entrepreneurs however, suggest that nascent entrepreneurship is also a process characterised by emotion. If they are not to abandon their ventures, it appears that entrepreneurs need to feel understood. They need to feel that success is possible without perfection, and that social entrepreneurship is a feasible and meaningful project. Practicing social entrepreneurs appear to provide more of this vital emotional input, than coaches without entrepreneurial experience – regardless of their degree of expertise.

4.3.6.2 Providing Inspiration and Energy

The above paragraph suggests that practicing entrepreneurs often contributed to participants’ learning in a manner that affected their *emotions* – and in particular their feelings of hope and efficacy. Some entrepreneurs’ comments however, suggest that both the practicing entrepreneurs and the subject-oriented ‘experts’ contributed to a general atmosphere of energy and creativity. Barry (A1) and Kenny (A2) represent different types of entrepreneur, but describe very similar processes of creativity. Kenny for example, describes how flashes of creativity often came to him during the accelerator, as he listened to a coach:

“I’m just kind of posing that I don’t believe in the academic formula of things [...] Like in the case of Johan - there’s a guy who came, his name is Johan⁶⁹ – and while he was teaching and stuff like that, my mind wasn’t following what he was saying – but he said something that sparked my brain and that solved a very big problem that my organisation was having. And that has to do with um, measuring impact. [...] And it was still not too clear, but when the last woman, Jackie, brought something – when Jackie came in – Jackie finished the whole thing.”

Kenny’s experience suggests that at times a creative experience develops during the accelerator that is not so much a product of clever design (“I don’t believe in the academic formula of things”), but rather of synergy and a climate conducive to reflection. His comment makes it clear however, that the accelerator coaches were not unimportant to his creativity. Rather, he describes how one of them provided the ingredient that enabled him to complete the idea that came to him in a seminar. Barry’s experience is similar and is described in more detail in a

⁶⁹ Johan held on workshop on among other things: ‘social value proposition’.

subsequent case-study. His comment however, underlines the role coaches play as inspirers of creativity:

“It’s a bit like... sitting in a lecture, it’s not just that if it’s boring I think of something else, it’s almost the opposite. It *has* to be inspiring, because if it’s boring I begin to think of my to-do list and so on. But if it’s inspiring, then... then the creative ideas come about completely different things.”

The experiences described above suggest that coaches contribute more than just their specialist knowledge to accelerators. With hindsight it is therefore clear that my discussions with entrepreneurs about coaches’ contributions was lacking in insight. I asked participants to score coaches’ sessions primarily on the basis of how ‘useful’ the content was (even if entrepreneurs were free to write further comments on the coach’s contribution after this assessment). Other sections of entrepreneurs’ interviews however, make it clear that coaches also participated in the development (or impeding) of a particular ‘climate’ within the accelerator – something that Hjorth (2011) refers to as “affect”. Effective coaches appeared to bring energy and inspiration to the accelerator. These factors seem to be related to outcomes (such as creativity) that are more difficult to predict than the ‘common-sense’ outputs intimated by the topics they addressed in their workshops.

4.3.6.3 Relating their Knowledge to the Entrepreneurs’ Ventures

Allan Gibb (1983) suggests that in small firms, managers demand that education be immediately applicable to the needs of their enterprises. Participants’ assessments of the coaches who participated in the *Booster* accelerators suggest that social entrepreneurs share this orientation. In week three of A1, Edward for example, expressed his discontent over what he perceived as a disproportionate amount of talk, in contrast to action:

“I had expected more... more, um... what shall I say. More... or rather, *less* talk. Less talk and more action.”

In view of this type of expectation it, it is unsurprising that coaches who related their teaching to situations the entrepreneurs were familiar with, tended to be evaluated more positively than those whose explanations entrepreneurs felt were too theoretical. Ideally, coaches would relate their teaching directly to the entrepreneurs’ own ventures. Olga (A3) for example, evaluated two coaches who held sessions with a similar focus (branding and communication) in a manner that illustrates this preference:

(Referring to coach 1: branding strategies) “Useful, would like to have some concrete work on the case of my organisation”.

(Referring to coach 2: communication strategies) “It was useful because the coach concentrated on concrete examples, gave concrete and individual recommendations”.

Olga’s written comments were accompanied by a ‘scoring’ of the coach on a scale of one to four, with “not useful at all” at one end and “extremely useful” at the other. Although not all of the entrepreneurs provide explanations for their scoring, it is interesting to note that the second coach received a consistently higher score than the first. Nonetheless, practical relevance was not the only characteristic of coach behaviour that entrepreneurs identified as important. They also assessed coach performance in terms of their preparedness and the respect they demonstrated to the social entrepreneurs’ own competence.

4.3.6.4 Showing Respect – and Being Prepared

Despite the expertise shown by many of the coaches, several entrepreneurs reacted not so much to the competence that they demonstrated, but to the attitudes they perceived them as having. In both A1 and A2, entrepreneurs appeared to be less willing to learn from coaches who they felt were talking ‘down’ to them. Edward described his experience in the following way:

“Sometimes I felt like I’m not being treated as a professional [...] all the people in this room who were accepted for this programme, we have a background. We’ve been working, we know things from before... so we’re not complete beginners. [...] We all need support and um, encouragement, but sometimes... I don’t know how to put it. Treating people as if they don’t know anything, or I don’t know... sometimes I’ve felt that way. I’ve felt that way sometimes from lecturers, but even sometimes from the programme personnel.”

In A2 Kenny made a similar comment about the expectations one of the lecturers (‘Konrad’) had of the African entrepreneurs. I questioned him about why he had given the coach such a low score:

“I’ll give Konrad... two.”

(Duncan) “So what did he need to improve then, was it just not very relevant or... ?”

“Relevant, maybe. I think I will say Konrad probably underestimated us as Africans; he never thought we would be exposed to the extent he met us, so there was a little shock... So maybe it’s just like a football match... a bigger team’s going to play a smaller team and they say ‘we’re just to kill them away’ and when you get there the reverse is almost the case, or something.”

(Duncan) “So did you feel he was talking down to you?”

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“No, no... not talking to us at too low a level, but he wasn't actually telling us... giving us vital information for our standard. Almost like what you said, but not like he was looking down on us, no – but he was just like telling me things I know, telling me colours: 'this is red, this is purple' and stuff.' [...] I honestly did not enjoy his teaching.”

Although the above quotes to a certain extent mirror a somewhat top-down attitude on the part of some coaches, they also mirror another aspect of coaches' behaviour that entrepreneurs reacted to, namely a lack of preparation. The majority of the *Booster* coaches lectured 'pro bono' and this was at times associated with some of them devoting too little time to preparation. This was particularly so in A1, before managers were able to 'weed out' those speakers they felt were not providing the entrepreneurs with the input they needed. Managers were however, also responsible for this behaviour to a certain extent – as coaches were not always informed about the characteristics of the cohort ahead of time, nor told what other coaches had covered. Consequently, Edward (A1) made the following comment:

“One of the things is to find a way to not... repeat things – especially in the first weeks, some of the lectures. You felt like this is the third time or fourth time I'm hearing the same thing. But from another person. [...] perhaps fewer lectures and focus on some really good ones.”

My analysis of entrepreneurs' comments about coaches suggests that what participants were concerned about, was not so much the coaches' preparation as regards their own areas of expertise. Instead they highlighted the importance of speakers familiarising themselves with the larger context of the accelerator (as illustrated by the above comment) – as well as with the entrepreneurs and their ventures. Something entrepreneurs found irritating was having to introduce their ventures to coaches who had not met them before. They felt that this wasted workshop time – as when four coaches visited the accelerator in a week the entrepreneurs had to conduct four introductions before moving on to the workshop topic. Entrepreneurs interpreted this behaviour as indicating that coaches had not done their homework (i.e. familiarising themselves with the ventures before the session). In contrast, entrepreneurs were enthusiastic about coaches who knew at least a little about their ventures upon arrival and could therefore make relevant reference to their ventures in their sessions. Two of the A3 entrepreneurs commented on this behaviour in their evaluation of a coach who talked about websites:

(Olga) “It was detailed, concrete. The comments were made very specifically for our website”. Score: 4 (extremely useful).

(Patience) “Personalised feedback on our website with constructive advice on how it can be better.” Score: 4 (extremely useful).

4.3.6.5 Being Familiar with the Context of Social Entrepreneurship

An interesting theme that emerged in interviews with the A2 entrepreneurs was the unfamiliarity of some coaches with the contexts in which most of the entrepreneurs operated, namely the developing world. Comments tended to focus on either difficulties that entrepreneurs had in transferring ideas to their own environments, because coaches' talks centred on Western/European examples – or on the impracticality of their ideas. Steven (A2) made the following comment about a coach who talked about issues of impact evaluation:

“A lot of his examples were... European examples. Yes, he didn't really have knowledge of Africa, but his content and examples were good, but they were more for Europe.”

Peter (A2) also discussed differences between coaches, suggesting that Konrad needed to make his teaching “friendlier” by enabling participants to ‘see and feel’ the content. As he moves on to discuss other coaches, it appears that he defines ‘friendly’ teaching as content that is adapted to the context of the entrepreneur:

(Referring to Konrad) “The way of teaching it, he should change it. He should make it friendlier and you know, people should like it. [...] Okay, I know he gave us the key points, but I think he should make it feel... you know, make it see, make the participants feel it.”

(referring to several other coaches) “The social impact guy wasn't so good... he was too theoretical. Even the previous guy... at least he tried to put it in the context of the participants. So this other guy who came in. It wasn't so good, but at least he did try and put it in that context whereby... eee! People enjoy and you feel you're like, 'yeah!', you know... for example like the guy who did the social networking.”

Kenny (A2) also discussed the teaching of the social impact coach, clearly illustrating the typical dislike of the *Booster* entrepreneurs for teaching that they felt was overly theoretical and that they had difficulty in relating to their own contexts:

“Um, I think too theoretical; yeah, it was more of theory, theory, theory. Theoretical!”

(Duncan) “Okay, so not so... didn't feel very relevant for you or...?”

“It's relevant, but you know the brain sometimes gets tired of things that are too much like... theories, because you... you just like... like these days you want to see the practical... how it affects me, you understand?”

The above paragraphs illustrate the reality of all educational programmes, namely that educators bring different content and distinct educational approaches to the ‘classroom’. With each accelerator, *NSE* staff became more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the individual coaches and adjusted the design of the programme accordingly. Coaches who received poor feedback from participants were dropped and either replaced with new ones – or with existing, effective coaches who were asked to take on additional sessions. Managers took entrepreneurs’ feedback seriously and my impression is that they became increasingly skilled in managing the accelerators as time passed by. Consequently, it is natural to expect that each *Booster* accelerator would be slightly better than the last – as managers incorporated their experience into the design of the programme and the recruitment of mentors and speakers. In reality however, the second accelerator is associated with a pattern of interaction that appears considerably less effective than those of the first and third accelerators. This suggests that accelerator *design* may not be the only factor critical to programme success. In the following section I describe several contrasts in the way in which the three *Booster* programmes developed – contrasts that emerged despite strong similarities in structure and content.

4.3.7 Similar Structures, Dissimilar Interaction

4.3.7.1 Accelerator I

One of the most interesting insights generated by this study has to do with the extent to which the learning of the social entrepreneurs is shaped by the emergent characteristics of the accelerator cohort, as opposed to the design of the programme. The group dynamic in the first accelerator was very positive, with entrepreneurs displaying open and supportive attitudes to one another – and for the most part, to the accelerator itself and to staff. Several months after the accelerator Henrik referred to this positive group dynamic as he discussed the need for some kind of online follow-up:

“It [the online group] would have been really good for all of us I think, especially as we all trust each other. We were really open for one another on *Booster* and that was fantastic.”

Despite the fact that the social entrepreneurs came from different backgrounds – and even if some had progressed further than others, there was an atmosphere of ‘togetherness’ in the first accelerator. Henrik attributed this to the trust and openness that developed among participants. It is also possible that the relative homogeneity of the group in terms of ethnicity, played a role. All of the entrepreneurs (with the exception of Gabriella) came from Western Europe – and only one of the participants was not a long-term resident in Scandinavia (Catrin). Gabriella’s comment however, suggests that the group dynamic may

also have been enhanced by entrepreneurs' experience of being able to work on their own venture ideas, in the company of other individuals facing similar challenges:

“Six people feel just like I do: it's hard, but it can be done.”

4.3.7.2 Accelerator 2

In contrast to the first programme, the second accelerator was characterised by tension and conflict. Building on the experience of 'post-accelerator depression' in the first accelerator, the second accelerator was held at the beginning of the year. Unfortunately, the composition of the cohort was radically different, with the majority of the entrepreneurs of African origin – and male. This made the programme's scheduling to avoid ending just before the Scandinavian holidays irrelevant. Entrepreneurs also came from very different social backgrounds, even when they came from similar geographical locations. Isaac was for example, well-travelled and seemed to be financially well-off. Steven in contrast, had never travelled outside of his home country – and as time went by, managers gained the impression that some of the African entrepreneurs (for example: Kenny) lacked the financial resources possessed by the previous cohort.

As the second accelerator progressed, it became evident that many of the entrepreneurs in the cohort were having a hard time getting on with some of their colleagues and that sub-groups were forming. It was also clear that many of the African entrepreneurs were irritated over some of practical arrangements made by *Booster* managers and by the lack of immediate opportunities for funding. These negative attitudes in turn engendered irritation on the part of the accelerator managers themselves and among the non-African entrepreneurs. At the end of A2, Kenny described the breadth of the conflict in the following way:

“Like you heard, there's a fight in the house [laugh]. You understand, you know... stuff like this one is beating this one. Enemies here and there... [laugh] It happened, it happened you understand. Side-talk. This one doesn't see, you understand; gossiping, backbiting, the issue of food, attitude...”

As I interviewed managers and entrepreneurs it became clear that at least four factors were affecting the group dynamic: practical issues relating to sustenance and accommodation, issues of status, issues of expectations and issues of behaviour.

With regards to the practical issues, it appears that this factor was linked to finance, travel and household duties. In comparison to many regions of Africa, the cost of living in Scandinavia is high. *NSE* provided for entrepreneurs' travel and accommodation, but not for clothing or food. Consequently, the cost of participating in the accelerator was far higher than many entrepreneurs had

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expected and as the programme progressed, several entrepreneurs felt less and less able to afford to eat. At times the African entrepreneurs ate together – and in an atmosphere of scarcity, extra attention was focused on the need for each person to contribute a similar amount of money for upkeep. Consequently, tensions rose when individuals did not appear to be ‘pulling their weight’. For example: when Kenny said that he was having trouble withdrawing money using his West African credit card.

In addition to tension associated with money, it appears that some of the African entrepreneurs were unprepared for the day-to-day practicalities of household work (primarily preparing food, cleaning and washing clothes). In many African households, women perform these duties – and in well-to-do families, servants are often employed. As Lewis commented:

“I don’t remember when I actually cooked. In our culture once you have – I mean you have – you are married, I mean you’re not supposed to cook.”

One result of backgrounds such as those reflected in Lewis’ comment, was that some of the entrepreneurs least used to household work became irritated with *NSE* and did their best to avoid housekeeping tasks. However, as Nelson describes, this created tension within the group:

“The guy I was talking to last week, the guy from [name of country], he don’t do *anything*. He don’t cook, he don’t clean, he has never done *anything* - and when you talk he gets angry. He has never done anything! When it comes to the house, cleaning or cooking, he’s not doing anything. But when you go in and talk then he feels angry”.

It is worth noting that the neglect of household work was not necessarily linked to the resources entrepreneurs had access to. Nelson noted for example, that Isaac helped out with housework – but that Steven did not. What is clear however, is that the tensions linked to the practical challenges of living in Scandinavia were augmented by entrepreneur’s attitudes with regards to ‘status’. Several of the African entrepreneurs described feeling that some of their fellow-Africans thought they were better than them. Peter and Nelson both commented on this impression:

(Nelson): “...other people think that they are up there and other people think they are down there.”

(Peter): “Something else... people are bossy, others want to show that they know a little bit. I don’t like that crap [...] We have people who want to be high... and then others, you know, want to be like... [makes ‘stuck up’ noises].”

Although a large part of the tension in A2 was associated with the African entrepreneurs, it was clear that the non-African participants were also affected by the conflict. At times they sympathised with the situation of the African entrepreneurs – critiquing *NSE* for not being better prepared for their needs. However, at other times they appeared to take sides: aligning themselves with participants who they felt worked hard and were attentive, and distancing themselves from those who they perceived as arrogant or spoiled. In particular Heidi and Marie appeared irritated by entrepreneurs who they felt were participating ‘just for the money’ and by entrepreneurs who did not display an interest in learning. When I asked her to explain why the group had splintered in the way she described, Marie made the following comment:

“It felt as if some of the group had... um, expectations that weren’t realistic [...] some of these projects... I don’t know how realistic they are and what these lads have for objectives with these projects.”

Conversations with Marie that were not recorded made it clear that the expectations she was referring to had to do with funding. Her sensitively phrased assessment was that some of the African entrepreneurs had signed up for the accelerator primarily because they felt they expected to source investment – and not in order to learn – and develop their enterprises. Heidi’s assessment on the other hand was direct and passionate:

“I was getting quite frustrated at the beginning [...] and I mean it doesn’t really have anything to do with me, so it shouldn’t really bother me – but when everyone’s just talking about funding and... connecting with people and I was like ‘Did you read any of the emails? Have you looked at the website?’ [laugh] This isn’t what it’s about, you know! [...] It’s not about grants, it’s about doing something sustainable”.

When it came to the behaviour that Marie and Heidi associated with a preoccupation with funding, Heidi commented several times on the behaviour of some of the African entrepreneurs. The following excerpt is one of many examples:

“Sometimes it’s obvious that people... haven’t been paying any attention, then they ask a question at the end and it’s just so embarrassing and you’re like... ‘they [the speaker] just said that!’ You know, like that isn’t you being... questioning and having, you know, insight. And then sometimes people don’t understand it, that’s fine, you know. But you know, it’s ‘cos you’ve been on a computer the whole time, then...’ [laugh]”

Other parts of Heidi’s interviews reveal that she is referring to the behaviour of some of the African entrepreneurs (and in particular to Nelson and Lewis). Steven commented on this behaviour (which included late arrival, accessing

websites/social media, writing emails and taking phone calls during lectures) in his interview – and I also experienced it first hand on several occasions. Marie described how she raised this issue with the group in the fourth week:

“I brought up that I get so damned irritated with everybody arriving late and going in and out of the room, and disturbing when we’re having lectures. I find that bloody irritating!”

Marie’s comment in week four opened the ‘floodgates’ of criticism and an open discussion was held about the climate in the group and the practical challenges facing the African entrepreneurs in particular. She said that things improved a bit after this, but interviews make it clear that the group as a whole never really came together in A2. Instead, entrepreneurs linked together in smaller sub-groups, with Marie and Heidi tending to discuss venturing issues mainly with one another – and at times with Jamal. Kenny linked up with Nelson and to a lesser extent with Peter, while Isaac spent more time with Lewis. Steven described receiving advice from experienced entrepreneur Isaac, but did not mention linking up with any of the other entrepreneurs on a more equal peer-to-peer footing. Consequently, my impression is that Marie speaks for all of the A2 entrepreneurs when she summarises her experience of the group dynamic in the following manner:

“To begin with I tried, and I have helped some people who I’ve had better contact with. But we had nine individuals with different knowledge and competences, and we have definitely not taken advantage of that.”

4.3.7.3 Accelerator 3

The third *Booster* accelerator was similar to the first in terms of the positive group dynamic that developed. *NSE* managers learned a great deal from the challenging experience of the A2 accelerator and addressed many of the problems associated with it: providing entrepreneurs with an allowance for food, scheduling the accelerator in the warmer weeks of spring and reducing the distance from entrepreneurs’ accommodation to *SocNet*. An equal number of males and females was also recruited and a session on intercultural communication was held early on in the programme. Consequently, entrepreneurs were enthusiastic about the resultant group dynamic – describing an atmosphere of humour, openness, trust and ‘family’. Entrepreneurs quickly came up with nicknames for individuals whose names they had trouble pronouncing, or who were characterised by a particular trait. Indeed, the group dynamic was characterised by so much humour that the Scandinavian managers were at time uncertain as to whether individuals were going too far. As manager Frida commented:

“There’s been this way of talking – and there’s a very fine line between what’s okay and what isn’t – but there’s been this way of talking in the group where they’ve been able to joke about each other. I find that... that they joke with each other, that they kind of... laugh at themselves and at others.”

Frida’s experience reflects the impression I received from observations and from interviews, that the prevailing atmosphere in the group was open, trusting and friendly. It is therefore important to understand that, despite the exceptions discussed in subsequent paragraphs, entrepreneurs’ experience of the third accelerator was overwhelmingly *positive*.

Despite the marked contrast in the overall group dynamic between A2 and A3, interviews with entrepreneurs and managers revealed that there was a surprising amount of continuity in terms of the factors affecting it. In particular respondents described the emergence of sub-groups based on gender and ethnicity – and the existence of behaviour that had the potential to develop into significant conflict.

After the second accelerator my impression was that I had gathered data on an ‘exceptional’ case: I felt for example, that few researchers would be familiar with the type of conflict that characterised A2, from their own studies of accelerators. I was therefore very surprised as I began to interview the A3 entrepreneurs, to discover a similar pattern of interaction around practical household issues⁷⁰. In A2 all of the African entrepreneurs were male and lived in the same apartment. In A3 the group was more heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, but lived close to one another – with males in one apartment and females in another. Thomas (an experienced manager who enjoyed philosophising) volunteered a sociological analysis of the A3 group dynamic in one of his interviews. He identified a male member of the cohort (Willis) as an “alpha male” and described how he attempted to get other members of the group (Vinay and Zayd) to cook for him:

“Willis is more dominant alpha male... so he uses the others to get his wishes fulfilled. Whether it’s for cooking, or for... getting. And, these [Vinay and Zayd] come from cultures that are very easily subordinated, so they comply easily with the African... Silverback. So, this has created a group where... Willis has adopted the Vinay as his housemate and... food source.”

In contrast to the process in A2, Thomas’ account suggests that the tension associated with social entrepreneurs ‘using’ others for their own purposes, never blossomed into a significant conflict. Thomas described how he intervened when he noticed Willis’ behaviour, ‘raising the consciousness’ of Zayd and Vinay and making them aware of his ‘manipulation’. By intervening at an early stage, it does

⁷⁰ Note that my data on this interaction is overly dependent on the account of a single entrepreneur who highlights his own role in resolving the conflict. Other entrepreneurs do however confirm the existence of the tension described – albeit in less detail.

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appear that Thomas was able to stifle behaviour that threatened to have a negative effect on the group dynamic. Nonetheless, Thomas' account suggests that Zayd and Vinay were irritated by Willis' behaviour, even if they initially complied:

"In the beginning they're like, 'F**k why do I have to do this?', but they still do it".

Thomas' interpretation of events is that he intervened to prevent a negative group dynamic from developing ("I'm doing preventive, I'm helping them to not get to the point of conflict"). At the same time, the terms he uses in other parts of the interview to refer to Willis ("leech", "free-rider") suggest that Willis' behaviour engendered a negative attitude on the part of Thomas, towards interacting with him.

Other entrepreneurs' comments on the group process provide further insight into the A3 group dynamic. Thomas portrays himself as protector of the group dynamic ("I'm the one who defends the other apes"), but other entrepreneurs' comments suggest that his role may have been restricted to the male group, with Rebecca apparently taking on a similar role among the females – as Nadia commented:

"She [Rebecca] would be a good mum, she has been like a mother for us. Always asking us how we are getting on."

Rebecca in turn, commented that she felt that it took three to four weeks for the group to begin to function effectively – an impression somewhat shared by the other female entrepreneur from East Africa (Patience), who suggested a slightly shorter period (two to three weeks). Nonetheless, as I questioned entrepreneurs about interaction it became clear that although they felt the group was functioning effectively, they were also aware that they were forming ties with reference to ethnicity and gender. At times this only became apparent when I paused to reflect on, for example: female entrepreneurs' use of terms such as "the guys" – or by reading between the lines of interviews. Similarly, when males discussed interaction they tended to mention primarily other male entrepreneurs (and vice-versa, in the case of female entrepreneurs). At other times respondents described the impact of gender explicitly, as in Thomas' case:

(Duncan) "Have you found you talked to... are there any of the entrepreneurs you talk to more than others?"

“Yes, of course; naturally. A gender division has really worked, you can take that any way you want. So... I would put a bit of emphasis on that in terms of sustainability... even in the introduction, I would make people aware that gender roles exist [...] even if they come from other cultural backgrounds they haven't been exposed to the same political pressure of gender equality [...] It's senseless, you can smooth it over so nicely with positive words and actions, like, in this field we're operating, hugging, and being open, collaborative.”

The male sub-group in A3 appeared to develop a higher level of interaction than the female group, despite the potential for conflict associated with Willis' behaviour. It emerged for example, that they had initiated regular, informal get-togethers in the evenings, to discuss all manner of subjects – not all of which were business related. This informal interaction appeared to be reinforced by the natural segregation of shared living space along gender lines. Although entrepreneurs described instances of ‘crossing the gender border’ for advice, it appears that they only did so occasionally and that it involved more effort. For example: Nadia jokingly commented that Patience was unlikely to go and knock on the door of the men's apartment, for fear of the door being answered by Thomas in his underpants!

Many of the A3 entrepreneurs were very similar in terms of gender, industry and entrepreneurial stage (for example: Olga and Patience whose ventures both addressed sex-workers). Nonetheless, my observations and entrepreneurs' comments suggest that ethnicity and even status often played a more significant role in determining who entrepreneurs were most likely to interact with. For example: Patience and Rebecca came from the same country and after only a few weeks it was clear that when accelerator tasks required peer input they tended to seek each other's company. Thomas also explained his tendency to associate with Zayd by referring to ethnicity:

(Duncan) “So, who do you talk to most... who do you find: ‘I speak to this person, we give really feedback to each other?’ ”

“I'm... because of my Middle Eastern background... I'm a good support for Zayd, [name of country⁷¹], whatever we call him”.

Although it was common for entrepreneurs to link up primarily with other individuals of the same gender and ethnicity in A3, this was not always the case. For example: despite Thomas' comments about Willis ‘using’ Vinay, they seemed to form an early companionship based on among other things, their status as the only two smokers in the group. This apparently minor detail was identified by

⁷¹ Due to the fact that the African entrepreneurs had difficulty with Zayd's middle-eastern name, they initially referred to him by his country of origin – and eventually the nickname stuck!

Vinay as the main thing that ‘brought them together’. In the first few weeks of the accelerator Vinay also attempted to teach Willis yoga, but desisted after the early mornings proved to be too much for him! In contrast to ‘Thomas’ assessment, Vinay made no negative comments about Willis’ behaviour and when asked whether he tended to talk with any entrepreneur more than the others, he immediately identified Willis. He did however, seem both amused and mystified at this companionship. One of the interesting characteristics of the A3 accelerator was the tendency for the cohort to group into ‘pairs’ when working (as opposed to groups of three or four). It is therefore also possible that some entrepreneurs (such as Vinay and Willis), paired up with each other ‘by default’. That is: simply on the basis of being the only individuals without a natural companion. As almost all of the group were travelling and shopping in Scandinavia for the first time, there was a natural tendency to seek company when shopping or travelling. Often entrepreneurs sought the company of the same individual, but in contrast to A2 the sub-groups that formed did not appear to have a negative impact on the atmosphere in the larger group. Patience’s description of the group dynamic (in the final week of the accelerator) echoes the descriptions provided by the other social entrepreneurs:

“It has become like, you know, a family where you joke about anything, so it’s not only mental but also, you know, the emotional attachment and the companionship that you feel when you are around the people that really know you or understand you”.

I have now described the *context* for social entrepreneurial learning (the *Booster* accelerators) in considerable detail. In the next section I move on to describe four different experiences of learning in this context.

4.4 The Social Entrepreneurs – Part 2

One of the advantages of developing an accelerator in a sector that relatively few actors have focused on previously, is that ‘ignorance’ provides numerous opportunities for learning – hence the Portuguese proverb that heads up my ‘acknowledgements’ section. Writing about incubators, Vanderstraeten and Matthyssens (2012) suggest that many programmes develop specific internal competencies that align with the strategies they adopt when recruiting new tenants. It is arguable that accelerators are similar to incubators in this regard and that with time, accelerator managers become more aware of the types of enterprise that benefit most from their programmes – or of the types of enterprise most likely to succeed. This increasing focus on a particular type of enterprise may boost the most obvious outcomes of the accelerator (firms that survive, grow or obtain investment). However, it may also reduce the likelihood of managers becoming aware of the less obvious benefits of the programme to other categories of enterprise.

The *Booster* accelerators are unusually useful to scholars of social entrepreneurial learning due to the diversity of enterprises that participated in the programmes. The social entrepreneurs who participated in the accelerators had very different backgrounds, were attempting to start distinct types of social ventures and were at different stages in the founding process. This heterogeneity might be a challenge in a quantitative study, but in an exploratory study it is an advantage. This is so because the study expands, rather than narrows down the list of types of social entrepreneur whose learning might be enhanced through participation in an accelerator. Such an expansion is likely to generate a wider range of alternatives for future research, in contrast to a study of an accelerator that only focuses on enterprises in a particular industry or at a specific stage of growth.

Due to the diversity of participating ventures, my analysis of entrepreneurs' learning in the accelerators could have been structured around several different characteristics. For example: industry (or sector), region of operation and stage of development. After familiarising myself with my data however, I initially chose to group (or categorise) participants according to three characteristics that appeared to affect the way in which they participated in the accelerator and accelerator outcomes, namely: whether or not they were long-term residents in the country in which they were working, their experience in the sector their venture focused on – and their length of managerial/entrepreneurial experience. This process for creating typologies mirrors the practice recommended by Ayres and Knafelz (2008) – and the typology itself reflects the categories developed by Cope and Watts (2000), in their exploration of entrepreneurial learning.

Cope and Watts (2000) develop the work of Gibb and Ritchie (1982) in discussing entrepreneurial learning in relation to the experience of the entrepreneur. They construct a four-field diagram along the axis of business/managerial experience (high-low) and sector experience (high-low). This diagram allows for four categories of entrepreneur to be distinguished⁷². These are: the 'innocent' (low managerial / low sector experience), the 'knowledgeable improviser' (low managerial / high sector experience), the 'confident entrant' (high managerial / low sector experience) – and the 'veteran' (high managerial / high sector experience). As I reflected on my interviews with the *Booster* social entrepreneurs my impression was that a third factor was also important in the learning processes discussed by individuals. This factor had to do with the experience of the entrepreneur in the particular geographical or cultural context of the place in which they sought to establish their venture. I categorise individuals as 'indigenous' social entrepreneurs if they were living in the same country that their enterprise was targeting and were either from that country, or had spent most of their lives there. The term 'expatriate' social

⁷² In figure 4.1 the different categories are numbered: 1- 'innocents', 2- 'knowledgeable improvisers', 3- 'confident entrants' and 4- 'veterans'.

entrepreneurs in contrast, refers to individuals whose enterprises targeted a country that they did not come from, nor in which they had recently spent a substantial amount of time⁷³.

At first glance, the ‘indigenous⁷⁴ / expatriate’ distinction outlined above may appear to be an oversimplification. Nonetheless, my intuition (based on my experience of growing up in and working in developing countries) was that they probably reflected important underlying differences. Individuals who I term ‘indigenous’ are often more reliant on the success of their venture for their own prosperity and have a far weaker safety net to fall back on, should their ventures fail. For ‘expatriate’ social entrepreneurs operating in the same context, the failure of their venture tends to result in little more than embarrassment and a comparatively small financial loss. As Henrik (A1) commented:

“I’m actually not very worried, my life doesn’t depend on Garbage Garments.”

Other differences include the expectation in developing societies that expatriates will often break with local traditions, while natives are expected to follow them. My point is not to denigrate the one over the other, but simply to underline the idea that the two categories of entrepreneur often operate under different premises. Importantly, I base the above suggestions not only on my own intuition, but also on recent research on innovation at the ‘base of the pyramid’. While not employing the exact terms that I use, Brännvall and Johansson (2012) note that “entrepreneurs from underserved markets” (who I term ‘indigenous’) follow a distinct pattern of innovation when compared to expatriate firms. They report that expatriate firms spend less time studying the needs and behaviours of target populations, and also use a more ‘closed’ model of innovation that relies on a smaller number of external experts and advisors. Brännvall and Johansson also note the existence of a distinct group of *experienced* entrepreneurs among innovating firms – many of whom are individuals with a background in senior positions and global companies, often from India and Nepal. These individuals would probably be termed ‘veteran’ using Cope and Watts’ (2000) terminology – and ‘veteran-indigenous’ (V-I) using my typology.

⁷³ By ‘substantial’ I mean a period of at least five years.

⁷⁴ It is possible that the term ‘embedded’ might be more indicative of the rationale that makes it useful to distinguish between indigenous and expatriate (non-embedded) social entrepreneurs.

By adding the ‘indigenous- expatriate’ factor a three-dimensional model was developed (see figure 4.1), which allows for the distinguishing of eight different types of entrepreneur. However, for the sake of simplicity I distinguish between entrepreneurs with experience of the contexts in which they were launching their ventures, by simply adding the terms ‘indigenous’ or ‘expatriate’ to the terms coined by Cope and Watts. For example: I term an individual with extensive managerial and sector-oriented experience, who is also an experienced actor in the context in which they operate; a ‘veteran-indigenous’. For the sake of brevity, in later sections I abbreviate each type and add ‘-E’ or ‘-I’ to distinguish between the indigenous and expatriate variations of the same type. A ‘confident entrant’ with little experience in the context where their service/product will be used is this abbreviated as ‘CE-E’.

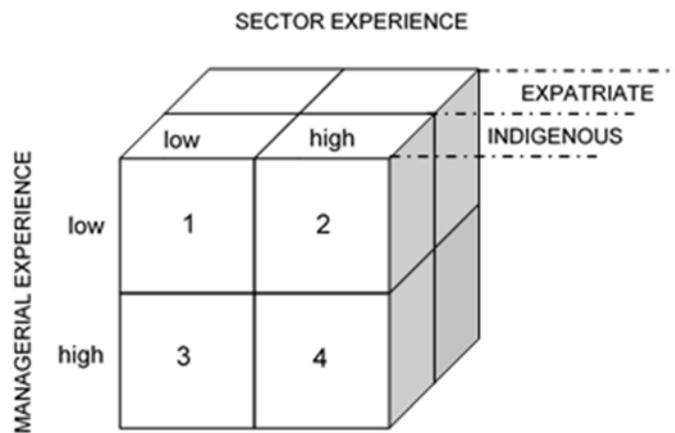


Figure 4-2: Categories of social entrepreneur, developed from Cope & Watts (2000)

Despite my use of Cope and Watts’ (2000) terminology, it is important to note that I emphasize slightly different factors when I use their terms. This is particularly so with regards to my understanding of the term ‘sector’. Cope and Watts seem to discuss the term ‘sector’ with a focus primarily on the type of industry in which the entrepreneur is active (for example: renewable energy or mobile communications). My interviews with the *Booster* entrepreneurs however, suggest that their participation in the accelerator was very much influenced by their *professional* identity and experience. Consequently, while I hesitate to replace Cope and Watts’ term altogether, it is important to note that the term ‘sector’ is not without its weaknesses – in that it is not extremely specific and can contain additional aspects of expertise and identity. This reasoned, yet subjective distinction is one reason why I term my grouping a typology, rather than a taxonomy – in keeping with the ideas of Smith (2002), and Ayres and Knafl (2008).

In this study of entrepreneurial learning I suggest that it is useful to distinguish between different types of social entrepreneur. I do so based on the assumption that if certain social entrepreneurial types are linked to different processes or outcomes of learning, it will be easier for accelerator managers to recruit and interact with each 'type' more effectively. In the case studies that follow I describe the patterns of interaction and outcomes associated with four types of participant in more detail. I have selected these four types out of the eight possible types, because they represent the types of social entrepreneur more commonly found in this study. Furthermore, at times I have chosen to discuss only one 'version' of a particular type, because the other variation is similar to the first (for example: the behaviour of the 'veteran-expatriate' was similar to that of the 'veteran-indigenous'). Clearly, I have also been unable to provide case studies of categories that may exist in other contexts, but that were absent from the accelerators – for example: the 'innocent-indigenous' type. Consequently, my choice of 'sub-cases' for a more detailed study of social entrepreneurial learning, has been influenced by my desire for *relevance* (it is most useful to discuss the learning of the type of entrepreneur most commonly found in accelerators) – and *insight*. In other words, because a particular type of social entrepreneur illustrates a radically different process or outcome of social entrepreneurial learning.

In the following paragraphs I describe the four types of social entrepreneur discussed in this study in more detail – and present a table on which I locate the accelerator participants who belong to each category.

In keeping with Cope and Watts (2000), I term the first type of accelerator participant the 'veteran' (V). Entrepreneurs of this type⁷⁵ were frequently older than their peers and tended to have had a fairly long and successful career prior to participating in the accelerator. Often this implied international postings, experience of leading teams and/or organisations, and responsibility for significant financial resources⁷⁶. Due to their experience these individuals were usually competent in many areas in which their fellow entrepreneurs lacked experience. Consequently, accelerator managers were often challenged to find mentors that could provide them with the quality of input implied by their backgrounds. In the first accelerator Barry (V-E) belonged to this category, as did Isaac (V-I) in the second programme. I also judged Thomas in A3 to belong to this group (V-I), as he had considerably more experience in consulting and management than his peers – even if he would be considered relatively inexperienced in comparison with the 'extremes' of Barry and Isaac.

⁷⁵ Note that in this section the terms 'category' and 'type' are used interchangeably. This does not mean however, that I am creating any other type of classification than the simple descriptive typology discussed by Ayres and Knaff (2008).

⁷⁶ I.e.: budgets of hundreds of thousands of dollars or more.

The second category of *Booster* participant is the ‘knowledgeable improviser’ (KI) – expatriate or indigenous. In my initial analysis I called this category the ‘profession-oriented social entrepreneur’. This was because the individuals in this category seemed to participate in the accelerator on the basis of their ‘profession’ rather than in response to an acute social need. Participants in this category tended to construct their social entrepreneurial intentions around the logic “I am a [profession] – so how can I use my profession to create social or environmental value?”. For the most part, the entrepreneurs of this type were Europeans (i.e.: expatriates /KI-E) – and several had a background in design. Only one participant from this category was found in the second accelerator (Marie – expatriate), but in the first programme half of the participants were ‘profession-oriented’ (Andrew, Alice, Edward and Gabriella) – and all of them belonged to the ‘expatriate’ category (KI-E). In A3 I classified two social entrepreneurs (Vinay and Zayd) as ‘knowledgeable improvisers’ – and both had intimate (‘indigenous’) experience of the contexts they were targeting (KI-I). However, the social entrepreneurs in this category tended to have limited managerial and/or entrepreneurial experience.

The third and fourth types of social entrepreneur discussed in more detail in this study, belong to the ‘confident entrant-indigenous’ (CE-I) and ‘innocent-expatriate’ (I-E) categories. I suggest that these two categories represent the classic domain of the social entrepreneur, in that individuals in these categories are often responding to a pressing social need that is associated with a ‘sector’ in which they have relatively little experience. What individuals bring to the table is their passion for change – and in the case of the ‘confident entrant’, their skills (or experience) as leaders or agents of change. Unsurprisingly therefore, a large number of the *Booster* social entrepreneurs occupy these two categories.

In table 4.3 I have mapped the *Booster* social entrepreneurs according to the social entrepreneurial ‘type’ that I associate each individual with. However, despite my emphasis of the distinctiveness of each type of accelerator participant, it is important to note that my typology at times simplifies and exaggerates these differences. At times entrepreneurs were ‘borderline’ cases and displayed some of the characteristics of a second category. Andrew (KI-E) was such an entrepreneur, having a long enough background in entrepreneurship to be bordering on the ‘experienced’, while also choosing to develop his venture on the basis of his professional knowledge. Barry, who I have categorised as ‘veteran-expatriate’ had some sector-oriented experience, but was far more experienced in terms of his background as a manager. Jamal (I-E) and Gabriella (KI-E) had immigrated to Scandinavia from developing countries – and despite having lived in Europe for many years, could conceivably be categorised as ‘indigenous’ entrepreneurs. In the *Booster* accelerator however, Jamal and Gabriella did not distinguish themselves from ‘expatriate’ entrepreneurs in terms of their behaviour – perhaps due to the long period of time they had spent in

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Scandinavia. Consequently I have not categorised them as ‘indigenous’ social entrepreneurs, even if this could be appropriate in an accelerator recruiting individuals who have only recently emigrated.

Table 4-3: The Booster entrepreneurs, showing categories and stage.

Name / Enterprise	Acc.	Provenance	Cat.	Status at start**
Barry / CellSun	A1	Scandinavia	V-E	validation (1)
Alice / Goodlink	A1	Scandinavia	KI-E	concepting (-1)
Andrew / C-Cure	A1	Scandinavia*	KI-E	concepting (-1)
Edward / Goodlink	A1	Scandinavia	KI-E	concepting (-1)
Gabriella / Brottle	A1	Scandinavia*	KI-E	ideation (-2)
Catrin / Imbani	A1	Western Europe	CE-E	concepting (-1)
Henrik / Garbage Garments	A1	Scandinavia	I-E	commitment (0)
Isaac / MobiClin	A2	East Africa	V-I	scaling (2)
Lewis / BioVolt	A2	East Africa	V-I	commitment (0)
Miriam / Better Work	A2	Scandinavia	KI-E	concepting (-1)
Heidi / Bottle Art	A2	North America	CE-E	validation (1)
Nelson / Pistols to Ploughs	A2	West Africa	CE-I	validation (1)
Peter / AfriPads	A2	East Africa	CE-I	validation (1)
Steven / Bibl. Communitaires	A2	Central Africa	CE-I	concepting (-1)
Jamal / AgriTech	A2	Scandinavia*	I-E	ideation (-2)
Kenny / Afri-Text	A2	West Africa	I-I	validation (1)
Thomas / TourFair	A3	East Africa	V-I	validation (1)
Olga / Rough Diamonds	A3	Western Europe	KI-I	commitment (0)
Patience / FairCare	A3	East Africa	KI-I	commitment (0)
Rebecca / Spread IT	A3	East Africa	KI-I	commitment (0)
Vinay / Sunpower	A3	South Asia	KI-I	validation (1)
Zayd / Puretech	A3	Middle East	KI-I	validation (1)
Willis / AfriChoc	A3	West Africa	CE-I	validation (1)
Nadia / Femicharge	A3	Western Europe	I-E	concepting (-1)

* Denotes an entrepreneur resident in Scandinavia who immigrated as an adult.
 ** Stage categories from *Startup Commons* (2014).

The distribution of the different categories in the three accelerators is portrayed in table 4.3. Enterprise stage of development is also indicated, using the typology developed by the *Startup Commons* (2014). As noted earlier, their typology consists of three over-reaching stages (pre-start-up, start-up and growth), each of which is divided into smaller sub-stages. These sub-stages are numbered from -2 to +3. This practitioner-oriented model of entrepreneurial stage is used because it focuses primarily on the stages associated with *nascent* entrepreneurship, in contrast to several more scholarly articles (for example: V. L. Lewis & Churchill, 1983; Scott & Bruce, 1987). These latter articles are heavily

cited, but adopt a 'life-cycle' perspective that glosses over the sub-stages associated with nascent entrepreneurship⁷⁷. I am aware that other scholars also discuss issues of entrepreneurial 'stage', but my main focus is on the learning of nascent social entrepreneurs. I have therefore chosen a typology that reflects my experience of the stages the *Booster* entrepreneurs were at and have chosen not to engage in a discussion of the merits of different models. I am nevertheless aware that my choice may be controversial, given the different perspectives adopted by other scholars (Carter, Gartner, & Reynolds, 1996; Reynolds & Miller, 1992) – and in view of suggestions that ventures do not necessarily progress through these stages in a linear fashion (Bhave, 1994). It is also worth pointing out that few discussions of stage appear able to adequately cope with the 'sideways' mode of development discussed later on in this study. That is: the establishment by a non-profit organisation, of a branch of the enterprise that operates in a more business-like manner.

In the following sections I describe four social entrepreneurs' experiences of the *Booster* accelerator in more detail. These descriptions reflect the 'broad brush' of my over-riding research purpose (to '*explore the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerator programmes*'). Naturally, the full diversity of experiences described by the twenty-three social entrepreneurs who participated in the three *Booster* accelerators, cannot be captured within the confines of this dissertation. For this reason the four individuals are chosen as '*exemplars*' of the four categories described above (Benner, 1994). Furthermore, complete data is not yet available for the social entrepreneurs who participated in the third accelerator (these individuals have not yet completed the one-year follow-up questionnaire). Consequently, only individuals from the first and second accelerators have been chosen for in-depth analysis – as I am able to tell their stories 'from beginning to end'.

Entrepreneurs' experiences within each category vary to a certain extent, but my analysis suggests that there is more to unite the entrepreneurs in each category than there is to distinguish them from one another. In chapter five the experiences of the remaining twenty-one entrepreneurs are at times referred to as the findings of the study are discussed in more detail. However, the following section and chapter five have different purposes. In the following paragraphs I provide the reader with an impression of the 'whole' experience of the entrepreneur. In keeping with the ambitions of qualitative research, I try to provide the reader with a 'rich' account of how the participation of a social entrepreneur in an accelerator affects their learning. In this section my intention is to provide the reader with four views of the 'forest' (the 'whole' experience of the entrepreneur) – before moving on in chapter five, to examine individual 'trees' (particular aspects of this experience). In my discussion of these latter

⁷⁷ For example: Scott and Bruce (1987) suggest that 'survival' immediately follows 'inception'.

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aspects I expand my discussion and draw on the testimony of the entire group of social entrepreneurs.

Each of the four case-studies is divided into five sections. In the first section I describe the entrepreneur's background and personality, before moving on to describe their expectations of the accelerator as discussed at the beginning of the programme and in subsequent interviews. A short description of the entrepreneur's venture is also provided. These three sections roughly equate to the two components 'the entrepreneur' and 'intent' in my synthesis of the literature in chapter two (see figure 4.2). The 'intentions' part of the section also reflects the concerns of my first research question ('In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators influenced by their experiences and intentions prior to entering the programme?') Naturally however, the social venture itself embodies something of the long-term intent of the entrepreneur, while their 'expectations' capture part of their short-term intent with regards to their participation in the accelerator.

The section 'experiencing the accelerator' describes the experience of the entrepreneur during their eight weeks in the programme. In this section it is hoped that the reader will begin to get a 'feel' for the answers to research questions two and three, even if these are not explicitly addressed until chapter five. Consequently, in this section the interaction of the entrepreneur with their mentor, accelerator staff, external speakers (coaches) and peers is described. Participants' experiences of the accelerator material structure (for example: time, space, activities and assignments) are also portrayed at this point. This content roughly matches the 'Immersion in the learning process' part of the diagram. The fifth section ('after the accelerator') describes the development of entrepreneurs' ventures after the programme and their subsequent comments on the contribution of the accelerator to their development. In the diagram, this section is intended to parallel the 'new or expanded knowledge and capabilities' and 'long-term business outcomes' parts of the diagram. It also provides the reader with a feel for the answers to research question four, answers that will be discussed in more detail in chapter five.

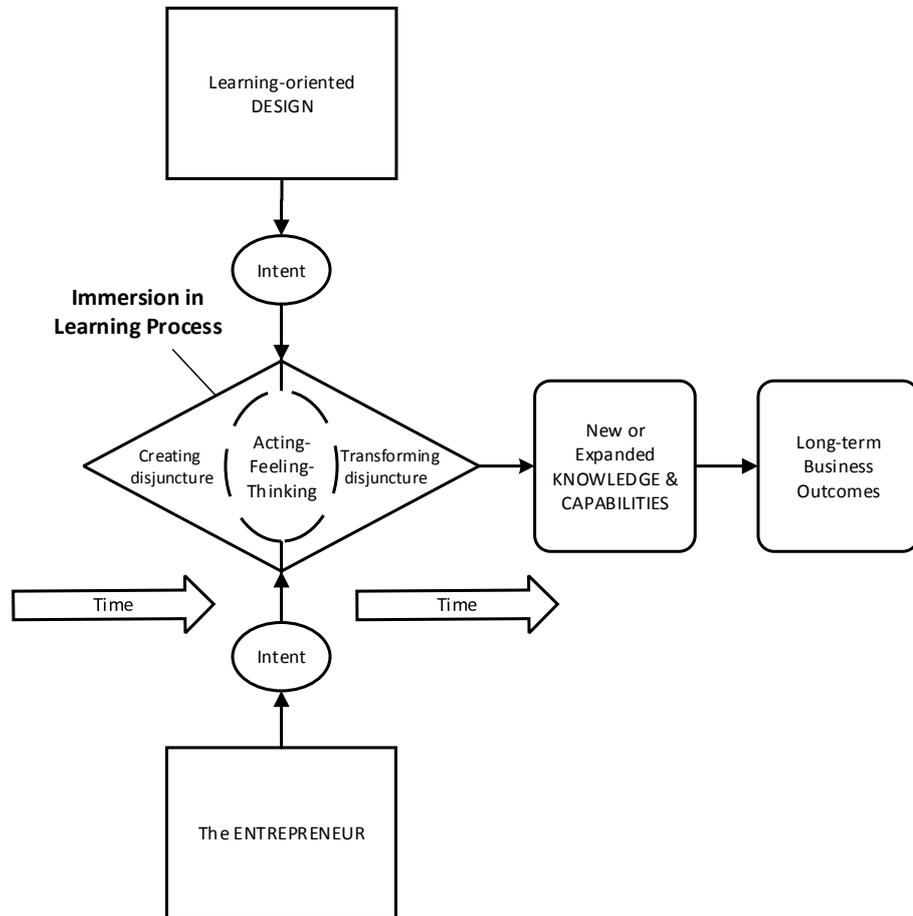


Figure 4-3: A Preliminary Model of Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators

4.4.1 The Veteran-Expatriate: Barry (A1)

4.4.1.1 Background and Personality

Barry is a 42 year old Danish businessman, whose father was an entrepreneur. When Barry was eight years old his parents divorced and his father moved to Angola, where he had been doing business for several years. Consequently, Barry moved backwards and forwards between Angola and Denmark as he grew up and calls Angola his second homeland. His father married an Angolan woman and they had children, so that Barry has brothers and sisters in both countries.

Barry spent some time in the Danish navy after military service – as a reserve officer, before studying civil engineering at university. He then moved into consultancy and worked for several years with an international consultancy firm focusing primarily on business development. Eventually, the part of the firm that Barry worked in was bought by a multinational computer manufacturer. By that time Barry had risen in the ranks and was responsible for the consulting personnel in that part of the firm. In 2009, shortly after the global financial crisis, the firm began to lay off personnel – yet wished to maintain contact with many of their skilled employees. They therefore introduced a scheme whereby employees were allowed to take a leave of absence while retaining a third of their salary. At university Barry and several other students had discussed the possibility of starting their own businesses – so when the chance of a paid leave-of-absence came up, Barry seized it. As he puts it:

“[At university] many of us said that we were building our CVs in order to be able to do something in the future. I realised that I was doing it so that I could run my own business. And now I have the chance, so if I don't do it now – and I'll soon be 40 – it will never happen.”

Barry describes his career as centring around three themes; criteria that he has developed to guide his choices when offered new career opportunities. Importantly he found that all three criteria were fulfilled by the type of startup one of his friends suggested:

“I want to work internationally, I want to work with something that makes the world a better place and, um... I want to be in charge. So when I started my own business and my friends came and said ‘Why don't you work with solar energy in developing countries?’ – then I got everything at once.”

Barry describes these values as constant in his life since around the year 2000, although he adds that ‘people’ are a fourth component that he adds to the equation nowadays:

“It’s important for me to work with people. Regardless of whether or not they are my employees or my colleagues – or if I make life better for people. So that’s a fourth component.”

Unsurprisingly considering his background, Barry was one of the most experienced entrepreneurs in the first accelerator, a characteristic mirrored by his rating by the global computer firm in 2005, as having “strong leadership potential” (the highest rating). Despite his obvious capacity he was very ‘low key’ in his behaviour; displaying a helpfulness, curiosity and an openness to new ideas that some of the more experienced entrepreneurs in the second accelerator (for example: Isaac and Lewis) appeared to lack. This humility and willingness to learn from others was displayed by Barry in many different contexts. Speaking at an *Innovations against Poverty* conference several months after the accelerator, Barry described his learning rationale:

“Others have done it before, learn from them [...] One way of working may not work elsewhere; you have to try, try, try...”

“It might be the person sitting next to you on the bus who can help you most at the moment, out of all the people in the world – and if you’re not open to that and initiate a conversation, you’re sure to miss a lot of opportunities.”

Despite his openness to new ideas, it is important not to mistake Barry’s unassuming attitude for a lack of direction or enthusiasm. Barry is passionate about what he does and contrasts his feelings while doing his old job with his feelings today:

Duncan (follow up question after Barry described his ‘getting quite comfortable’ and lacking passion at his old employer): “So you have that passion now?”

“Yes! Yes! Yes! It’s like I’m living in a story tale. I’m living for a goal [...] I often describe it as if there is a magnet in the future, pulling me. Um... I’m on the way towards a goal... and I’m convinced that it’s a good goal.”

4.4.1.2 The Venture

The passion that Barry described in the first interview I conducted with him (in week three of the accelerator) centred on his vision of bringing electrical power to rural areas in Africa. After leaving the computer corporation, Barry began searching for an idea around which to develop his venture. One of his friends suggested that solar power was an exciting possibility. Building upon his familiarity with sub-Saharan Africa, Barry began to develop this idea. The process that led from his friend’s suggestion to the final business idea is unclear, but after several months Barry had a clear idea of what he wanted to do. He wanted to develop a business that would help entrepreneurs in the rural areas of Africa to

earn a living by charging their neighbours' cell phones using solar power. His ambition is to have 250 000 African entrepreneurs using his innovation.

Barry discussed his ambition with his friend (who unsurprisingly had come up with the idea, because he owns a solar power manufacturing facility). Without Barry asking the firm to do so, the firm then developed ten prototype solar chargers for Barry to test in the field. Here the contribution of Barry's experience is clear:

"Um, that [to say he did it without me asking] isn't altogether true... I requested it without saying so. I planted the idea with the right person who I knew would do something with it."

This informal partnership drastically reduced Barry's development costs, the importance of which should not be underestimated. I interviewed an entrepreneur a few months before Barry, who was also developing a portable solar charging system – and one of their greatest challenges was the financing of the technological development of their product.

Barry describes the field testing of the product in deceptively simple terms: describing in a few sentences the process of travelling to Angola, testing the prototypes and receiving a positive response. This positive response and Barry's partnership with the solar manufacturing firm made it easier for Barry to take a further step in developing his venture and attracting finance. Assisted by the manufacturer, Barry applied for funding from Sida's *Innovations against Poverty* programme and was awarded a grant of \$75 000 USD. The grant was conditional on Barry matching the grant with other investment, which was a key concern as he entered the accelerator in the spring of 2012⁷⁸. Nonetheless, it had enabled Barry to make some progress on his startup prior to entering the accelerator. On entering the programme Barry's startup had already received funding from his step-mother in Angola and a lawyer friend – and he was employing a consultant in Angola and a student in Denmark on a part-time basis.

4.4.1.3 Expectations

Prior to the accelerator in 2012, Barry participated in a course for nascent entrepreneurs in 2009. However, after his contact with Sida in 2010, he was put in touch with *NSE* and became a member. Later, as *NSE* began to plan the first accelerator, *Booster* manager Denise asked him if he would like to participate. Barry reasoned that although he expected the accelerator to be similar to the 2009 course, time had passed and he felt that it would be healthy to be exposed to a "critical evaluation". However, although Barry describes his expectations of the

⁷⁸ Barry was able to raise some finance after the accelerator, but is unclear about whether he was able to raise enough money to entirely match the *Sida* grant, or only part of this amount.

accelerator as including “marketing to investors, networking, sourcing investment”; in both his application and subsequent interviews he emphasizes inspiration as a primary motivation (on the application form he wrote “to provide inspiration” first on his list of expectations).

“to hear what other entrepreneurs are up to and to be inspired... to get a little energy”

In addition to inspiration, an expanded network and contact with investors; Barry also identified advice, coaching and “experience-based knowledge” as his expectations of the accelerator. In his interview at the beginning of the accelerator Barry developed his reason for participating in more detail. He described his experience of the long process of launching a venture being detrimental to his critical thinking, with the pressure of trying to raise investment leading him into a pattern of just attempting to complete what he had planned to do. Consequently he felt a need to have a critical look at his venture once again – and to set aside the time to do this.

4.4.1.4 Experiencing the Accelerator

Barry was one of the entrepreneurs who was willing to talk at length about his experiences of the accelerator and his account makes for interesting reading. Early in the accelerator it was clear that his participation was having an unexpected impact and that he appreciated the programme’s inspirational speakers for an unusual reason.

“It wasn’t conscious, but I notice now when I’m sitting on this course, that simply by being quiet and just having a paper and pen in front of me and somebody talking about something. So... there are parts of my brain that are otherwise far too inactive that relax and kind of free themselves.”

“It’s a bit like... sitting in a lecture, it’s not just that if it’s boring I think of something else, it’s almost the opposite. It has to be inspiring, because if it’s boring I begin to think of my to-do list and so on. Um, but if it’s inspiring then... then I start getting creative thoughts about entirely different things. It’s as if... yeah, my brain relaxes and... ‘Yes, that was the way I planned to do that – that was stupid. Do it this way!’ – and in that way I put things together. And that isn’t conscious, it wasn’t the reason I’m on this programme.”

Barry stands out from many of the other entrepreneurs on the accelerator because of his emphasis of the importance of attaining social impact with financial sustainability. As with many of the accelerator participants he prefers to describe himself as an entrepreneur, rather than a social entrepreneur – but he had clearly thought through the financial side of his venture more than many of the others – who had often focused primarily on their social impact. For them

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the exercise in thinking through the financial sustainability of their ventures was new, while Barry described it as the “foundation” of his work on his startup up to that point. Nonetheless, Barry did not react negatively to this, but found the exposure to others’ ideas interesting and inspiring:

“It’s really exciting to meet these people who haven’t thought about that at all previously”.

“Open source... and stuff like that... it’s not social... entrepreneurship, social work - that we do things for each other without getting paid. Um, it’s almost *more* social entrepreneurship than what I’m doing. [...] They’ve managed to find a model where *nobody* gets paid and still they survive... it’s pretty amazing!”

Despite his appreciation of the new ideas and inspiration generated by the accelerator, as the programme developed it became increasingly clear that Barry was already familiar with many of the concepts and skills covered by the accelerator. His venture was one of the few startups in A1 already in a position to scale up and he commented that in terms of product/service-related ideas, he was only able to ‘borrow’ ideas from one of the other ventures (Catrin’s cross-border, SMS-based payment service). Halfway through the accelerator Barry was already aware of the mismatch and commented:

“I have come so far with my business that many activities are not very valuable. However, they sometimes give me new ideas and activities that develop practical skills - like yesterday’s theatre session with Enoch, which was great and very rewarding”.

As noted earlier, Barry appeared to be unusually aware of his own patterns of thinking and the way in which the structure of the accelerator supported or restricted his learning. For example: he reflected on why he found the session with Enoch rewarding.

“It was good because it was a break, we used a different part of our brain.”

Despite Barry’s experience, he came away from the accelerator with more than just inspiration and a few new ideas for his venture (for example: “a discount coupon using a texting service”). From a more strategic, long-term perspective Barry described how he had learned the importance of coordinated communication during the accelerator. This learning took place as a result of the accelerator’s ‘critical assessment’ of each aspect of his venture, which was one of the reasons he gave for wanting to participate.

“I realised that I can’t do crowd-sourcing because my website doesn’t tell the story I’m passionate about”.

As was the case with many of the entrepreneurs in the first accelerator, Barry felt that there were too many seminars and too little time set aside for individual work. In the final evaluation he suggested that the programme be radically reduced to one full day of coaching and lectures. However, he emphasized the need to retain the ‘inspirational’ function of the accelerator (“one inspirational speaker each week”). He also recommended that the accelerator take on some of the ideas from the startup course he had taken previously. He particularly emphasized the need for entrepreneurs to be given clear tasks each week – and the need for a single ‘head teacher’ to place demands on participants and follow up on their assignments. Barry also questioned the recruitment process of the first accelerator, suggesting that in the future accelerator managers needed to first ask themselves what the goal of the programme was. Based on this understanding he suggested that they should subsequently ask which of the applicants they could develop during the accelerator, to attain that goal.

An interesting phenomenon that emerged as Barry participated in the accelerator was a behaviour that I refer to as ‘piggy-backing’. Barry was in many ways more experienced than the other entrepreneurs and often appeared to make a greater contribution (in terms of feedback and advice) to the other entrepreneurs’ ventures, than they did to his. Barry did not appear to object to this imbalance and other entrepreneurs were appreciative of it. Gabriella (KI-E) appeared to be the entrepreneur who benefitted most from Barry’s willingness to ‘piggy-back’. Her relation to Barry after the accelerator underlines the idea that the phenomenon involved not only advice, but also the sharing of networks and practice. Twelve months after the accelerator, Gabriella accompanied Barry on a trip to Africa and by doing so was able to meet several of his local contacts – who naturally provided her with useful information and advice about how to adapt her product to their context. It also appears that during the trip Barry ‘modelled’ entrepreneurship in the African context for Gabriella – as she was able to follow first-hand the process that he engaged in, as he sought to develop his venture in the Angolan market.

4.4.1.5 After the Accelerator

One year on after the accelerator a lot had happened in Barry’s venture. He employed seven people: himself fulltime, one other person half-time in Sweden, two fulltime employees and three agents (receiving either a wage or sales commission) in Angola. He described the first year as a tough one and one that he described as being almost totally devoted to sourcing investment. He confessed that he thought it would be easier to find investors than it proved to be – and also commented on the difficulties associated with the delay between coming to an agreement with an investor and actually receiving the investment.

“I mean, the agreement and the milestones and stuff were written based on an agreement in August and my belief that the money would be available in

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September [...] those bits don't change and what we are supposed to achieve – but I haven't had any money available during the first two months of that plan⁷⁹.”

Barry commented that although he was now trying to devote all his energy to selling his product, it was difficult to focus on sales when investment wasn't finalised and he felt uncertain as to how long the money would last – not least when he had employees to consider. He also repeated his comment made during the accelerator, that the challenge of being involved in a startup has a cost at home in terms of reduced income and worry about the future. One year after A1 he described visiting Angola one week each month and being in daily contact with his staff. However, he commented that the pressure got worse as his venture developed:

“In the beginning I had the advantage of being able to be at home while I worked with business development – the stage most of the others were at during *Booster* – that stage isn't a problem. But later [...] the family doesn't get much out of it, but rather the opposite: I don't contribute with money, I don't contribute with time and I'm not present⁸⁰ – so it gets really unbalanced.”

Despite having had a tough first year all, it was clear from Barry's account that he was making progress not only with regards to selling his product, but also in terms of creating a strong organisational culture. Barry's explained that his philosophy has been one of not so much writing down organisational values, but rather living them out. He then wryly described how he came under pressure from investors to change his franchise model from one of renting the product to entrepreneurs (entailing a lower risk for the African entrepreneur) to one of selling them the product. When he brought this suggestion up with his staff in Africa they questioned the suggestion immediately:

“‘Yes... but we're a socially responsible company!’ – and then they began to find alternatives themselves... so that, yes - the sales model should sponsor the rental model.”

When asked about the long-term impact of the accelerator, Barry commented first of all that the programme helped him develop a network among social entrepreneurs. It also emerged that it was the accelerator that first led him to understand himself as a social entrepreneur:

⁷⁹ The interview took place at the beginning of November 2011.

⁸⁰ The context of the interview makes it clear that Barry is referring to his thoughts being elsewhere, even when he is physically present.

“I can't say that it was only at *Booster*, but in principle it happened about then; it was the first time I realised that some people call what I do 'social entrepreneurship' .”

Barry repeated what he said in earlier interviews, about the value of the network, but is a little more specific. He suggests that the value of the network (he appears to be referring to the cohort at this stage) lies in the different competencies possessed by the entrepreneurs and the stimulation he experienced while working with different business ideas – “that was very exciting”. He commented that he has begun to coach Gabriella and that he will be discussing the “digital bits” of his operation with another participant, Edward. He also says that he would like to develop several other contacts he made during *Booster* – in particular several of the visiting speakers. Barry goes on to discuss his own learning and says that he has taken on board some of the accelerator content, and some of the ideas that surfaced there:

“I still have an idea about conducting a crowd-sourcing campaign and some other things – so it actually gave quite a lot.”

Despite his positive attitude to the accelerator, Barry is still convinced that he had achieved too much in his venture, when he entered the accelerator and that the accelerator failed to provide him with two key areas of knowledge, namely contacts with investors and coaching in sales:

(Duncan: Did the content of the accelerator match your needs at the time?)

“No, it didn't. I had come too far [...] I was after the final destination which we never arrived at, that we would finalise and become ready to meet investors and get in contact with a larger network of investors.”

“I don't think I really needed much help to develop. I just needed help to meet investors... Perhaps what I needed, what I would have found useful was sales – coaching on sales [...] how to commercialise the market as fast as possible.”

Despite these observations, Barry denied my suggestion that he might have found it frustrating to participate in an accelerator with entrepreneurs who had made less progress than him:

“No, I didn't feel that. I felt that it was stimulating.”

He also commented that he appreciated the fact that two of the participants were focusing on Africa and developing countries. However, when questioned about whether it was better to recruit entrepreneurs from either the same industry *or* the same stage of development, Barry was adamant that it is more important that entrepreneurs be at the same stage:

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“I think it’s good if they’re at the same stage. If someone is into the commercialising phase and someone else is into the... in theory they can learn from one another, but then you’ll be completely uninterested in each other’s problems.”

(Duncan: “So they don’t need to be from the same industry, but rather at the same stage?”)

“Exactly [...] they *shouldn’t* be from the same industry.”

In previous interviews Barry had made little comment on his relation to the mentor he was allocated during the accelerator. I questioned him more about this and he said that he hadn’t met his mentor since concluding the programme, but that they were planning to eat lunch together soon. When I asked what his mentor contributed, Barry responded dryly “Not much so far” – and after further discussion he acknowledged that his mentor was more an “acquaintance” at the moment, even if he had a feeling now and again that the relationship might lead to something useful. Barry suggested that time is always a constraining factor for entrepreneurs, even when it comes to relationships:

“As an entrepreneur or a businessman... the less time you have the greater your dependence on it ‘clicking’ when you meet different people. And it [Barry’s relationship with his mentor] hasn’t really clicked I think”.

Despite Barry’s misgivings about the mentor allocated to him by *Booster*, he was still enthusiastic about the idea of a mentor:

“At the moment it would be good to have a mentor who is great at building a sales organisation.”

One year after leaving the accelerator though, Barry received a lot of advice from his father-in-law (“an entrepreneur from [location], he knows what it takes”) and his stepmother in Angola who constantly encouraged him and came up with new ideas. He had difficulty however, in imagining how *NSE* could contribute to the development of his venture – but was keen to remain in the network (“because I find it inspiring”).

Two years after the accelerator, Barry went back to ‘traditional’ employment, albeit with a focus on emerging markets, He now runs his startup as a ‘part-time’ operation and on his LinkedIn page the duration of his solar energy startup is listed as “4 years, 10 months”).

4.4.2 The Knowledgeable Improviser: Marie (A2)

4.4.2.1 Background and Personality

Marie is a 51 year-old entrepreneur from Norway – which, given her focus on southern Asia implies that she is ‘expatriate’ (KI-E). Married with two children, she has now settled in Norway after many years living abroad. Initially trained in graphic design and journalism, Marie’s first major job was at a photo agency – a job that she held for seven years, while running her own photo-journalism company on the side. During this time she became increasingly interested in human rights and CSR issues – and in particular, the rights of garment workers in southern Asia⁸¹ and in China. This interest led to her successful application to work for the press and communications department of a major European garment wholesaler, focusing primarily on the production of materials relating to garment suppliers in China and southern Asia. Five years later Marie had moved from documenting the activities of garment suppliers and their employees, to living in southern Asia and managing rights-related projects for the garment wholesaler. In 2011 Marie moved into the corporation’s CSR department as project manager for a series of initiatives that centred on the improvement of workers’ conditions in suppliers’ factories. These initiatives included the production of manuals and films on worker safety. She then left the company upon her return to Norway in 2012, and began working independently as a CSR consultant and taking several university courses in the subject.

As a person, Marie appears forthright, open to new experiences and engaged. In her CV she describes herself as an organiser and implementer: “creative, curious and always willing to learn”. She displays many of these characteristics as she participates in the accelerator and is clearly a ‘people’ person rather than a loner: going out of her way to help resolve conflict or to facilitate the progress of other entrepreneurs.

4.4.2.2 The Venture

Marie’s experience in southern Asia had made her aware of the need for developing safety procedures and an awareness of workers’ rights among the smaller garment factories that are often ignored by the CSR programmes of large corporations. Back in Norway she toyed with the idea of developing a ‘hub’ for worker safety and workers’ rights, that would bring together all of the major stakeholder groups in the garment industry: “workers, suppliers, buyers, industrial organisations, networks, NGOs and governments”. By providing a platform around which stakeholders could engage in dialogue, Marie’s ambition was to:

⁸¹ I.e.: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka.

“use business as a driving force with cooperation [...] and transparency as core tools. I would like the hub to grow [...] to change attitudes and actions amongst all, from workers to managers to prime ministers”

Marie’s startup was consequently at the idea stage when she participated in the accelerator and her intention was to develop a platform for stakeholder dialogue. Initially in a single country in southern Asia; but with time, in several of the main garment-producing nations in the region.

4.4.2.3 Expectations

Marie’s expectations of the accelerator centred very much on moving her startup from idea to action. In the pre-accelerator survey she writes of developing an action plan and of creating “systems for the [hub/stakeholder] collaboration. It is clear that she expects to get professional advice while at the accelerator, particularly on the practical, financial and legal aspects of launching her venture – and she is keen to sharpen her presentation skills. Nevertheless, the interviews made it clear that Marie was particularly concerned about preparing a business plan and a concrete description of her product offering – something she could show to potential customers as a basis for their ‘coming on board’.

Marie was one of the few entrepreneurs who included her own contribution to the group under the ‘expectations’ heading, writing that she looked forward to sharing her own knowledge and experience with the other participants.

4.4.2.4 Experiencing the Accelerator

‘Intensity’ was a theme that characterised much of Marie’s interview halfway through the accelerator, both in terms of value and experience. Very much aware of the demands made on her time by her consultancy work, Marie appreciated the focus demanded by the accelerator.

“I feel it’s good to work intensively, reserving time and working very intensively with this – because I get new [consultancy] tasks all the time and it’s easy for that to take over, as I need to make a living”.

Nevertheless, halfway through the accelerator Marie was feeling both pressure and frustration. Clearly she was learning a lot and enjoying the process, but she also commented on the difficulty of developing everything that she wished to – and noted that she had been unable to accomplish many of the things she had hoped to. For example:

“I really want to finish preparing a business plan that I feel good about, but I don’t have enough time, because there so much going on all the time. But I learn a lot every day.”

Despite this frustration Marie expressed her appreciation for the working environment at *SocNet*. She talked about the value of meeting different people there, both during the week and at events:

“It’s an unbelievably good environment to work in. I’d love to stay on”.

Marie also noted the contribution of the accelerator to expanding her network and emphasized the value of meeting people who were *interested* in her venture. She commented on the questions interested people ask who are involved in social entrepreneurship and that stimulate her thinking. For example:

“A question I get since I started the accelerator, which I’m not sure I’ve had before is that people say: ‘Oh great! How nice to hear about your project – and what do you need?’ And I reply, ‘What I need? Well you know...’ That’s a fantastic question and I’ve really taken it on board.”

With regards to her expanded network, Marie expressed its value in terms of the future: knowing who to contact for advice and being able to contact them (on the basis of having been introduced to them at the accelerator). Her enthusiasm for the accelerator’s contribution to her network was undiminished at the end of the programme, when she mentioned for example: that she had already scheduled a follow-up appointment with one of the speakers. Marie also pointed out that although the accelerator was structured in a manner that implied that participants should get practical coaching from the visiting speakers and more strategic coaching from their mentors, it was also possible for entrepreneurs to get extra feedback by chatting to one another’s mentors.

Marie was provided with a mentor with a background in the textiles industry and was positive about the feedback he provided about her startup, particularly in relation to issues she was having trouble resolving. For example: the question of how to structure her ‘hub’. She commented on the usefulness of having a mentor who complemented her weaknesses, rather than reinforced her strengths (“boxes and systems and finance” vs. “ideas and creativity”). Despite her mentor’s structured personality, Marie described the mentoring process as dynamic in nature with their dialogue based on relevance rather than any pre-structured process. Her mentor would occasionally give her themes to address that related to key aspects of her startup, such as business model and finance – often by asking her questions. At other times he would introduce her to entrepreneurs with similar business models or ideas and encourage her to ask about their solutions, or their evaluations of her startup idea. On another occasion he accompanied Marie on a visit to a fashion company, as a way of ‘testing’ her product on a potential customer. Marie summarised her mentor’s contribution as that of a ‘sounding-board’.

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With regards to the contribution of the visiting speakers, Marie commented that one of the accelerator's contributions had to do with helping her with the parts of the startup process that she was less familiar with:

"A lot of things are fairly concrete: the idea and the tools and so on – I have that kind of knowledge – but it's everything else round about that needs to fall into place."

At the end of the accelerator Marie underlined the importance of being able to discuss her startup with "so many professional people". She associated these discussions with the development of her idea to a workable proposal and commented that this interaction increased her chances of success:

"I think the chances of this thing succeeding are higher and that it [the accelerator] has in fact accelerated".

Marie suggested that different speakers made contributions of a very different nature. In other words, speakers not only differed in terms of the topics they covered, but also in the role played by their visit. Marie noted for example: that some of the speakers were very practical and 'business-oriented', while other instead made more of an 'emotional' contribution. Marie even went so far as to suggest that these more inspirational speakers "tore down" some of the overly rational structures built up by the more practical visitors. This contribution was clearly important in terms of helping Marie get through the intensive accelerator process:

"Some of the speakers have been very inspiring and that has given me hope and strength to move on - because it's really heavy to get this off of the ground"

Marie, as noted earlier, had a wealth of experience to draw upon during the accelerator and often reflected on the design of the programme and on the ongoing process. In the interview at the end of the accelerator for example: she pointed out the different states of preparedness among visiting speakers. She questioned whether the voluntary nature of their engagement might be linked to some of them appearing unprepared for their interaction with the entrepreneurs. In particular she complained about the frequent need for participants to spend valuable seminar time on acquainting visitors with their ventures. Marie also suggested that an 'overload' of seminars makes it difficult for entrepreneurs to make progress on their ventures:

"It just doesn't work to sit for an hour or two between lectures and get something useful done".

Marie also suggested that the accelerator be designed with a focus on two stages. A 'basic' stage during the first three weeks, to provide participants with foundational business knowledge – and a 'specialist' stage in the remainder of the programme, to enable entrepreneurs to focus on their particular needs. She suggested that this 'individualised' focus is needed in order to address differences between participating ventures. For example, she suggested that some ventures were more in need of an expanded network than others – and that several of the entrepreneurs felt frustrated, because they had been unable to make as many connections as they had envisaged. Marie also acknowledged that she felt frustrated at not being able to make as much progress during the accelerator, as she had hoped to.

As noted in a previous section, conflict was a recurring theme in the second accelerator and Marie believed that the design of the accelerator was a factor in the group's problems. She suggested that accelerator managers wrongly assumed that it was necessary to take pressure off of the group in order to create a feeling of 'togetherness'. Marie suggested instead that the accelerator be designed in a manner that enhanced cohesion 'under pressure'. For example: by getting on with the development of entrepreneurs' ventures at an early stage and enhancing the group process during this development – and also by scheduling and structuring entrepreneurs contributions to one another's ventures. Marie was clearly affected by the tension within the group and her frustration over both the design of the accelerator and some of the other entrepreneurs' attitudes:

"Something that has created a lot of pressure and stress, is that... um, people haven't, um... given of what I feel they should have given."

"It's been hard, because these guys have done whatever they wanted to and come and gone as they wished, and sat and worked with other things during seminars. Everyone's had their laptops open and I get so unbelievably stressed by that, so I had to go and sit on a corner so I couldn't see their screens as they sat and Facebooked and Googled."

"It was a bit like... we should support each other and help one other and so on. And I felt that it became really individualised after... after week one it just went 'swish!' and we splintered and then no one seemed to want to help anyone else."

"So we have *not* made use of one another's' capacities... at all".

When asked if the problems stemmed from the accelerator or from the group, Marie felt unsure and said that the responsibility probably rested with both the group and the accelerator managers. She noted for example, that entrepreneurs were at different stages in the development process. She also questioned whether some of the ventures that participated in the accelerator were 'realistic' –

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wondering therefore, with what motives the entrepreneurs running them had come to Scandinavia. She suggested that the intensity of the programme accentuated the tensions in the group and that participants had very different ways of handling the assignments given them by managers. Marie described how she was at time “disobedient” and neglected some of the assignments, preferring to prioritise tasks that she felt were important. She suggested however, that other participants felt they *had* to complete all of the tasks assigned to them – while others might not have done any assignments at all. Marie was particularly critical of the role taken on by the accelerator managers, which she felt developed into a ‘mothering’ role (ensuring that all of the practical challenges of the accelerator were solved), rather than that of a leader:

“She should have been our boss! A boss shouldn’t have to take care of pots and sheets and buying suits for the lads, just because they... didn’t bring a suit with them.”

“I think that’s quite a strong critique of the programme - that the person leading the programme has to be available, and has to be a leader and has to have time for that. Someone else has to do deal with the administration.”

Despite her critique of some of the aspects of the accelerator, Marie noted that she had been able to build productive relationships with most of the participants. Halfway through the accelerator Marie she described interacting with Heidi, Steven, Jamal, Kenny, Peter and Nelson. She noted that being at the same stage made it easier for her to interact with these individuals She contrasted their stage of development with that of Isaac and Lewis, whose ventures she felt she had progressed too far to be of relevance to her. However, she also pointed out that some of her interaction with Heidi was based on the simple fact that they were both women and furthermore, the only “Westerners” in the programme.

Marie distinguished between individuals from who she felt she received as much as she gave (Heidi and Jamal) – and participants who she primarily gave advice to (Steven, Kenny, Peter and Nelson). By the end of the accelerator Marie only described Heidi as retaining the ‘give and take’ role she had hoped to see in the accelerator, while identifying Kenny and Steven (and to a lesser extent Peter) as participants she continued to give feedback to on more of a one-way basis. Her description of the peer-learning process suggests that from her perspective, entrepreneurs ‘earned’ the right to feedback from one another:

“Of the others [apart from Heidi] I felt that Kenny and um, Steven are the ones who have shown most enthusiasm and who have wanted to work a little harder than I feel the others have done. So I think it became a little natural that it felt fun to help them, because they were positive and wanted it [feedback].”

Marie's account of her relationship with her fellow entrepreneurs also made it clear that individuals not only could earn the right to feedback, but could also 'burn their bridges'. An example of the latter was Nelson's follow-up of Marie's provision of a contact at the Red Cross, which resulted in an embarrassing letter to them. This made her hesitant to provide additional support.

The above paragraphs suggest that the 'culture' or 'working climate' of an accelerator has a significant effect on entrepreneurs' experiences and learning. Clearly, not all of their experiences were positive and had a positive impact on learning. Nonetheless, Marie describes several instances of *positive* peer pressure – where she behaved in a more entrepreneurial manner than she would normally have done. One example is her response to my question about whether she wished her firm to remain anonymous in my writing up of the study:

"I think you need to stick your chin out more, even if you haven't got a finished concept. Otherwise you shouldn't really be here, at the accelerator. I think I stick my chin out a little more!" (laugh)

(Duncan): "Has that happened here? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes, I think so."

(Duncan): "Why? How did that happen?"

"Well, everybody else is so... (laugh) Everyone else has their name on the ideas that they're working on, so I feel 'What the hell, of course!' Then I guess we'll have to see if it works or not, but you have to take a chance... and I really think that that's the kind of spirit there is around here!"

Several months after the accelerator Marie referred back to another experience of 'sticking her chin out', namely the entrepreneurs' regular presentations of their businesses ("those horrible little pitches"). She commented that with perspective, she believes that the experience was useful – as she now feels more confident in giving presentations.

4.4.2.5 After the Accelerator

Five months on from the accelerator a lot of things had happened in Marie's startup. Marie described how after the accelerator she continued to talk to others and to potential customers about her ideas – and continued to receive positive feedback. Nevertheless, in her own mind the idea did not 'take off', as she puts it and she decided to take some time off from thinking about the new venture over the summer. Stimulated by a comment made by one of her stakeholders ("great idea, but what's next?"), Marie decided to develop her idea further and to build on her previous experience of awareness-raising and film-making. The

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product that resulted from this process continues to focus on garment workers and the smaller factories in which they work. However, rather than attempting to launch a 'hub', Marie is now focusing on creating an interactive series of training films and games, that can be viewed by workers on computers and smartphones. This development resulted in a change in the company name and Marie's confidence in the new idea has led to the registration of the firm as a limited company.

During the accelerator Marie had attempted to recruit an acquaintance as a business partner, but had failed. However, upon seeing the new concept, he became enthusiastic and is now a partner in the business – providing financial savvy to match Marie's expertise in the industry and in media. Marie estimates the initial impact of the new package to be far higher than that of her previous film-based solutions⁸². By rolling out in China and southern Asia at the same time, she expects to reach around one million workers in the first year. Marie estimates that she needs three to five firms to purchase the solution for it to really gain momentum. Since the accelerator she has been in dialogue with one of the largest Norwegian hardware wholesalers. They are positive to the initiative and prepared to fund its development. Marie therefore planned to roll out a first version of the product during the autumn of 2014, with a more extensive launch (and hopefully a larger number of committed customers) in the spring of 2015. While the product is developed and launched the startup is being hosted by the social business incubator, whose manager suggested Marie apply to the accelerator.

When asked if the venture would have developed in the way that it has *without* input from the accelerator; Marie suggests that it would have eventually arrived, but probably not as quickly. Above all she underlines the role of the accelerator in helping her understand that her idea would probably not work in its previous form – and she points out that there is also a risk that she might have given up instead:

“I might have come up with the idea anyway, but I think that... that these tools, that I was given the possibility to work... that I worked intensively on this for two months... I think was useful. It's quite possible I would have given up otherwise.”

Marie also pointed out that she feels much more positive about the accelerator today than she did immediately afterwards:

⁸² In her previous job she was able to reach around 600 000 garment workers in a single country over a six-year period.

“Now that I have a little distance to it, I feel that I got a lot more out of it than I maybe felt to start with, when it had just finished – because then I was really only very tired.”

Despite her subsequent positive impressions of the accelerator, Marie notes that it is the expanded network provided by the accelerator and the speakers that stand out, rather than her contacts with the other entrepreneurs. Marie says that she still has occasional online contact with Heidi, Steven and Kenny – but that it is really only with Heidi whom she shares startup oriented information. Nevertheless, she emphasizes how important it was for her to find a partner. She notes the useful role of the accelerator in providing expert advice and a sounding-board for a limited period, but underlines its inability to compensate for the lack of a partner in the long term.

4.4.3 The Confident Entrant: Steven (A2)

4.4.3.1 Background and Personality

Steven is a 41 year old entrepreneur who lives and works in Francophone Africa (making him an ‘indigenous’ social entrepreneur). Thirteen years before participating in the 2013 accelerator Steven founded his own non-governmental organisation (NGO). The organisation was initially simply a campaign run by university students that coincided with the celebration of the new millennium and that focused on improving prison conditions. The campaign rapidly expanded into an organisation that began to focus on the needs of vulnerable children – in particular those orphaned by the HIV epidemic. Steven’s engagement with children and poor communities in the region helped his organisation gain the trust of both regional government and aid agencies (for example: the Ministry of Social Affairs and UNICEF). Consequently, his organisation frequently partnered with these actors – and received funding from them – as it delivered support to vulnerable children. In his application to *Booster*, Steven reported that his 2012 revenue stream amounted to just over \$5 500 USD. He writes in his application that he works fulltime and survives on a “stipend (living expenses) from my social enterprise”, but in interviews he makes it clear that this is not his only source of income:

“It is from the internet business⁸³ that I generate the funds to pay the rents of the office, to pay the basic stuff, day-to-day basic operations, to pay utilities.”

Steven studied economics at university and in his first years of social engagement referred to himself as “an economist... working on poverty alleviation”. He

⁸³ In his application Steven describes his main source of income as “ICT related services (internet café)”

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describes the difficulty of finding a good 'label' for his occupation – and the eventual solution he found:

“I was doing a lot of social work, but you see I'm not a social worker, I don't want to be described as a social worker. So finally I realised I was working as a social entrepreneur... it fits me better.”

Steven is a quiet, self-effacing man with a warm smile. He is often quiet during seminars and is slow to voice his opinions – perhaps because his trip to Scandinavia was his first time outside of his own country. Initial impressions are deceptive however and one-on-one conversations with Steven reveal another side. He continues to be soft-spoken and humble – yet also appears alert, eager to learn and focused. He seems to care deeply for the children and communities with whom he interacts, and it emerges that he has managed an orphanage since 2010. Despite not having travelled abroad previously, it is interesting to note that Steven's network includes a North American professor who uses his venture as an example of social entrepreneurship – and even bring students over to visit:

“She said: 'This is a perfect example of social entrepreneur', she's always quoting it.”

Several other of the African entrepreneurs participating in the accelerator share this aspect of Steven's experience – with both Peter and Nelson in regular contact with universities in the United States.

Soon after the founding of Steven's NGO, he conducted a field survey of the needs of the communities among which he was working. As his NGO's website describes, the survey indicated that government educational programmes were not reaching the most vulnerable children and that additional support was needed:

“There are many children who still fall within the cracks and do not benefit from the educational system [...] Scholarships are provided to pupils or students mostly on the basis of merits and poor children who need education and are not in school or not the intelligent pupils in their class are left out. This creates an unfair system for promoting education for all children.”

In 2003 insights such as the above led Steven's NGO to pay school fees for the most vulnerable children and to provide them with core textbooks. Although the NGO was subsequently involved in several other projects relating to HIV education and an orphanage, the textbook initiative stuck in Steven's mind and eventually became a separate project. It was also the one he was attempting to launch as he participated in *Booster*. In this study the textbook initiative is referred to with the pseudonym *Bibliothèques Communitaires* (BC). The startup's website describes the initiative as a “satellite library system” whose aim is to:

"ensure that children have books when they need them, especially orphans and vulnerable children who are victims of education marginalization"

In order to achieve these goals the venture attempts to "enhance a book distribution network" by using existing infrastructure to create library environments, including: "community buildings, shipping cargo containers, or just a cupboard in a room".

4.4.3.2 Expectations

Steven describes his expectations of the accelerator in terms of "exposure", training and the opportunity to have his venture critically appraised by experts.

By "exposure" Steven refers to both the broadening of his own experience (it is his first time abroad), but also to the publicising of his venture. As was the case with several of the African entrepreneurs, the initial interview with Steven gives the impression that he perceives Scandinavia to be a potential source of funding – and that funding will be relatively easy to source if he can only publicise his venture:

"We [Steven and his mentor] have other priorities... for example: we want to have... I want to have the institution registered here [...] and to also have a bank account here. Because we don't have this structure in place, a lot of our efforts... many people will not be able to reach us, because the greatest challenge for many people is how to make a contribution".

Closely related to this expectation is Steven's desire to understand how non-African investors think:

"I wanted to have an understanding of the way of the international community... I wanted to have an understanding of their understanding about what we do."

"I don't really understand the attitude of investors; that is something I wish to learn."

It appears that initially at least, Steven sees the accelerator as a means of gaining access to funding that he believes exists outside of his home country, but doesn't know how to access. However, he also appears to realise (perhaps as a result of previous experience) that he is presently not in a position to communicate effectively with international investors – and he hopes the accelerator will equip him for this.

Despite his initial 'funding' orientation, Steven also describes several other expectations that are linked to the quality of his venture and his capacity to run

it effectively. He seems to be aware of the dangers of working alone for too long and of his need for training:

“I knew that so far I’ve been working alone without having the opportunity to go out for some formal training [...] when I saw this opportunity, I said it would be good for me to get out of the ditch with the pressure, get to an environment where I will meet with professionals who can cross-examine objectively what I do.”

As the above quote illustrates, Steven believes that his venture is vulnerable to the limitations placed on his own thinking by the startup environment. Limitations that he links not only to his restricted outlook (the “ditch”), but also to the stress of initiating a new venture (the “pressure”). He appears to see the need for not only a move to another environment, but also input from individuals with startup-related expertise.

4.4.3.3 Experiencing the Accelerator

Echoing the accounts of his fellow entrepreneurs, Steven found the accelerator an intense experience. He associated the intensity not only with the amount of work involved, but also the sheer number of impressions generated by the accelerator – and the fact that speakers at times had divergent opinions:

“At the same time some tutors conflict, because some coaches [...] bring one aspect of your lecture and talk about it and another coach will come and say something contrary to whatever that was said. And now we have to fight to have a balance. Then we see the pressure and stress. It has been highly stressful in this... for me in particular, because we have to deliver a plan by the end and we have the obligation to do that.”

At times Steven expressed frustration over this diversity and lamented the lack of someone with the ‘bigger picture’:

“We had several different coaches coming in, so there was *no* coach who could have a... full control of your business plan from the beginning to the end.”

Steven’s experience suggests that the stress experienced by entrepreneurs stems from a complex interplay of factors. On the one hand the design of the accelerator puts pressure on entrepreneurs to perform, by asking them to complete a common set of assignments – including a business plan. However, this component of the accelerator can compromise other areas of the accelerator, such as the role of peer consultation. For example: when asked halfway through the accelerator, whether there was too much interaction among the entrepreneurs – or too little, Steven replied:

“We don't have time for interaction.”

(Duncan): “You don't have time?”

“We have time for work, which is programmed by *NSE*. And when we get home we have to create time for ourselves to do our own homework, run our own offices, respond to emails, understand what is happening... so we barely create time for chat. It's a very intensive exercise.”

“You can imagine: on Saturday we work in the house from... six a.m. to midnight. Everybody's on his computer, you work until you pass out, then you go and... you lie down for a while, you get up and everybody's quiet in his own area.”

The above quotes underline the challenge of accelerating ventures already in existence, or startups that are offshoots of existing organisations. Entrepreneurs value the opportunity to spend dedicated time on developing their ventures, but many of them are never entirely ‘free’ from the concerns associated with running an ongoing small business or NGO.

Steven's experience of the accelerator is particularly useful in providing insights about the mentor's role in the accelerator process, not least because his insights became more nuanced as the accelerator progresses. Halfway through the accelerator Steven describes his mentor as a role model, but also as someone who puts pressure on him to make progress:

“So at the same time my mentor is on me... pressure!”

“So I like the guy, he's practical. He's a young man, very ambitious. Just by talking and looking at the way he works I learn a lot, just from his lifestyle.”

(Duncan): “What do you mean when you... you said ‘just by looking at him?’”

“Yes, his position, his vision, his outlook. Like when we go to talk, he [talks] about other very successful people and what made them to be successful. So he takes you completely out of the classroom work and brings you into the real world and uses real people for you to be able to see through the eyes of these people.”

Steven's comment suggests that mentors may perform an important bridging function between the themes taught in seminars and their subsequent application. Not least because he complains at the end of the accelerator, about the overly academic nature of some of the content. As with many of the mentors, Steven's mentor maintains regular contact with him by email throughout the accelerator, even if they have far fewer face-to-face meetings. Halfway through

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the programme they had only managed two physical meetings (with a further one planned for the day of the interview). Their online communication was however, much more frequent:

“We share emails about five times a day [...] So I will write, he will read, he will react immediately and he will give his comment, say: ‘Do it like this’. I will write back and he’ll say: ‘Why don’t you think you can do it like this?’ [...] So when I finally got it he said: ‘Great, you’ve got it.’”

Steven describes his interaction with his mentor as a process that resulted first of all in a refining of several areas of his business. For example: simplifying and reducing his marketing ‘message’ to create more impact. However, he also describes a process whereby his mentor helped identify the next step in the process:

“So we started from there and I’ve been able to come out with a clearer vision, and now he said the next point was for me to prepare a brief introduction that captures the entire concept in one pitch.”

Despite the role of the mentor in shaping the process and the venture, Steven’s experience makes it clear that the process is co-created by both the mentor and the entrepreneur. During the interview halfway through the accelerator Steven describes his mentor’s plans, but also outlines his own objectives for the coming meeting:

“Today I want us to look into how we can put in place a fund-raising strategy [...] and then how we can also have a business plan for the business aspect, because what I wrote was for the social aspect.”

The above quote illustrates not only the social entrepreneur’s attempts to shape the accelerator process, but also the role of the accelerator in developing the hybrid character of the venture. In Steven’s interviews he commented several times on the value he gained from interacting with individuals without a background in social enterprise. For example, he commented on the visit of a speaker from the United Kingdom:

“I think he was objective... he was *really* objective, but the fact was he didn’t have the mind of social enterprise. He saw it purely from a business perspective. I think I learnt a lot from him in terms of running a company.”

Steven’s mentor also had a background in business, but as the accelerator progressed Steven found this challenging and even felt uncertain about whether it was appropriate to have someone without a background as a social entrepreneur as a mentor:

“My mentor is more or less a very focused capitalist businessman, so he doesn’t really have a strong background in social enterprise [...] and because of that he doesn’t really understand the business.”

“He’ll give you *other* valuable information – on the tactical, managerial information [...] which is really good. I think he should be brought in as one of the coaches for... strategy management, how to manage your time – he’s perfect at that. But when it comes to social enterprise he has not got the background. Because of that [...] I had to do a *lot* of work by myself and it gave me lots of pressure.”

It was also clear that Steven sometimes felt unsure as to how he should handle the tensions between the for-profit and social logics. Should he take on board his mentor’s advice or the ideas of some of the guest speakers?

“Because of that [the contradictions] I had a challenge to satisfy my mentor or to be polite, as well as to keep track with the lectures.”

Despite Steven’s suggestion that he had no time to interact with other accelerator participants, he describes such interaction several times. At times he commented that the behaviour of other entrepreneurs had a *negative* effect on both himself and visiting speakers – for example: when some participants failed to focus during seminar sessions:

“Somehow I also felt like some of my colleagues were not so focused and I didn’t feel so comfortable with that, and it also affected his performance. Yeah, I saw it affecting his focus. I saw some frustrations, but he *managed* it and I felt really bad for him. And I went back and I told the colleague that what he did, I wasn’t comfortable.” (laugh)

At other times, Steven describes the *positive* impact of being coached by entrepreneurs with more experience than him, such as Isaac:

“Like my friend Isaac, he said: ‘This concept could be scalable to the rest of Africa, because they face the same problems’ [...] and with somebody who has been exposed like him telling you that, gives you more resilience to sit and figure out how to make it... grow bigger.”

In addition to interacting with visiting speakers, his mentor and his peers, at one point Steven described his frustration with the type of interactions he was experiencing at *SocNet*:

“I’ve had a lot of interaction with the people here at *SocNet*, it was good. They were really welcoming and receptive. But it is like I was interacting with the

wrong community, because the same people at a certain point – there wasn't anything coming out of those interactions.”

His comment reflects the challenge faced by accelerator managers, of both foreseeing the type of contacts that entrepreneurs will find useful – and then facilitating these contacts. Steven eventually managed to get in touch with the ‘right’ people, but only towards the end of the programme. Fortunately, it was possible to rebook his return flight, which enabled him to spend a further two weeks in Scandinavia after the accelerator, to cultivate these contacts.

4.4.3.4 After the Accelerator

Steven’s description of the accelerator’s contribution to his venture focuses initially on his increased awareness of what he needed to achieve in order to make his venture sustainable. Halfway through the programme he described how he became aware of what needed to be done and how he began to work on a solution:

“I realised that I had to establish the concept in a formal structure. And now... to build this structure is what has actually got me to a lot of work, because now I have to figure out a clear, um... value proposition for the... programme. I had to look at it as an independent entity with a sustainable model, as a business.”

The above quote illustrates part of the process by which Steven came to the decision to register *Bibliothèques Communitaires* as a separate entity to his NGO, rather than as a project within it. He emphasizes the significant shift in his thinking that has taken place:

“It’s really done great to my business, because all along I’ve been working as a charity and now I have to work as a social business.”

“I’ll be having a different business from the former business, so this will become a new business by itself. I’ll give it a new registration and a new identity.”

“During the accelerator I had to time to work on that [how to make the library programme a profitable enterprise] so it is now having its own model different from the model of the charity, that is a parent organisation.”

Steven says that he now has a business plan that is designed specifically for the new venture, but also comments on the increasing confidence he feels as a result of having participated in the accelerator. He links this confidence to having been able to spend *time* on the development of his venture:

“I have more self-esteem, I am just confident that I'm now above the workforce. So I could navigate, I could talk to anybody confidently [...] I've already figured out the strategies because I had enough time within these two months to actually explore all the angles of the business. If I was back home with the other company, I wouldn't have had enough time.”

Nevertheless, Steven suggests that his ability to obtain a new outlook is not only linked to having time to reflect, but also to having access to other people's perspectives:

(Duncan): “Where does this learning come from?”

“I think maybe... it gives enough time for internal reflections... and seeing your business. I think it's about this information you have, the way others perceive.”

Steven goes on to describe in more detail the boost to his self-esteem that came with having had his ideas discussed by others:

(Duncan): “Where does this confidence come from? What made the change?”

“It's a combination of factors, just the fact that I have a business plan that has been appreciated by different people and they've seen the value is one point [...] It means there are people who see value and institutions who see value at this initial stage. So if I could go back and do a proof of concept with already these eyes watching, it gives me enough confidence for me to move forward.”

At the beginning of the accelerator Steven described his wish to get out of his “ditch” in order to get a more objective look at his venture. At the end of the programme, Steven is disappointed that he was unable to immediately source funding, but satisfied that he has been able to obtain the panoramic view he had hoped for:

“[The] accelerator makes you think professionally. It also helps you think globally. While you are in your own corner, small corner... you look upon yourself as though you are a king, because there is nobody to criticise you. And you keep maybe refining the idea at one spot, instead of moving it to the next level. So the accelerator it has helped to... to *think*.”

“With the accelerator it has given that opportunity to move out of the other day-to-day activities and be ready to take it to the next level.”

When asked about things that were missing from the accelerator or less relevant, Steven comments first of all that he would have appreciated more teaching on the financial aspects of starting and managing an enterprise. In other words: he

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felt that the education provided was relevant, but not sufficient. With regards to the teaching of marketing however, he had mixed feelings – and he described the mismatch between European approaches and the realities of the developing world:

“I’m looking at how we can make use of online marketing tools, like the tools we were taught [...] I use Twitter, Facebook – but again, our communities are still very... I would say they are still not IT savvy. So what we are doing is to go out and do it the traditional way: talk to people one-to-one [...] and you know, print fliers on papers, there it is more or less a paper environment.”

Five months after the end of the accelerator, Steven reports having undergone a tough period. He was recovering from a bout of malaria when I talked to him and described how the development of his venture had been slowed by his having to rebuild his management team:

“I had to disqualify the leader of the team because he was trying to double-cross; to like, also use the idea for himself [...] So I had to change the team – and again, you know what it takes to change a team, cultivating the team... and it has been hard work.”

Steven rebuilt his team and recruited two women from a nearby university. He also purchased a car in order to be able to visit the communities he is engaged with, but also to provide him with more legitimacy when he visits publishers:

“They don’t need to look at you from a needy perspective, you need to look like... so one of the reasons I needed the car is because I also needed to move around and visit these companies in a more responsible manner, so that, you know, we talk as peers.”

In addition to these challenges Steven also described the difficulty of getting the first library to function in the community environment:

“There is another business directly opposite our office and this guy is using the public address system to play loud music, very loud music [...] children have been coming and collecting the books, but they cannot read in the office because of the noise [...] so the first problem we want to solve is to stop him.”

Five months after the accelerator Steven was still financing his startup by bootstrapping and by means of a loan from his sister in North America. After a year he described the main challenge facing his enterprise as “funding to properly test the concept”.

The content of the post-accelerator interview and questionnaire suggest that Steven now spends a large proportion of his time cultivating target communities’

interest in his libraries and developing relations with publishing houses. One publisher was sceptical of the idea of a book exchange, suggesting that this could reduce his own book sales. Nevertheless, Steven eventually managed to persuade another publisher to sponsor the enterprise with some school textbooks to a value of about \$35 USD. In the context of a developing country this sponsorship is a useful input in terms of library stock, but clearly does not contribute significantly to the ongoing costs of the enterprise in terms of salaries and transport.

Steven's comments after the accelerator give the impression that he is engaged in a long-term process of engaging with local communities and developing his enterprise. Initially he was reluctant to promote the library programme due to his newly formed team:

“When I returned we had a lot of issues with restructure, so I didn't want to promote the programme very much until we had an effective team in place [...] without the team in place, all the burden would be on me and I don't want to run this operation all by myself.”

Despite the pressure of finances, a year after leaving the accelerator Steven was clearly making progress and had established the first 'genuine' community library (the pilot project was located at the NGO office). This generated a lot of publicity and further good will, which Steven hoped would generate more funding:

“It is about now that our startup is coming into the limelight with the launching of the first village library. Hopefully a lot of potential sponsors and the government will pay more attention to the programme.”

A year after the end of the accelerator Steven was in touch with several of the other entrepreneurs and also his mentor, but described the nature of his contact as primarily 'social' (as opposed to contributing to his enterprise's development). There were however, a few exceptions to this and Steven notes that he still has 'business-related' contact with accelerator manager Karen. He also described how he chats to Kenny about once a week on Skype and how Kenny at times provides him with useful information⁸⁴:

“When he finds some interesting information for me he will let me know, so he will give me any leads or any information that he thinks can be relevant to my project, so he gives it to me.”

Steven is also in contact with several individuals who he met while in Scandinavia, who he hopes will contribute to the enterprise in the long term. One of them is

⁸⁴ It is unclear whether this is reciprocal: Kenny does not explicitly state that he has received useful ideas from Steven, even if they are in regular contact.

an African-American restaurant-owner who lives in Scandinavia. He has expressed an interest in the startup, but has as yet not made any direct contribution to the enterprise. A woman who Steven met at *SocNet* plans to travel to Cameroon with her fiancé in the near future, but again Steven is uncertain of their plans:

“They want to come and see where it is happening and maybe to go back and see what they can do.”

4.4.4 The Innocent-Expatriate: Henrik (A1)

4.4.4.1 Background and Personality

Henrik is a twenty-seven year old entrepreneur from a small town in central Sweden. He has two younger sisters and his father runs his own small business. His mother was forced to retire early due to ill-health. In secondary school Henrik studied computer science and foundational courses as an electrician, but realised immediately after leaving school that he had no desire to pursue a career in that direction. After secondary school Henrik did military service in the Swedish armed forces, specialising in defensive monitoring/guarding of key installations. During this time he received training in guard duty and consequently began work as a security guard as soon as he left the army. As he commented:

“It was perfect, as back then times were tough and none of my friends had work, so I got started with that right away.”

Henrik’s choice to do military service is perhaps the first indication in the interviews, of an adventurous side to his personality. Something that shines through time and time again, coupled to his willingness to take important decisions in a short space of time. Henrik describes himself as an optimist and is clearly a ‘people-person’, giving the impression throughout the accelerator of being energetic, friendly and open to new ideas. He is also fashion-conscious and dresses in an up-to-date, stylish and youthful manner. Henrik was one of the entrepreneurs with the greatest ‘presence’ on social media, and it was easy to follow the development of his non-profit and social business through his two blogs. Early on I made an attempt to follow his Twitter feed, but the volume of traffic was overwhelming. As Andrew commented in an early focus group:

“Because this [social media] is really good to... have a look at just all these things, to see what is happening. Except Twitter for Henrik... his account... it’s blinking every five minutes! (laugh)”

Henrik worked as a security guard for six months after military service and had just earned himself a permanent contract of employment when he felt it was time

to move on and “look for another adventure”. Henrik had always enjoyed languages and decided to learn Italian, as his grandfather is from Italy. His mother had her doubts however, pointing out that Italian is a relatively small language and suggesting that he move to Spain and study Spanish instead.

Henrik studied Spanish for a year before his captain (from his time in the armed forces) rang him up and offered him a job in the Nordic Battle Group – where, as Henrik wryly comments: “we were supposed to get permanent employment”. Within a week Henrik had packed his belongings and was back in uniform. However, after only a year the posting was concluded and Henrik returned to his job as a security guard. This time however, he felt that it was a step backwards: he was more aware of the down-sides to the job and didn’t enjoy it as much as before. At this point Henrik began to consider starting his own business and began to think about the kinds of products and services needed in society. However, as he puts it:

“They all failed as soon as I put them [his business ideas] on paper. It just... it just didn’t feel right, it didn’t feel like *me*. So I started all over again and I thought like this: ‘okay, who am I and what do I need in the things that I do?’”

When Henrik began to think in these terms he quickly realised that he enjoyed working with people, that he needed to feel that he was challenged and developing as a person – and furthermore:

“...a little adventure. In other words: something new. Throw myself into something and discover the world.”

The ‘adventure’ that eventually came to dominate Henrik’s next years was the plight of street children in Latin America. Henrik does not describe the process of developing a heart for street children in detail. Nevertheless, short excerpts in different interviews make it clear that, parallel to the process of developing a vision of his future as an entrepreneur, Henrik also developed a social vision. Consequently, he chuckles as he recalls the point when the two visions came together in 2009 – three years before he participated in the accelerator:

“Imagine my surprise when I started a non-profit organisation instead of a business!”

As with some of the other accelerator participants (such as Gabriella), Henrik’s engagement in social enterprise stemmed from a frustration with existing charities and from irritation over some people’s unwillingness to put in the hard work needed to move from charity to social business:

“I was so bloody tired of all these charities spending unbelievable amounts of money on crap [...] and such a small amount of the money reaching its target.”

“Perhaps they think it’s easier to travel somewhere and pay a 1 000 dollars to some organisation and pat turtles for a week...”

In 2009, determined to develop an organisation that would ensure that all of its profits reached its target communities, Henrik founded a non-profit organisation that focused on raising money to support street children. At the same time he began to save money so that he could travel to Latin America and work with a Brazilian non-profit organisation. He sold his apartment and invested all his savings in the trip, also reducing his workload⁸⁵ to 75 % in order to be able to develop his non-profit and participate in a local training programme for nascent entrepreneurs. Finally in January 2011, Henrik boarded a plane for Brazil⁸⁶ and began his first trip outside of Europe – a trip that began as a journey to work in an existing organisation, but ended with the founding of a social enterprise.

4.4.4.2 The Venture

Almost as soon as he arrived in Brazil, Henrik experienced culture shock:

“It was a terrible shock... I remember so well sitting next to Jane in the car and you know... it was burning here and there, and a cow runs over the road... and a naked man comes walking towards us – and it was just too much!”

“And then came shock number two [...] the Jardim Gramacho garbage dump is nothing like the rest of Brazil, it’s ten times worse. And... kids are running around sniffing glue and it’s just... it’s a circus in there!”

Despite his initial reaction of “today and no more”, Henrik began to work in an existing organisation that provided daytime activities for street children. His new colleagues were busy with their own activities and Henrik was forced to learn what he needed to know about his work duties by himself. With time however he became more familiar with the Jardim Gramacho community and interviewed several of the people living there. His interviews and his interaction with the young people in the community convinced him that employment and fair wages were key needs. During this period Henrik was active on the internet and networked online with a wide range of organisations and individuals, not least two Scandinavian social entrepreneurs who introduced him to the world of social

⁸⁵ Presumably as a security guard.

⁸⁶ Naturally my account uses the names of a different country and a different garbage dump to the one referred to by Henrik.

enterprise. Referring to an influential online talk by one of the entrepreneurs, he described the formation of his new idea:

“[In the talk] they describe how you can run a non-profit organisation, you can drive a profit-making business and you can actually run them together – and I actually already had the non-profit operation and I thought... yeah, maybe one day, maybe I'll have something like that, and I can develop them and play them together.”

Henrik describes this new idea as playing an important role in helping him persevere. He had a lot of ideas for improving the organisation he was working in, but felt that the top manager was not willing to listen to him. In a sense therefore, Henrik was forced to start up his own organisation in order to achieve what he felt was necessary:

“And then I realised, no it didn't matter how many ideas I had, or projects or things like that, it didn't go through. So I thought, 'okay, if they don't want to do it, I'll have to do it myself.’”

Although Henrik realised early on that employment was a key ingredient in helping garbage dump communities improve their lives, he was unsure of how to do so. As he worked with the young people in the day centre, he continued to network with not-for profit organisations and also with *Coompanion*, a Swedish third sector organisation that receives state funding to provide advice to cooperative enterprises. Through his dialogue with their advisors Henrik became convinced that *stories* were at the heart of his startup:

“It [the dump] is such an amazing place [...] and if it can hit me so hard and shock me, it must be able to shock others too... and so I thought that that is what we'll use, quite simply.”

“The huge contrast: a fashionable tee from a garbage dump.”

Henrik's business idea revolves around t-shirts that tell a story. The front of his t-shirts carries the portrait of someone who he interacted with at the garbage dump. The back carries a pithy quote that captures something of the daily life on the dump. T-shirts are marketed as fashion objects and priced at around \$ 40 USD. Henrik describes how he considered trying to use other materials associated with the garbage dump (such as old tyres), but confesses that the t-shirts idea came to him early on and stayed with him.

Following his interaction with *Coompanion*, Henrik's advisor suggested that he submit his idea to their business idea competition. During this period he also applied for a stipend that a cosmetics company offer for individuals involved in

sustainable development. Subsequently, in the space of two days Henrik received news that he had won both awards and as a result, a sum of \$ 14 000 USD:

“Those two days were fantastic – and right around then it was my birthday too!”

The combined prize money enabled Henrik to lay the foundations of his social enterprise. He was already in contact with a women’s cooperative that had been laid waste by a hurricane and that was rebuilding to both produce garments and make prints on existing clothing. Due to his active presence online he also had over two hundred pre-orders for t-shirts, as an indication of the market’s interest in his product. Consequently, he now felt able to take two further steps. First of all, he was able to offer part-time employment to a couple of bright young men who he had met at the dump – and who are required to study part-time in order for their employment to continue. Secondly, convinced that he had finally developed a workable concept, Henrik registered his own private limited company⁸⁷ in Sweden: *Garbage Garments*.

Although Henrik’s social enterprise appeared to be at a breakthrough point, reading between the lines of the interviews and his subsequent actions, it appears that Henrik was still not entirely confident of his own ability to make the enterprise succeed. He continued to interact with other social entrepreneurs online and within months of employing his first employees, one of his online contacts suggested that he might be interested in the *Booster* accelerator. Henrik felt that the accelerator fitted in well with the development of his enterprise:

“It came at just the right time... just the right time! I mean, we have the money we need to get started and um, we’ll soon be in operation; we have a registered company. All I need now is to put some more ‘flesh on the bones’, I just need to feel sure about where I stand and where it is that I’m going.”

Once again, Henrik demonstrated his willingness to take major decisions in a short period of time. A week after being told that he had been accepted to the accelerator Henrik was back in Scandinavia.

4.4.4.3 Expectations

Henrik was one of the entrepreneurs who skipped the ‘expectations’ question in the online questionnaire in the first accelerator. Nevertheless, the preceding quote and his application to the programme reflect not only his desire to work out the details of operating his new venture, but also his growing awareness of

⁸⁷ Swedish: Aktiebolag/AB

the challenges of running a social enterprise in a developing country. For example, Henrik writes:

“ I hope to learn a lot about being a social entrepreneur in a developing country, maybe find a mentor in the subject.”

“How to be a good employer when dealing with people with a different culture, level of education, etc. I already have experienced it very different and a bit difficult sometimes.”

In addition to giving voice to his need for advice about operating in a developing country, Henrik also identified needs associated with getting his enterprise off the ground, particularly in the area of marketing and developing business-to-business relationships with retailers. He summarises his expectations by stating that:

“Our current need is to get the sales and build hype around the brand.”

4.4.4.4 Experiencing the Accelerator

In comparison with most of the other entrepreneurs Henrik did not instinctively begin to talk about his experience of the accelerator in interviews, but often began to talk about his startup and the issues he was addressing. I noticed this in my first interview, where I interviewed two entrepreneurs in quick succession:

“Interesting interviews, both of them spoke for a long time. Gabriella was really inspired and talked freely. Henrik was a little more focused on his company.”

Although I often tried to steer the conversation back to the accelerator process, I was not always successful and so in discussing Henrik’s experience I more dependent on my *observations*, than is the case with other entrepreneurs (who provided more information in interviews).

My early impressions⁸⁸ of Henrik as an outgoing entrepreneur were reinforced as I observed the interaction of the accelerator participants with one another. On the very first day I recorded the following reflection about the group:

“Very, very happy, cheerful, joking group. Some people clearly taking the lead early on. For example, we have Henrik from Garbage Garments clearly not aggressive but taking the lead, often the first person to speak or taking the initiative”.

⁸⁸ Henrik was interviewed very early on in the first accelerator.

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In week seven I made a similar observation, suggesting that Henrik maintained this role throughout the accelerator:

“Fun to see today Henrik as usual taking the lead when the social media speaker asked people to present themselves. The long silence and then the first person to speak, Henrik as usual, so he continues to take the initiative when it comes to actually talking and taking the lead in the group work or in the group setting”.

The main theme that stands out in Henrik’s reflections on the accelerator is that of ‘breaking down the business idea and putting it back together’. This process began in week one and at the end of the week Henrik commented on the mix of cognitive and emotional processes involved:

“It was a bit tough to take apart the whole idea that we have, the idea that we’ve worked so hard to bake together into something sustainable. Logically I know this is healthy and good, it’s just that it takes some time to get the pieces to fit together again.”

This process continued in week two, with one of the roles of the visiting speakers clearly that of the scrutineer. Alice, Henrik and Edward described the descent into chaos at the start of the accelerator:

Alice: “In the beginning it was structured and now it’s... disintegration”.

Henrik, humorously: “A mean man⁸⁹ came... now we are trying to find a chain from the problem to the solution”.

Edward: “Tearing our hearts and ideas into pieces and looking at them again.”

At the end of the accelerator the evaluative attitude displayed by the accelerator coaches was also becoming second nature for Henrik himself. He described how he now looks for weaknesses in new ideas and often returns to the question of whether an idea can earn its keep:

“I’m very sceptical now [...] you meet a lot of people with ideas [...] and I’ve now started to evaluate their ideas immediately when I hear them. A mechanism is started in my head that immediately tries to find errors or problems in the idea.”

“But also how you can earn money through the idea. ‘Cos that was actually one of the things they emphasized at *Booster*. How you earn money.”

⁸⁹ Referring to one of the visiting speakers / coaches.

Henrik's comments often reflected his concern about being alone in the startup process and having to do things that others (with professional skills) could do better. In week two he commented for example, on the accelerator's role in helping him clarify his own identity as a social entrepreneur – but still seemed uncertain about whether he had the skills needed to manage his enterprise in the long-term. Consequently, he was initially very enthusiastic about the expanded network the accelerator was providing him with:

"I'm building my network every day, much faster than in Brazil. I've collected piles of business cards."

Despite this networking, Henrik seemed to understand that as an entrepreneur he automatically took on the role of "the spider at the centre of the web" and that he had to do a lot of things himself. Despite this, he made it clear that he longed for someone else to take on the tasks he felt he was not good at. The first insight seemed to be something that he learned at the accelerator. Initially he gave the impression of hoping to find answers to the questions he was struggling with. However, at the end of the programme he appeared to realise that he was not about to find all of the answers. For example, a year after the end of the accelerator:

(Duncan): "Do you do anything different today, than you did a year ago?"

"Yes, I probably do... really. I think it's due to the fact that somehow you are forced to find a system that works for you, how you get things done."

Henrik also commented on the accelerator's role in helping him realise that it takes *time* to start a new venture:

"I guess the biggest thing I've learned is that it takes a lot of time."

When Henrik's various comments are linked together they build the picture of a young social entrepreneur initially unsure of their own capacity to succeed. Despite behaving in an open and proactive manner throughout the accelerator, Henrik's comments reflect a hope that the accelerator would provide him with solutions to many of the issues he was struggling with. For example: personnel, smooth operations and leadership. When interviewed several months after the accelerator he admits to an underlying fear that at the time, delayed the development of his enterprise:

"Even though I had received orders, I've been a bit scared and I've kind of drawn out the process a bit."

(Duncan): "Why do you think you felt like that?"

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“I think it was because I was afraid of criticism.”

At the end of the accelerator Henrik seemed to have a different perspective. On the one hand he seemed more at peace with the idea of operating without all the answers – and he also appeared to view the entrepreneurship process more in terms of an ongoing cycle of trial and error:

“This is the first thing we’re doing and things will change, they’ll improve, we’ll start getting the systems to work and so on. All the pieces of the puzzle aren’t put together yet and perhaps they never will be. But it’s nice to get some insight about what the puzzle will become.”

“Now however, this [the first set of t-shirts] is our first collection and it functions as something of a test. As long as you have that at the back of your mind it feels a bit better, you dare a little more somehow. But I guess that is a big lesson as well: you can’t wait for it to be perfect, because it won’t become perfect. You never get going if you just hang around waiting.”

Despite coming to accept imperfection, Henrik makes it clear that the startup process is still not just an exercise in action and reflection, but also an emotional roller-coaster:

“You kind of have good and bad days, it goes up and down. On the good days you feel good about the product and on the bad ones you feel doubts about it. But it kind of gets better.”

Henrik’s description of coming to terms with the uncertainties and imperfections of social entrepreneurship suggests that one of the roles played by the accelerator is the provision of a ‘bigger picture’. He emphasizes that the accelerator came at the right time for his startup, as it enabled him to get a perspective on what he was doing – despite his preoccupation with the many day-to-day activities of his new enterprise:

“When I came to *Booster* I was just getting my enterprise going, I had set a few wheels in motion and it was extremely timely for me. I got a very good understanding of what I was up to. I also got a bigger perspective of that world⁹⁰.”

[responding to the question: “What was the accelerator’s greatest contribution?”]:

⁹⁰ Henrik clarifies “that world” to mean the business world.

“The first thing I think of is, um... it has to do with gaining an understanding of what you’re doing, I think.”

The understanding described by Henrik apparently had to do with his development of two types of perspective. First of all, with the development of a vision of his own enterprise as a ‘whole’ – in contrast to only seeing a large number of separate startup activities. And secondly, with a perspective that placed his enterprise in a larger context: that of social entrepreneurship. Henrik described the development of this latter perspective in the following way:

“I had never worked with something like this before... so it was really interesting to see... how big it is. I don’t really think that I had realised how big social entrepreneurship is. So it was important for me to be able to see what the world looks like.”

Apart from the ‘perspective and ‘people’ side of the programme, Henrik also talked about the accelerator’s emphasis on being able to communicate one’s idea. In Booster he associated this emphasis with the regular requirement that entrepreneurs ‘pitch’ their ideas effectively:

“I think it was damn good that we could pitch... pitch quite a lot – even if I remember that I thought it was hard at the time: ‘Oh, do we have to pitch again?’ [laugh] But at the same time, we’ve become damn good at talking for ourselves! [laugh] I mean, we could wake up in the middle of the night and do a pitch! And that isn’t so bloody bad, really.”

In common with many of the other entrepreneurs in the first accelerator, Henrik often commented on his appreciation of being able to meet other people in the same ‘industry’. For example: when asked to rate the value he gained by participating in the SOCAP⁹¹ conference (by allocating nine red dots to four alternatives), Henrik placed four dots in the “‘individuals⁹²” circle that related to networking and only two in “investment”. When asked about the greatest contribution of the accelerator (continuing on from his first answer, as detailed above), the second main contribution listed by Henrik was the following:

“Um, all the people I had the honour of meeting, um... all the inspiration I got from all those people; from the other participants, but even from you and Denise and the speakers we got to see and so on. That was really cool!”

⁹¹ The ‘Social Capital Markets’ conference attended by the A1 entrepreneurs.

⁹² Sub-titled: “The chance to meet new people and make useful contacts with organisations, suppliers, other entrepreneurs, etc.”

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The above quote underlines the role of other accelerator participants as a source of inspiration for Henrik. He also comments on the role of trust within the group, in making the accelerator a positive experience:

“We were really open for one another on *Booster* and that was fantastic.”

Later Henrik also emphasized the role of the other participants as sources of advice – even when the accelerator became a more stressful environment:

[Duncan] “I talked to Gabriella and Henrik over supper and they had very different reflections. Gabriella was very unaware of the fact that anybody was feeling stressed and busy. Henrik had noticed that, but at the same time, Henrik said it was really nice that everybody was willing to help each other out with ideas about their own startups”.

Henrik’s experience of the accelerator cohort was a positive one and as noted previously, the support he received did not only have to do with advice about his startup. He also received practical help in finding accommodation in the city, and ended up staying at Edward’s flat for the duration of most of the accelerator – and the entire summer afterwards. Henrik was also positive to the contribution of the visiting speakers and in particular to the visit by one of the social entrepreneurs who he had been in contact with in Brazil:

“I’m thinking Mattias. I thought he was really good. I think most of all because it was extremely nice to talk to him, as he has done a lot of the things I have done – we understood each other very well and he had experienced many of the things I had experienced in Brazil. Mostly what it’s like to work with vulnerable people. To work with poor people.”

Henrik was not as positive about the role played by his mentor. Five months after the accelerator I asked him if they were still in contact with one another and he answered: “A little, not really that much”. When questioned more closely, Henrik was unenthusiastic about his mentor’s contribution:

“He was really clever and he knows a lot of good people, but I don’t know... we didn’t get very much done together. I went on a course he gave about sustainability and I didn’t think it gave me very much, even if it was interesting. I think it would be more appropriate to learn that later on in the [startup’s] development.”

When asked if he would have preferred another mentor, Henrik described his feelings in more detail:

“Maybe another mentor. He is actually really good at what he does, but he doesn’t know the clothes business, which I needed help in [...] As I said

earlier, there is no single straight and correct route for Garbage Garments to take, so there it would have been really fun and good to have a mentor who's done what I'm doing. From the start, from zero, with the same means as I have. Maybe not someone who had a million dollars in their wallet before they even started."

Although Henrik felt that he could have done with a different mentor, he also commented on his own uncertainty about how to make good use of such a resource. He described how he often reflected to himself as he puzzled over a problem: "Why didn't I get in touch with my mentor?" He suggested that a lot of the fault lay with himself ("for some stupid reason I still don't get in touch"), but also noted that some decisions need to be taken quickly – so that time can also mitigate against the taking of such an initiative. Henrik's comments suggest that it is one thing for an accelerator to emphasize the need for entrepreneurs to build networks, but quite another thing to do so:

"It's like what we talked about, that we need to get ourselves a 'team of expertise'. I think it's easier said than done. I think about getting such a group together, but how do you do that? What do you need to think about? How do you maintain contact and so on?"

Despite Henrik's regret at not getting a more appropriate mentor, it is worth noting that his mentor did put him in touch with somebody who he hoped he might be able to have a mentee relation with in the future:

"a really good contact at Sweden's biggest clothing brand."

At the end of the accelerator, as the entrepreneurs discussed the graduation event, it was clear that Henrik was focused on getting as much out of the event as possible, particularly in terms of contacts. As I observed:

[Duncan] "Interesting to notice the way people were reasoning about inviting friends or not. Gabriella had invited four friends so she was seeing it very much as a graduation. Henrik, possibly showing a little bit more entrepreneurial instinct, had taken a conscious decision not to invite any friends, because that would prevent him from talking to new contacts or investors after the presentation. So an interesting contrast there".

Henrik's focus appeared to pay off, as later on at the event I observed him chatting to a woman who had her own Fairtrade clothing business:

[Duncan] "She'd been working with a Fair Trade clothing company and it was interesting she'd been over to talk to Henrik – or he'd contacted her – and had a lot of questions about how to grow the company, she had suggestions and ideas".

4.4.4.5 After the Accelerator

Several months after completing the accelerator I asked Henrik to comment on things that he felt were missing from the programme or could be improved. One of the things that he commented on was what he perceived as the programme's lack of practical tools for enterprise management. He noted that the accelerator had covered the strategic side of business development thoroughly (for example: the business plan), but that it had not suggested very many practical tools for the everyday running of the business:

“As soon as you get going you need an auditor and an accountant, or accounting software if you're going to do it yourself of course. Customer software, billing software: I'm thinking of the administrative bit that you often have to – for the most part – do yourself to start with.”

“...once you get going and don't have any systems it doesn't work very well to take care of these things.”

In addition to this, Henrik also felt that the accelerator had been a bit of a 'bubble', a bubble whose bursting was made all the more painful by the doldrums of the Scandinavian summer holiday period:

“Things are almost dead in Scandinavia in the summertime. It's almost impossible to run a company in the summer here.”

“Afterwards I felt as if we had been a little isolated, as if we'd been living in a little bubble. It felt as if we'd been living in this social entrepreneurship bubble. We'd been there for almost two months. So it felt strange to come out of it, definitely. *Booster* was really good as you got such a good, encouraging response – especially with Denise as a support the whole time. So yes, I guess that bubble burst.”

As with several of the *Booster* graduates, Henrik expressed disappointment at the lack of follow-up after the accelerator. Describing the cohort as being composed of “wandering people”, he emphasized the need for an online solution to overcome the geographical challenge of keeping in touch:

“I think we perhaps needed a forum or a private group on Facebook, where we could have talked to one another – a bit like a 'team of expertise'. We live a long way from one another and I think it would have been a convenient solution. I think that would have been very good for all of us, especially as we all trust each other.”

“I'm thinking of an alumni network or similar.”

To many people's surprise, after spending the summer in Scandinavia Henrik did not return to Brazil, but instead began studying entrepreneurship at university. Henrik describes how while still in Brazil, he applied to the university "as a bit of a joke to see whether I would get in". However, when he was admitted he was forced to take the offer seriously and realised that he needed to take advantage of the opportunity. He found the initial months hard work and frustrating, as he attempted to keep his startup going while studying for exams and writing assignments:

"The thought has really hit me, 'Is this right for me? Should I really be sitting at a school desk studying a load of theory, when I already have an enterprise going that I want to work on?'"

Henrik described his attitude to his studies as giving the first term a go and "probably also the first year" before deciding whether to continue with his studies. In the end he decided to stay on and when I discussed his choice with him, he again commented on his desire to find a team to work with in developing his enterprise:

"The reason I'm studying here is because I want to see what it's like to be... a cog in something much bigger. Where there are resources, where there are professional colleagues who know their stuff, where you don't have to pull the whole load by yourself, do you know what I mean? It was more about that."

When Henrik was interviewed several months after the accelerator, *Garbage Garments* had had a slow few months. The women's cooperative who manufactured the t-shirts had for example, been forced to relocate due to the parent organisation⁹³ being expelled from Brazil. Henrik was also having difficulties with the two young men he was employing as the enterprise's local representatives – and felt uncertain about whether he would be able to employ them long-term. In Sweden he had also had to abandon the partnership he had initiated with several individuals, to build the enterprise's webpage. Despite these setbacks, a year after the accelerator *Garbage Garments* had sold almost 500 t-shirts and Henrik had convinced several well-known public figures to be 'ambassadors' for the brand. Henrik had also initiated a partnership with a public relations bureau for the marketing of the t-shirts and was once again in the final of a business plan competition.

During the interview a year after his graduation from *Booster*, it becomes clear that Henrik is in the race 'long-term'. He describes the challenges of trying to

⁹³ Henrik's former 'employer'.

launch a fashion brand in the context of an economic depression, but also describes his own attitude and response:

“We’re living in an economic downturn and people don’t spend so much money on clothes, at the same time as there is enormous competition – but it doesn’t affect us that much as we don’t have very many outlays.”

“Now we’re lying – a bit like the wolf – in wait. We will find our way – our prey, and when the economic downturn has disappeared we’ll be ready to strike. By then we’ll have taken the time to prepare ourselves and then we’ll just be able to ride on the wave.”

Two years after the accelerator, it appears that Henrik’s strategy at least enables his enterprise to survive, if not necessarily to grow. It is still possible to order t-shirts on his website and on his blog he describes the one year anniversary of his enterprise: with t-shirt sales, cake and champagne. On his blog Henrik describes the public event and it appears that he has finally found one of the things he has been looking for, namely a business partner. Nonetheless, his t-shirts only tell a single story at the moment, and the webpages of *Garbage Garments* and his NGO are only updated sporadically. In a year Henrik will graduate from university and only time will tell whether *Garbage Garments* will develop beyond the small, part-time social initiative that it is at present.

4.4.5 Different horses and different courses

An important question with regards to the social entrepreneurial typology that I develop at the beginning of this section has to do with *relevance*. In a study of learning there is little point in discussing different types of social entrepreneur, if all of the types learn the same things in a similar manner. This study suggests however, that this is not the case and that social entrepreneurs’ learning differs according to their backgrounds and startup stage. In the following paragraphs I discuss the similarities and differences displayed by the four exemplars described in the previous section. I discuss these with reference to intentions and attitudes, the outcomes of learning and the process of learning. I also discuss how the *Booster* entrepreneurs related to different aspects of the accelerator; including mentors, coaches, managers, peers – and ‘space’.

4.4.5.1 Stage and Intent

In my theoretical discussion I noted the important role that ‘intent’ plays in learning. The social entrepreneurs used as exemplars are linked to different categories, but were also at different stages in venture development – with the exception of Marie and Steven. These differences were to a certain extent associated with different intentions upon arrival at the accelerator, as seen in table 4.4. The table illustrates how early stage entrepreneurs (-1 and 0) are more

‘action-oriented’ than those at a later stage. As the venture progresses, it appears that entrepreneurs increasingly wish to ‘critically appraise’ their strategies – with both Barry and Henrik displaying this intention. Henrik’s intent is however, allied to action – and Marie (at an earlier stage) is clear about what she wishes to *achieve* in terms of practical steps.

The importance of distinguishing between expatriate and indigenous social entrepreneurs – as well as social entrepreneurial type – is seen in the difference between Marie and Steven. Both individuals are at the ‘concepting’ stage, but Steven displays a confusing mix of the emphases from the ‘innocent’ and ‘veteran’ categories. He shares Barry’s concern for a critical appraisal of his enterprise, but also Henrik’s desire for training. My impression is that it is Steven’s background as ‘indigenous’ on the one hand – and as a non-profit manager on the other that explains these differences. Steven may be an experienced non-profit manager within the confines of his local environment, but as he begins to venture into a more business-oriented, international arena he feels less confident. Consequently he reports a similar intent to that of the ‘innocent’ category.

Table 4-4: Social entrepreneurs' intentions.

Factor / entrepreneur	Barry (V-E)	Marie (KI-E)	Steven (CE-I)	Henrik (I-E)
Stage	Validation (1)	Concepting (-1)	Concepting (-1)	Commitment (0)
Intent	Critical appraisal Inspiration Space to rethink Funding	Business plan Idea > action Advice	Critical appraisal Training Exposure Funding Learn about 'global SE'	Develop concept Training Mentoring Determine 'direction'

4.4.5.2 Outcomes of Learning

When it come to the outcomes of learning (*what* the four entrepreneurs learned), some interesting differences emerge (see table 4.5). With regards to identity, all of the categories of social entrepreneur mentioned appropriating a measure of a social entrepreneurial identity to some extent – with the exception of ‘knowledgeable improviser’ Marie. This was a clear trend among the social entrepreneurs with strong professional identities (one of the defining features of the ‘knowledgeable improviser’ type). Individuals who identified themselves to a lesser extent with a profession were more inclined to ‘learn’ an identity – even when they had many years of managerial experience (as in Barry’s case). Here there was a strong emotional aspect to learning, with Steven and Henrik in particular emphasising the ‘lonely’ nature of social entrepreneurship in emerging economies. In contrast, the learning of ‘confidence’ was something that veteran entrepreneur Barry did not mention – whereas this was something noted by all

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of the others. What was perhaps most surprising, was Barry’s emphasis (as a ‘veteran’) of the importance of emotions-oriented learning, which he described in terms of inspiration.

It appears that the *scope* of learning is narrower for the ‘veteran’ and ‘knowledgeable improviser’ categories, than for ‘innocents’ and ‘confident entrants’. Both Steven and Henrik describe their learning much more in terms of ‘becoming’ a social entrepreneur, than the other two. For Henrik this development apparently has to do with a move towards a more action-oriented, pragmatic attitude and pattern of thinking. For Steven it relates to the mental ‘framing’ of his enterprise in terms of a more sustainable, hybrid venture – and to his learning of associated ‘for-profit’ skills. Barry and Marie frame much of their learning in venture-related terms and appear to learn ‘what does and doesn’t work’ with regards to their enterprises, as opposed to their persons. Marie does mention developing a more ‘in-your-face’ attitude, but does not describe personal development to the degree that Steven and Henrik do. These differences have clear implications for the design and management of accelerators. It is probable that the ‘becoming’ aspect of social entrepreneurship implies a different educational content and process, than aspects that focus more on the development of narrow capabilities and the assessment of the venture concept.

Table 4-5: The content and process of social entrepreneurs' learning.

Factor / entrepreneur	Barry (V-E)	Marie (KI-E)	Steven (CE-I)	Henrik (I-E)
Learning outcomes (‘what’)	SE identity Inspiration Some fine-tuning of venturing skills	Confidence Network Learning what works / doesn’t	Confidence How to work as a hybrid venture Identity: belonging / connecting to an SE community	How to be an entrepreneur Seeing the whole picture: -Of the venture -Of the venture’s context Identity: belonging / connecting to an SE community
The learning process (‘how’)	Reflection Emotion	Action Dialogue Reflection Emotion	Reflection Dialogue Emotion Action	Action Dialogue Emotion
Attitude to learning	Open to learning, curious Managing own learning	Eager to interact Open to learning, curious Managing own learning	Open to learning Instructor-led learning	Eager to interact Open to learning, curious

4.4.5.3 Learning Processes

When the learning of the four exemplars is related to the existential learning process discussed by Jarvis (transforming experience primarily through either emotions, action or reflection), further differences emerge. As illustrated in table 4.5, most of the social entrepreneurs describe learning through all three processes. However, it is clear that one or two ‘transformational routes’ often dominated. The learning processes described by entrepreneurs during and after the accelerator often reflect their intentions at the start of the programme – underlining the significant impact of intent on learning. The learning process described by Barry for example, emphasizes the role of reflection and emotions – and he came to the accelerator hoping to critically assess his venture and to be inspired. The learning process described by Marie and Henrik centred more on ‘dialogic action’: learning how to work effectively as an entrepreneur by taking action in a social context characterised by dialogue. Once again Steven stands out as the ‘confident entrant-indigenous’. Despite describing working hard to meet all the accelerator deadlines (action), when he discusses *learning* it is more often in terms of reflection and dialogue. Dialogue appears to be a key route by which he ‘gets his head round’ the new model of enterprise implied by hybridity. In contrast to Marie and Henrik therefore, he appears to learn through a process of ‘dialogic reflection’. Nevertheless, all four exemplars learn some aspect of social entrepreneurship through the emotional ‘route’. For Barry the transformation of experience through emotions appears to be linked to inspiration and meaning. Marie also learns inspiration in this manner. The emotions-based learning of Steven and Henrik however, seems to be more oriented to combatting feelings of loneliness and isolation: it is about ‘belonging’ and identity.

4.4.5.4 The Role of Human Actors in Learning

My third research question focuses on how different actors in accelerators affect the learning of social entrepreneurs. The four entrepreneurial exemplars in this chapter described their learning in relation to these actors, in ways that suggest that they valued *different* contributions or roles. At times the importance of these roles is only apparent by their absence – with the exemplars sometimes noting that they needed a particular form of support during the accelerator, but failed to receive it. These support roles are summarised in table 4.6.

With regards to the roles of *mentors*, there are clear differences between the roles valued by veteran Barry and the other exemplars. As an experienced manager, Barry felt he only really needed someone to help him learn who to connect to, in order to take the next step in his startup. I term this role the ‘opportunitor’ as it relates to the role of providing entrepreneurs with possibilities they can exploit (such as connections). Without this intervention it is probable that they would not have been aware of the opportunity – or taken longer to become aware of it.

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Table 4-6: Roles Valued by Social Entrepreneurs in the Accelerators.

Factor / entrepreneur	Barry (V-E)	Marie (KI-E)	Steven (CE-I)	Henrik (I-E)
Stage	Validation (1)	Concepting (-1)	Concepting (-1)	Commitment (0)
Mentor role valued by entrepreneur (or desired)	Opportunitor	Pace-maker Opportunitor Discussant	Pace-maker Counsellor Role model	Opportunitor Counsellor
Coach role valued by entrepreneur (or desired)	Expert	Expert	Expert Role model	Expert Role model
Manager role valued by entrepreneur (or desired)	Opportunitor Facilitator Pace-maker	Cohort cultivator Pace-maker	Opportunitor Problem-solver	Facilitator
Peer role valued by entrepreneur (or desired)	Discussant Inspirer	Discussant Challenger	Expert Enthusiast	Discussant Enthusiast

As with Barry, ‘knowledgeable improviser’ Marie also emphasized her mentor’s role in learning as that of a provider of connections (‘opportunitor’), but added the role of sounding-board (‘discussant’). In contrast to Steven and Henrik however, she did not describe her mentor in terms of an ‘expert’ or an advisor (the ‘counsellor’ role). Nonetheless, she did value her mentor’s role as a provider of structure and ‘tempo’ during the accelerator. I refer to this role as that of the ‘pace-maker’ – and it was a role that Steven also identified as a useful mentor contribution. It appears therefore, that mentors are only expected to take on a more *advisory* role when social entrepreneurs are generally inexperienced (as with ‘innocent’ Henrik) – or when they lack experience in the field of social / hybrid entrepreneurship (the case of Steven). Steven (moving from the non-profit arena towards hybridity), felt furthermore, that he needed a mentor who was a ‘role model’. This emphasis was shared by other social entrepreneurs such as Kenny (A2), who described the importance of having a mentor with experience in the type of startup they were engaged in.

With regards to *coaches*’ roles, entrepreneurs generally valued only a few contributions. Their main emphasis was on the ‘expert’ role, that is: the provision of in-depth knowledge about a specific aspect of startups. Once again there is a clear distinction between the more experienced individuals Barry and Marie – and the less-experienced social entrepreneurs Steven and Henrik. Steven and Henrik described learning from coaches as a result of perceiving some of them as ‘role models’. Although Marie also described the impact of these practicing social entrepreneurs on her learning – in terms of a ‘wholeness creating’

contribution – this coach role seemed to have greater significance in the learning of less-experienced social entrepreneurs.

When it comes to the *manager* roles valued by the four exemplars, clear differences again emerge. Barry and Steven (‘veteran-expatriate’ and ‘confident entrant-indigenous’) both emphasized managers’ roles in helping them learn who to connect to (‘opportunities’). This role is also emphasized by the A3 participants, many of whom are from the ‘knowledgeable improviser-indigenous’ category. This is not surprising, given the fact that most of the social entrepreneurs in the ‘indigenous’ category had undeveloped networks in Scandinavia. This meant that they relied heavily on accelerator staff in order to learn who they could connect with. Furthermore, managers also played an important role as ‘problem solvers’ for many of the ‘indigenous’ participants. In this role they took care of many of the practical issues faced by the entrepreneurs, thus enabling them to focus more on their startups. Interestingly, more experienced entrepreneurs Barry and Marie both emphasized the importance of managers taking on a ‘pace-maker’ role with regards to their learning. Steven did not mention this, but discussed the same role in relation to his mentor. Henrik, the least experienced of the four, did not mention this aspect at all. This may suggest that insight into the need for structure in learning, comes with age and experience. Nonetheless, my impression is that the role of ‘facilitator’ is closely related to that of the pace-maker, as both roles focus on promoting optimal conditions for learning. Barry and Henrik both expressed their appreciation for this aspect of managers’ roles. Only Marie noted the importance of the manager role of ‘cohort cultivator’ (the promotion of a positive group dynamic). Given the ‘stormy’ group process in A2 this is not surprising. It is also probable that this managerial role is valuable in accelerators, but is for the most part invisible and taken for granted. The contribution made by this role may only become apparent when it is absent.

With regards to the roles of *peers* in accelerators, the four exemplars often discussed the cohort’s contribution in a similar manner. The role of fellow entrepreneurs as ‘discussants’ was often mentioned – and I suggest that this role forms part of the ‘facilitator’ function, when it comes to learning. Managers facilitate learning from other accelerator actors by structuring relationships (for example: by scheduling group interaction). Peers facilitate learning by making themselves available to one another both in these structured contexts and in more informal settings. Nonetheless, ‘confident entrant’ Steven appeared to value peers’ ideas in a more expert-oriented manner. The other three entrepreneurs discussed their learning in terms of a ‘give and take’ dialogue between equals, while Steven appeared to value input primarily from more experienced peers (such as Isaac). It is worth noting however, that although veteran Barry valued his fellow entrepreneurs as discussants, at the end of the accelerator he admitted that in terms of learning he was only really inspired by them – and did not generate very many new ideas from this interaction.

Once again there is a contrast between the roles valued by more experienced social entrepreneurs and those less experienced. Barry and Marie refer to peers' roles as 'inspirers' and 'challengers', while Steven and Henrik both describe peers' value in terms of the encouraging enthusiasm they show for their ventures (what I term the 'enthusiast' role). The value of peers' roles can thus be viewed as having both a dialogical and an emotional aspect. What is important to note however, is that *all* of the exemplars transformed experience into learning through emotions, even if the type of learning achieved was different. Less-experienced entrepreneurs learned to be confident through their peers' taking on of the 'enthusiast' role. More experienced entrepreneurs learned to persevere and to excel, as their peers inspired and challenged them.

4.4.5.5 The Role of Non-human Factors in Learning: 'Space'

Scholars often discuss entrepreneurs' development in incubators as relating to the provision of 'space' for development (for example: Hjorth, 2013; Lichtenstein, 1992). Although many publications discuss incubators in relation to physical space, the aforementioned scholars note the existence of space that has a more psychological or developmental character. Their ideas are echoed in Smith's (2011) discussion of different types of learning-oriented space in development programmes for entrepreneurs. My observations are similar to those of Smith and suggest that the four social entrepreneurs valued different aspects of accelerator 'space'. These aspects are illustrated in the table below and relate to opportunities to reflect, discuss, act and belong.

One of the important ideas that emerged from entrepreneurs' descriptions of accelerator 'space' is that the same general type of space is valued in a slightly different way by each exemplar. It also appears that social entrepreneurs spend dissimilar amounts of time in these different categories of space. My impression however, is that with the exception of Marie ('knowledgeable improviser-expatriate'), it is difficult to know whether differences relate to background or to venture stage. As noted earlier, the strong professional identity of the knowledgeable improviser appears to reduce their need to develop a clear identity as a social entrepreneur – which implies that the 'identity' aspect of community space will be less valued by this category of social entrepreneur.

Accelerators provide entrepreneurs with space to reflect, but it appears that the *focus* of reflection varies with both stage and background. Early-stage entrepreneurs such as Marie and Henrik use reflective space to think about what they will do in the future. Social entrepreneurs who have progressed further or who are moving sideways to hybridity, use reflective space to ask "Am I doing the right thing?" and "Am I doing things right?". In other words: they reflect on issues related to effectiveness and efficiency. In terms of proportions, it appears that social entrepreneurs at the 'validating' and 'concepting' stages of venture creation, spend comparatively more time in reflective space during accelerators,

than for example: individuals at the commitment stage. However, the case of social entrepreneurs who engage in a ‘sideways’ move from non-profit/charity to hybrid enterprise, appears to introduce an additional factor that is not accounted for by venture stage or social entrepreneurial type. Social entrepreneurs engaged in this process appear to spend a large proportion of their time in accelerators reflecting on the implications of such a shift.

When the four social entrepreneurs discuss their interaction with others in the accelerator, they very often do so with reference to learning. Consequently, ‘dialogical space’ (the opportunity to interact with others, implying discussion) appears to be an important contribution of accelerators. In table 4.7 I have noted that each of the four exemplars discusses ‘space’ in the accelerator in terms of the opportunity to talk to others – and to learn from them. However, it appears that there are *nuances* to this learning. All of the social entrepreneurs, with the exception of veteran Barry, mention the ‘being challenged’ aspect of learning in dialogical space. By this I refer to experiences of disjuncture that occur when entrepreneurs talk to others and meet an expectation that pushes or stretches them. For example: Steven’s experience of being told by Isaac that he should consider expanding his venture to all of Africa. It is possible that the absence of this type of disjuncture in Barry’s experience, may be related to the lack of other participants with similar (veteran) experience – or at a similar stage of venture development.

The four exemplars also associate dialogical space with ‘ideas’ – but once again, the type of idea-oriented learning differs. Barry (veteran at the validation stage) associates dialogue with a state of mind that facilitates *new* ideas, while Marie and Steven (at the concepting stage) describe learning that is linked to *better* ideas. Henrik (at the commitment stage) associates dialogue with *solutions-oriented* ideas, that is: problem-solving – and with *understanding*. This latter type of idea was mentioned by several of the social entrepreneurs and relates to individuals’ sensemaking. As entrepreneurs discuss their ideas with one another they often experience disjuncture that relates to the ‘splintered’ nature of the different parts of their enterprises. Material tools (such as ‘business model canvas’) combine with discussion to convey the idea that the pieces of the puzzle *should* fit together. Dialogue is one means by which entrepreneurs experiment with different ways of ‘putting the puzzle together’: it is a tool for sensemaking.

Table 4-7: Aspects of 'Space' described by the four Exemplars.

Factor / entrepreneur	Barry (V-E)	Marie (KI-E)	Steven (CE-I)	Henrik (I-E)
Stage	Validation (1)	Concepting (-1)	Concepting (-1)	Commitment (0)
Reflective space = opportunity to...	Be creative Re-think Critically assess	Think things through	Critically assess Think	Plan
Dialogical space = opportunity to...	Learn from others: Find new ideas Develop / maintain affect	Learn from others: Be challenged by others Create better ideas Develop / maintain affect	Learn from others: Be challenged by others Create better ideas	Learn from others: Be challenged by others Understand my venture Solve problems Develop / maintain affect
Action space = opportunity to...	Meet key stakeholders	Develop business plan Develop enterprise Act despite fear	Develop business plan Meet key stakeholders	Act despite fear Focus on sales Experiment
Community space = opportunity to...	Develop identity Develop / maintain affect (trust)	Mirror others' entrepreneurial behaviour (trust)	Break isolation	Develop identity Develop / maintain affect Mirror others' entrepreneurial behaviour Break isolation (trust)

The other paragraphs suggest that although all four of my entrepreneurial exemplars used dialogical space to develop ideas, the ideas they developed were subtly different in emphasis. A similar trend is also apparent with regards to the learning social entrepreneurs associated with 'action space'. To begin with, it is clear that veteran Barry appeared to spend less time than his peers in this area. Although he was clearly working on his startup during the accelerator, his work seemed to be more of a continuation of a routine he had already begun, rather than something he would otherwise not had 'space' for. In contrast, Marie and Steven (at the concepting stage), and Henrik (commitment stage) clearly experienced the accelerator as 'space to act'. Learning and not action is the main focus of this study, and so I will not comment extensively on this aspect of accelerator space. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the three social entrepreneurs mentioned above did not engage in action apart from learning, but instead learned *in* and *through* action. Furthermore, learning in the context of

action was often linked to the emphases associated with other accelerator ‘spaces’. How this was achieved is discussed below.

The clearest example of the how learning ‘spaces’ interrelate in accelerators is seen in Steven’s work with his business plan (see section 4.4.3). Steven describes an intense process of writing (taking action), sending his work to his mentor and

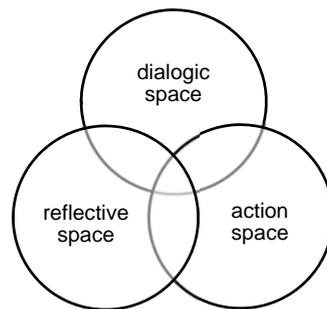


Figure 4-4: Venture-oriented Learning at the Intersection of Accelerator Spaces

receiving feedback (dialogue) – and then incorporating feedback into new action (reflection and new action). The process is clearly reminiscent of Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, with the added dimension of dialogue. Remembering Steven’s description of his busy life in Central Africa (a “ditch”), the value of the space created by the accelerator becomes clear. Steven has the opportunity to take action and to learn from this action with the help of others. In this particular instance he learns in the area where three categories of accelerator space intersect (see figure 4.3).

Henrik describes a learning process somewhat similar to that of Steven, with regards to the development of his enterprise. Although he characterises his learning more in terms of experimentation, the ‘spaces’ that provide him with the opportunity to experiment appear to be the same as in Steven’s case. Henrik is able to experiment (action) and to reflect on his action, in the light of the reactions he receives from other actors in the accelerator (dialogue) – as well as customers.

The above examples discuss entrepreneurs’ learning primarily in relation to their ventures. Nonetheless, two of the four exemplars discuss learning in terms of ‘behaving courageously’, that is: behaving in a manner they would not have done prior to the accelerator. Marie and Henrik both describe a process of ‘learning to be brave’ and associate this aspect of learning with the entrepreneurial culture of the accelerator. Based on their comments, my interpretation is that this aspect of Marie and Henrik’s learning involved a process of becoming [a social entrepreneur]. Part of this process is affective in nature (emotions-based) and has to do with feelings of both fear and confidence. Neither of the two entrepreneurs report a cognitive process of learning courage, but instead describe a process that appears to be more ‘social’ in nature – following a logic of: “members of my group do it > I belong to this group > I will do it”. This process lends weight to Jarvis’ suggestion that disjuncture may be resolved primarily through emotions –

rather than following the full experiential learning cycle proposed by Kolb and others.

In terms of accelerator ‘space’ therefore, person-oriented processes of ‘becoming’ seem to be associated with the three spaces of ‘dialogue’, ‘community’ and ‘action’ (see figure 4.5). ‘Reflective space’ may also play a role in processes of becoming, but in interviews it is difficult to know whether individuals are taking the opportunity to reflect for my sake (as an interviewer) – or if this reflection also played a part in their own learning prior to the interview.

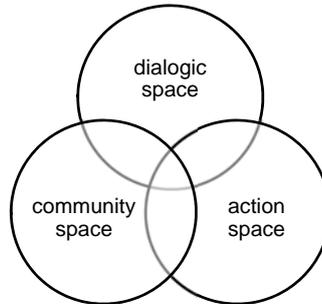


Figure 4-5: Person-oriented Learning at the Intersection of Accelerator Spaces

In accelerators the practice of recruiting entrepreneurs as ‘cohorts’ can contribute to the development of close relationships between participants. This temporary closeness (which Rebecca-A3 described as “family”) forms part of what I term “community space”, even if it is not the only part. Community space related to exemplars’ learning in slightly different ways, but was associated with the development of identity, the breaking of isolation, an entrepreneurial ‘personality’ and trust.

Although the development of identity can be linked to the social entrepreneurship ‘label’, community space is not only about the appropriation of an occupational identity. More experienced entrepreneurs (such as Barry and Marie) appeared to treat the social entrepreneurial identity ‘on offer’ by the accelerator in a pragmatic manner: they acknowledge the fact that society considers them to be social entrepreneurs, but only find this ‘interesting’. They feel secure in what they are doing regardless of the label, but are willing to use the label if it benefits their enterprises. In contrast, Steven and Henrik have experienced the loneliness of working as social entrepreneurs to a higher degree than Barry and Marie – or are more sensitive to this isolation. For them community space appears to be associated with ‘learning an identity in order to belong’. This appeared to be the case for Steven in particular, with Henrik seeming to have a greater need for an occupational identity different to that of the soldier/security guard.

Although the appropriation of a social entrepreneurial identity is one aspect of ‘becoming’, community space also appears to facilitate a process of entrepreneurial becoming that is more oriented towards behaviour. Marie and Henrik both describe coming to act differently during the accelerator and often discuss their learning in relation to the attitudes displayed by the cohort (such as

courage) – or by other ‘inhabitants’ of community space, such as visiting social entrepreneurs. Veteran entrepreneur Barry does not refer to this type of learning and nor does Steven. This seems to infer that entrepreneurs are able to ‘catch’ behaviour from other individuals at a similar stage of venture development and from those with more experience. However, entrepreneurial behaviour does not appear to be ‘upwardly contagious’ – that is: from less experienced to more experienced entrepreneurs. This contrasts with Barry’s description of the inspiration he received from less-experienced participants.

The above paragraphs reflect what is clearly a ‘social’ form of learning. By being grafted onto a social entrepreneurial community – what Lave and Wenger (1991) term “legitimate peripheral participation” – accelerator participants begin to appropriate not only the formal identity of more established community members, but also their behaviour. The contrast in Marie and Steven’s learning in community space however, suggests that this process does not occur automatically and may be de-railed by other factors. In Steven’s case such factors could include the lack of a clear role-model (his mentor was too ‘business-oriented’), his ‘perceived task’ (in contrast to Marie he was more concerned with networking than learning) and possibly conflict (he respected veteran entrepreneur Isaac, but did not feel respected by him).

Although community space in accelerators is directly associated with processes of ‘becoming’ (through social learning), it also appears to play a supportive role with regards to other aspects of psychological space. Although it is linked to the development of individual identity, community space is inherently ‘other-oriented’. It also appears to be ‘grown’ by entrepreneurs during the accelerator, in that participants learn ‘who they can trust’ and ‘learn to trust’ as time goes by. If entrepreneurs learn that they can trust all – or most – of the members of the cohort, a larger amount of community space becomes available. The experience of Barry and Henrik in the first accelerator suggests that community space ‘seeps’ into other categories of space, on the basis of trust. Entrepreneurs who trust one another initiate discussions at a deeper level (in dialogic space) – and are often more willing to work together on challenges faced by a single entrepreneur (in action space). Clearly however, this influence is reciprocal. Discussing venture challenges with other entrepreneurs and helping out with aspects of their ventures often has a positive impact on community space.

4.4.5.6 Summary

The main implication of my discussion in the preceding sections is that managers need to take the backgrounds of social entrepreneurs into account when they design and manage accelerators. Not only with regards to educational content, but also in terms of the roles emphasized by managers, coaches and mentors – and in terms of the activities that accelerator ‘space’ should promote. These issues are discussed in more depth in chapter five (Explaining Social

Entrepreneurial Learning) and are therefore not discussed further at this point. Rather, I conclude by noting that I have answered the question posed at the beginning of this section. That is: to what extent are the types of social entrepreneur that I develop *relevant* to the discussion of social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators? I believe that I have shown that, allied to the influence of venture stage, different social entrepreneurial ‘types’ engage in distinct processes of learning in accelerators – and accomplish different outcomes as a result.

4.5 Learning in Accelerators: the 7 ‘F’s

In this section the majority of the answers to research question four⁹⁴ are presented. In the literature, accelerator outcomes are often described in a manner that gives precedence to a relatively small number of ‘macro’ measurements – such as venture survival, the sale of the venture or the raising of investment (see section 1.7). Nonetheless, a foundational assumption in the design of accelerators is that ‘macro’ outcomes such as the above rely on the development of several other, less obvious ‘fitness’-oriented capabilities. Often these assumptions are not verbalised and must be deduced from the design of the programme itself, even if accelerator managers occasionally describe *some* of their assumptions in more detail⁹⁵. At other times managers appear unaware of these less obvious outcomes, or of accelerators’ side-effects. The purpose of this study (to explore the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators) assumes that there is a relationship between learning and the long-term development of the enterprise. For this reason, although I do not entirely ignore the more obvious venture outcomes (such as venture survival and the raising of investment), I devote much of this section to a description of the more ‘micro’ outcomes of the *Booster* accelerators, as these relate to social entrepreneurial learning.

In one of my early reports to *NSE* I described accelerator outcomes in terms of three ‘F’ words (friends, focus and feedback) – and unwittingly mixed process (feedback) and outcomes (friends⁹⁶). After more systematic study I suggest that accelerator outcomes as they relate to *learning* can be summarised in terms of seven ‘F’ words. Two of these are ‘social’ in nature (‘friends’ and ‘family’) and five relate more to the venture and the entrepreneur (‘focus’, ‘flexibility’, ‘facility’, ‘faith’ and ‘failure’). A further two terms (‘fame’ and ‘finance’) are outcomes of the accelerator process, but are not necessarily related to learning. A final term

⁹⁴ In which ways does the learning of social entrepreneurs in accelerators affect their development and that of their enterprises?

⁹⁵ See for example, my summary of Frank and Isabelle’s ideas in section 4.3.2 “Designing for development”.

⁹⁶ I.e.: an expanded network.

(‘fitness’) refers to the combined effect on the enterprise, of entrepreneurs developing capabilities associated with the first eight⁹⁷. Naturally these terms do not entirely capture the content of each outcome and in the *Booster* accelerators, some outcomes were more common than others. Furthermore, some terms (such as ‘focus’) refer as much to process as they do to outcome. For example: the term ‘friends’ (which refers to entrepreneurs’ expanded networks) refers to an outcome experienced by participants both during and after the accelerator. Nonetheless, some of the members of this expanded network (peers, coaches and mentors) clearly contributed to the *process* of venture development in the accelerator itself. In other words, the ‘friends’ aspect of the *Booster* accelerators can be seen as both an outcome and an instrument.

As I discuss accelerator outcomes that are less tangible in nature, I do not initially distinguish the A1 entrepreneurs from those in A2 and A3. Instead I highlight and discuss differences between cohorts and participant typologies as they arise. Furthermore, as this study is primarily about the process of entrepreneurial *learning*, I devote less attention to important accelerator outcomes such as the building of legitimacy, that are not clearly linked to learning. Outcomes that are more directly related to the learning of social entrepreneurs are discussed in sections 4.5.1 to 4.5.7.

4.5.1 FOCUS: Learning What and Why

An important aspect of enterprise development has to do with the entrepreneur’s ability to understand their venture idea, structure and refine it – and convince others of its viability. In many accelerators the most *visible* part of this three-part process is the third one: the ‘selling’ of the venture idea both in the form of a verbal ‘pitch’ (to an audience of investors at the end of the programme) – and in the form of a written business plan. The success of this final part of the accelerator process relies however, on the developmental processes associated with the other two. Investors are seldom convinced by pitches or plans that suggest that entrepreneurs have a weak understanding of their enterprises and of the factors critical to their success. In the *Booster* accelerators, entrepreneurs discussed their business plans both in terms of the process by which they were developed - and as an independent product (or outcome) of the accelerator process.

With regards to the *process* side of the business plan, entrepreneurs often described how they developed a more holistic understanding of their enterprises during the accelerator. In other words, they moved from having a limited perception of their ventures (perhaps only focusing on their product or service),

⁹⁷ ‘Failure’ (the ninth term) is omitted from “fitness”, as although it may be a desirable outcome in the long-term development of the entrepreneur, it is not an outcome many ventures wish to achieve.

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to one that included other key aspects – such as context, customers, financing and marketing. Often they linked the development of this ‘helicopter’ perspective to strategic tools such as *Business Model Canvas*. In particular, entrepreneurs at an early stage of venture development (generally all of the participants, apart from those in the ‘expert’ typology) identified ‘understanding their ventures’ and the related ‘tools for understanding’ theme as important outcomes of the accelerator. When asked to identify the main contribution of the accelerator a year after its conclusion; less-experienced, early-stage entrepreneurs typically provided answers similar to that of Gabriella (A1):

“I did not know how important the business model was, now working on it (and still a long way achieving it) it has been really useful for me to understand my own project.”

More experienced entrepreneurs whose ventures had progressed a little further also commented on the accelerator’s contribution to their understandings of their ventures. Their comments however, tended to be more nuanced – probably reflecting differences in the degree of validation they expected (and received) at the accelerator. In other words, more experienced entrepreneurs whose ventures were at a later stage of development were asking slightly different questions in the accelerator. Their questions tended to echo sentiments such as: “I’m pretty sure my venture idea works at a small scale, but can it grow?”, rather than: “How can I turn my venture idea into a viable product or service?” Consequently, although all of the entrepreneurs appreciated the holistic, strategic focus engendered by the accelerator; the background to this strategic focus was different. More inexperienced, early-stage entrepreneurs were adopting a strategic perspective as they moved from idea towards operations – while more experienced, later stage entrepreneurs were adopting a strategic perspective as they maintained operations and began to think about growth. *All* of the entrepreneurs were also involved in a process of venture validation, even if the more experienced entrepreneurs often appeared to have a few more answers to the challenging questions posed by their mentors and the accelerator coaches. When asked about the accelerator’s contribution at the end of the third accelerator, ‘veteran’ entrepreneur Thomas described his experience in the following way:

“Well, increasing our network... which is what I came here for also. Scanning the interest of people in this field, social entrepreneurship, and seeing how they react to our value proposition. That has been validated, so I like that, I see that people get it, and... support it. It’s also helping us to become investment ready, which is really the target and goal.”

(Duncan) Okay. *How* is it helping you though?

“Well, by forcing me to take the strategic role of the company, and change focus from operation to... So, it's a structure that helps me achieve what needs to be done.”

Thomas' comments reflect the experience of many of the entrepreneurs who participated in the accelerator while maintaining the operations of their nascent venture. Their experience suggests that accelerators develop a strategic perspective through a curious mix of freedom and compulsion. On the one hand the accelerator 'liberates' entrepreneurs by providing them with 'space' in which to engage in enterprise activities they had previously been unable to prioritise. At the same time however, the accelerator schedule and structure forces entrepreneurs to address aspects of their ventures that they had not previously attended to – and given the choice, might have continued to neglect. Heidi's (A2) reflections six months after the accelerator illustrate how for some participants, the writing of a business plan is of value not so much for its value as a planning or marketing tool, but rather as a tool for structuring entrepreneurs' thinking about their ventures:

“I think it was all really good, we did my business plan, which I'm not following that well but it was helpful to think about all the aspects.”

Other entrepreneurs' comments reinforce this impression, suggesting that the accelerator structure (including the development of a business plan) not only provides entrepreneurs with an umbrella perspective of their enterprise, but also ensures that they pay attention to the 'nitty-gritty' of each component of their venture. Andrew's partner Chris⁹⁸ (A1) described the contribution of the programme in the following way:

“The platform was a learning place that made everyone stronger, the ideas better, even if some ideas do not make it, the experience will shape people who will make new ones. Building trust and giving a clear vision of what is needed for an idea to become a business is priceless.”

As noted earlier, this 'helicopter' perspective helps entrepreneurs adopt a strategic (rather than purely operational) perspective on their ventures – so that they understand their enterprises in a 'holistic' manner. Chris' comment suggests that this perspective is also useful because it helps entrepreneurs see what is *missing* from their ventures. However, his comment also illustrates the combination of the macro (“a clear vision”) and the micro (“the ideas better”) perspectives that the *Booster* programme engendered.

⁹⁸ Chris did not participate in the accelerator, but was in constant communication with his business partner Andrew throughout.

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Despite the advantages many entrepreneurs associated with their work on a business plan during the accelerator, it is worth commenting on some of the downsides described by a few individuals. When the writing of a business plan is viewed as part of the 'structuring' function of accelerators, it appears that the unreflected application of this structuring tool can have negative consequences. For example, commenting on the development of her fellow A2 entrepreneurs, Marie suggested that Steven had spent too much time on his business plan and too little time networking – an action she attributed to his mentor's wish for him to develop a business plan during the accelerator. Despite describing Steven as one of the more enthusiastic and 'alert' participants, she also commented that she had noticed him working on his business plan during lectures. Her comments appear to be accurate, as Steven himself commented on the stress he experienced in relation to this activity:

"Then we see the pressure and stress. It has been highly stressful in this... for me in particular, because we have to deliver a plan by the end and we have the obligation to do that."

When asked whether his single-minded focus on the business plan was his own choice or forced upon him by *Booster*, Steven said that it was a combination of the two:

"I think it's both ways. If you complete a process then you feel satisfied, otherwise you feel like you didn't, you know, take full advantage of the opportunity. And then the other aspect is also to see a plan that can translate into a funding document and also to have a document that you can feel confident to present to investors."

It is difficult to know whether Steven's use of most of his time at the accelerator to write a business plan was effective. It clearly prevented him from networking during the programme (he asked *NSE* to change his airline ticket so that he could stay on in the city for a further week after the accelerator, in order to develop his network). Nonetheless, a year after leaving *Booster* he reported sending a copy of his plan to someone who expressed an interest in supporting his work – so his efforts may have paid off. What his experience does make clear however, is that different accelerator activities compete with one another for entrepreneurs' attention – and that it is often difficult to strike an effective balance between them.

The above paragraphs discuss how the process associated with writing a business plan led to valuable outcomes for accelerator participants – and at times, to the neglect of other aspects of the accelerator. For many entrepreneurs however, the business plan was valued not primarily because of the process of reflection associated with it, but more as an accelerator *product*. Many participants perceived a sound business plan to be an important factor in attracting investment.

Consequently, for them the ‘space’ created by the accelerator was important in enabling them to put together a convincing written description of their enterprises and their plans for the future. At this point however, the particular challenges of working in the ‘hybrid’ arena of social entrepreneurship made themselves felt...

The first accelerator adopted an approach to social entrepreneurship that emphasized the need for enterprises to make a ‘business case’ for their activities. Consequently, Catrin (who came from a development agency/NGO background) lamented the lack of support in writing grant proposals. In the second accelerator a similar emphasis was maintained and most of the entrepreneurs appeared to appreciate the effort devoted to securing the income side of the enterprise (more of this in the next section). In particular participants expressed appreciation for the teaching of one of the coaches on the ‘social value proposition’ of the enterprise⁹⁹. Isaac (A2) described the impact of this session in the following way:

“Well, my skills in my social value proposition and... understanding the entire social value proposition framework was a thing that I did not understand fully. To me, I just believed that... you just had to come up with a marketing slogan... for *me* it was a marketing slogan. But he... outlined and broke it down to the simplest detail, that the social value proposition is not about marketing, but it’s supposed to be a way of doing business for the enterprise.”

As an experienced manager, Isaac appeared able to adapt the session on social value creation to his own applications for funding – and later credited the accelerator with giving him the conceptual tools to write a successful grant application. For other entrepreneurs however, the mixing of the for-profit world with that of the not-for-profit was confusing. As Heidi (A2) commented:

“It sounds like there are really a lot of problems. It doesn’t seem like this super-good investment opportunity, but it seems like a good *impact* opportunity, but that’s more of an NGO kind of thing rather than a... business plan investment.”

Heidi’s experience suggests that there are challenges associated with structuring an accelerator programme for social entrepreneurs around a business plan model intended for for-profit ventures. In A2 Heidi was the only entrepreneur who commented on this discrepancy, but in A3 several participants expressed frustration over the fact that they did not receive adequate training in

⁹⁹ My impression is that the development of a ‘social value proposition’ is more about the ‘*why*’ of the enterprise, whereas tools such as ‘business model canvas’ and the business plan, contribute more to an understanding of the ‘*what*’.

distinguishing between a business plan oriented towards traditional investors and plans oriented towards grants in the not-for-profit sector. I have been unable to account for why this dissatisfaction was so much more apparent in A3, given the similarities of the programme and the cohorts to one another. What entrepreneurs' comments do suggest however, is that the task of writing a business plan is often useful in terms of *process*: individuals are forced to reflect on the adequacy of their ventures and to address weaknesses. What is also clear nevertheless, is that many entrepreneurs value the business plan as a *product*: it is written primarily for others' benefit and not for themselves. Problems appear to arise when entrepreneurs orient themselves on the basis of their business plan or grant proposal, rather than on the basis of other tools (such as business model canvas). Such tools appear to focus more on increasing the entrepreneur's understanding of their own enterprise, rather than on 'selling' the venture to investors or grant administrators.

4.5.2 FLEXIBILITY: Learning How – an Alternative Mindset

An unexpected outcome that emerged from the interviews with the A2 entrepreneurs was the role of the *Booster* accelerator in helping participants move from a purely non-profit/charity position, to one that was more 'hybrid' in character. The cohort in the second accelerator consisted mainly of entrepreneurs with a background in African NGOs and development agencies – the majority of which depend on time-limited grants for funding. Consequently, most of the entrepreneurs in A2 came to the accelerator with a mentality that was both 'project' and 'grant' oriented. In other words, they were used to obtaining money by writing convincing project proposals for development projects that lasted for a period of one to four years. The entrepreneurs who identified this outcome belonged almost entirely to the 'indigenous' typology and both less-experienced and 'veteran' participants commented on it. For the most part, the enterprise-oriented 'charity>hybrid' shift was associated with three 'sub-processes' of learning and action. One of these had to do with a change in mindset and two with the way in which entrepreneurs structured their enterprises. However, these sub-processes should not necessarily be seen as separate outcomes of learning, but are often related aspects of an overall shift in behaviour, informed by insight.

With regards to the shift in *mindset*, entrepreneurs described a multi-faceted move from a charitable, 'project-oriented' mindset towards a 'business model' approach. Kenny (A2) described this shift in the following way:

"Before I came, I had a notion that this is a non-profit and that I should keep seeking grants for people to help us to help others. In the course of... in the course of my training here, I discovered that no matter whatever mission you are, for-profit/non-profit, you should be able to design a way that you can

sustain yourself. That even grant-givers, donors whatever... don't wish for you to be looking up to them or looking up to others. They want to see your model, your business model... to be sustainable. And I got that from here and I know how to be sustainable right now."

These quotations illustrate the several components of the shift in mindset described by some entrepreneurs. Isaac and Kenny both describe a mindset *prior* to the accelerator that was oriented towards charity-based organising – and hence a dependence on a short-term cycle of applying for funding, running a project – and applying for more funding. In contrast, many of the sessions in the accelerator emphasized the importance of on the one hand, a workable long-term business model – and on the other, a clear [social] value proposition. Isaac (A2) described the contrast in thinking in the following way:

"I'm coming from a grants side of funding development projects. So, I knew a lot [more about] that than impact investment. The value proposition process is what I didn't know. So I just knew about writing 'my mission is this, my objectives are that'. The real impact proposition, the value proposition was missing from my vocabulary. And I learnt a lot about that."

Isaac's comment suggests that even experienced managers in the field of development (who had no trouble putting together a mission statement and identifying project objectives), were challenged when the accelerator asked them to create a long-term, sustainable business model – and to identify their value proposition.

After the accelerator, several entrepreneurs described adopting a new way of organising their enterprises. Some (such as Lewis-A2) described a radical switch from charity to for-profit:

"One of the impacts it's had on my business plan, is that initially I did not have a specific business proposition. What I had was like a goal and objectives, that kind of a non-profit orientation. And now we are taking the business for-profit orientation which demands that we don't only talk of goals and objectives. No, investors want to hear about goals, they want to hear about the business proposition and how it will add value – and generate revenue. So that aspect really... I think if you look at most of our businesses when we came here, it was more like reading a non-profit kind of proposal. So it has changed from that. I can say for myself, it has transitioned from that to a for-profit business plan."

A more common change among the A2 entrepreneurs was one from a purely charity-oriented enterprise to one characterised by hybridity. Steven described what this involved for his enterprise:

"Firstly it was just a programme within the organisation, it wasn't an autonomous structure by itself, I just had it as a sub-programme within the organisation. But with the accelerate I had to carve it out, as an initiative, as a social enterprise, because the organisation was a charity. So before, I was operating it as a programme within the charity. So I think... I did not have a clear, good map as to how to make the programme to be a new, profitable enterprise by itself. But during the accelerator I had time to work on that so it is now having its own model, different from the model of the charity."

In contrast to Lewis then, Steven continues to conduct some of his 'social' work within his enterprise's parent organisation, which is a charity. However, the work that he was developing during the accelerator (community libraries) is now located within a separate organisation that he hopes can generate enough revenue to become self-sustaining. Steven's shift in mindset and business model was similar to that apparent among many of the 'indigenous' A2 entrepreneurs. Lewis' shift (from non-profit to for-profit) was more unusual. Nevertheless, both types of restructuring illustrate an important contribution of social venture accelerators, namely that of helping charity-funded organisations move towards a hybrid (or even a for-profit) model of enterprise.

4.5.3 FAITH: Learning How – Confidence, Passion and Courage

Something that emerged in my interviews with entrepreneurs, that is not apparent in their responses to the more formal questions asked in application forms, about their *expectations* – is the accelerator's function as a source of affirmation. Few if any participants state in their applications that they want to participate in the programme in order to 'test the water'. However, their interviews make it clear that many entrepreneurs feel very uncertain about their ventures at the start of the accelerator. As they participate they are trying to find answers to questions such as: "Is my venture idea a good one?", "Is this going to work?", and "Does anybody apart from me think this is a good idea?". The answers to these questions may result in part from cognitive processes (for example: reflecting on venture feasibility), but it appears that they also have emotional and practical dimensions.

In terms of emotions, I suggest that 'confidence' is a useful 'umbrella' term for summing up emotional outcomes that in my *NVivo* analysis I coded as 'feeling encouraged', 'feeling proud', etc. Two excerpts from interviews and one from a focus group illustrate how entrepreneurs expressed these emotional outcomes – and what they attributed them to:

Catrin (A1) [to Barry]: "I really appreciate how you pushed me up a little bit and made me feel better about myself and what I'm doing, quite selfishly. And I, whenever I read about your project, like back in the UK still, I was like 'Wow, wow! I mean this is exactly what I think Africa needs!' Like we talk about

alternative energies, but for them there isn't an alternative. The alternative right now is walking for days or choking on the fumes and when they're trying to cook – so I love the project that you have conceived and come up with and are driving.”

Heidi (A2): “I think overall, it [the accelerator] provided me with confidence to continue with Good Glass, knowing that I was doing something people thought was cool – and that mostly I was managing in line with other people's suggestions.”

(Duncan to Steven): “Okay, so if you just summarise the contribution of the accelerator, how would you summarise it?”

Steven (A2): “It gave me more confidence... so I am more convinced about the innovation, I speak with a lot of confidence and authority now; that is what I think it has helped.”

The above excerpts suggest both emotional content and process. First of all, all of the entrepreneurs clearly began the accelerator with doubts about their ventures and their own abilities to succeed. Heidi for example, is uncertain firstly about whether what she is doing is worthwhile – and secondly, about whether she is managing her enterprise effectively. After the programme all three entrepreneurs feel more confident about their ventures, and also (in the case of Catrin and Heidi) about their own capabilities. In terms of process, the interviews with Catrin and Heidi suggest that there is a significant ‘others-oriented’ basis for entrepreneurs’ belief in themselves and their ventures. Heidi talks of what “people” think about her venture and her way of managing – and Catrin describes how her confidence has grown as a result of ‘veteran’ entrepreneur Barry’s feedback. It appears that as she describes the impact of his feedback on her own self-esteem, she is also ‘boosting’ Barry’s confidence – by telling him (to use Heidi’s term) that she thinks his venture is “cool”.

Almost all of the *Booster* entrepreneurs described some type of increase in confidence as a result of the accelerator. In interviews with ‘veteran’ entrepreneurs however, terms that reflect emotional outcomes such as ‘feeling encouraged’ and ‘feeling more confident’ are almost non-existent. This may reflect the fact that many of their ventures had moved beyond the ‘proof of concept’ phase – or that they possessed a higher level of self-esteem due to more experience in management. Nonetheless, two entrepreneurs from the ‘veteran’ category (Barry-A2 and Thomas-A3) suggest that ‘inspiration’ was an important part of the accelerator for them. Barry for example, cites inspiration as one of his reasons for participating in the programme:

“I felt that I’d been sitting for so long in my own bedroom, that it was... it felt healthy to be subjected to... critical assessment. And even hearing what other

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entrepreneurs are doing and becoming inspired and getting a little energy and so forth.”

Even after completing the programme, Barry described ‘inspiration’ as one reason for wanting to stay in touch with *NSE* and the other entrepreneurs. In A3, Thomas began to discuss the same theme when I asked him about the roles played by the accelerator staff. He responded:

“They complement each other well, so one plays group psychology on us, the other one gives us structure, the other one gives... inspiration.”

In contrast to Barry however, Thomas felt that the accelerator needed to have *more* inspirational content. He continued by saying:

“The programme would need to be a little bit more visionary... that’s the element missing. So, that, er... some inspiration to show, ‘Hey we have an amazing opportunity to use social enterprise for this – and these are the benefits and this is the potential’ ”.

Other entrepreneurs also mention the importance of becoming inspired during the accelerator. Nonetheless, the ‘veteran’ entrepreneurs are alone in displaying on the one hand confidence in their own ventures and abilities (suggesting a certain emotional resilience) – and at the same time, an awareness of their need for the inspiration and energy they associate with being exposed to other social entrepreneurs. These contrasts may reflect different emotional ‘needs’ at different stages in venture development, with inspiration perhaps increasingly necessary if social entrepreneurs are to overcome the long-term challenge of establishing their enterprises. Marie’s (A2) graphic description of the role of inspiration (or hope) in her own venturing process suggests that this may indeed be the case:

“Sometimes it’s been really inspiring with some of the speakers, who have given me a little hope and strength to cope. Because it’s pretty heavy, getting something going. Now and then you feel ‘Oh hell! How am I going to cope with this?’ Then you rest for a few days and think about the positive bits.”

In the *Booster* accelerators, several entrepreneurs appeared to link the development of ‘courage’ to the encouragement and inspiration they received from their peers. ‘Courage’ is a difficult factor to discuss, as it is clearly linked to emotions, yet also appears to require practical action if we are to be certain that it has actually been developed. Henrik (A1) describes a learning process that has practical implications, but that also appears to involve both cognitive (i.e. reflection) and emotional dimensions:

“What I’ve learned about myself – and I think this is really interesting – is that I’ve been a little scared of sending out t-shirts. Even though I’ve received orders, I’ve been a little scared and I’ve sort of delayed.”

(Duncan): “Why do you think you felt that way?”

“I think it’s because I was afraid of criticism. Now this is our first collection and so it kind of functions as a test. If you think of it that way it feels a bit better actually – and then you kind of dare to do it. And I guess that’s a major lesson, you can’t wait for it to be perfect, because it doesn’t really become perfect. You never get going if you keep on waiting.”

In the above process, Henrik (A1) describes *feeling* an emotion (fear/doubt), *thinking* about the emotion and then *transforming* the emotion through the practical step of sending out his t-shirts, despite his fear. During A2 Heidi described a similar process: nervously presenting her products to a retailer (expecting a noncommittal or negative response) – and being instead surprised by their positive reaction (“So that was a good feeling.”). As mentioned in section 4.42, Marie (A2) suggests that courage is also developed through exposure to other entrepreneurs and their apparent confidence (regardless of whether this is genuine or feigned). She commented on the fact that she had become more ‘cocksure’ during the accelerator and when asked why this had happened she attributed it to the other entrepreneurs displaying that attitude.

4.5.4 FACILITY: Learning How – Knowledge and Skill

Although a major contribution of the accelerator to entrepreneurs’ development had to do with a changed perspective on their ventures, most participants also described the learning (or enhancing) of particular abilities – or ‘facilities’¹⁰⁰. At this point it is worth reflecting on the fact that logically, entrepreneurs might be expected to learn the skills taught during the accelerator. It is therefore important to realise that the development of specific venturing skills in different accelerator programmes will often be related to the content of the programme. As noted in section 4.1 however, the degree to which skills are learned may be affected by the characteristics of the accelerator process and the agents that populate it. In the *Booster* accelerators, entrepreneurs identified three main areas in which their skills were enhanced: communication, financial management and impact evaluation.

In many accelerators and incubators a great deal of attention is paid to ‘selling’ the venture in a variety of forms, in view of the overall emphasis on preparing ventures for growth and investment (Hjorth, 2013). The *Booster* accelerators were

¹⁰⁰ The term ‘facility’ is used in the sense of ability; as reflected in Parragon’s (2002) definition of the term as meaning “aptitude, dexterity”.

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no exception and entrepreneurs from all of the typologies described becoming more skilled in both the verbal and written marketing of their enterprises. Specifically this involved verbal ‘pitching’ skills and related computer skills, such as the preparation of MS PowerPoint slides. It also included the ability to design websites and use social media tools – and perhaps most importantly, the ability to ‘package’ their ventures in different ways depending on the audience. ‘Veteran’ entrepreneur Isaac (A2) described his learning in this area, in the following way:

“And then my communication: how you effectively apply the internet, social media. How you design your information, education and communication strategy. That experience and exposure made me have the particular skills and the knowledge of how I could best repackage my proposal. My coming to the programme helped me repackage my proposal, and by the time I repackaged it and came back over here [East Africa], I was able to sell my idea in a way that was very, very, very forward looking – and in a way that was marketable in the eyes of other partners.”

In the above quote Isaac describes the combination of knowledge and practical skill that he needed to develop in order to communicate effectively. On the one hand, an enhanced awareness of differences in expectation between different types of investor – and on the other, the ability to adapt presentations in order to communicate effectively with these audiences.

An increase in communication-oriented skills was attested to by all ‘types’ of accelerator participant. In contrast, enhanced knowledge and skill in the area of financial management was something that the less experienced entrepreneurs tended to describe. In A2 and A3 considerably more time was devoted to helping entrepreneurs understand different forms of revenue generation and prepare finance-related documents. Unsurprisingly therefore, many participants described an increase in financial ability after the programme. Nonetheless, ‘veteran’ entrepreneurs tended not to identify skills in financial management as an outcome, describing instead their enhanced knowledge of alternative revenue streams. For example, when Isaac was asked about the accelerator’s main contribution one year after graduation, his answer included:

“Knowledge about fundraising and other modalities of financing my start up.”

Despite the fact that entrepreneurs (with the exception of the ‘veteran’ group) described learning financial skills during the accelerator, some participants still felt they needed more. Steven (A2) for example, when asked if anything was *missing* from the accelerator wrote:

“Little time devoted to financial and cash flow statements.”

Steven's comments reflected the feelings of several less-experienced entrepreneurs and in particular those with a weak business background (the majority of the 'African' entrepreneurs in A2) – or lower levels of education. The second accelerator raised managers' awareness of the 'double-edged' combination of opportunity and obstacle that is associated with the recruitment of social entrepreneurs from developing countries. On the one hand, many of these entrepreneurs appeared to be engaged in ambitious social ventures, with unique access to vulnerable populations. At the same time, the very characteristics that allowed them access to these populations (and fuelled their passion for helping them), also appeared to be linked to significant 'holes' in their entrepreneurial capabilities. Nelson was perhaps the most obvious example of this, with his background as a child soldier in West Africa resulting in a 'patchy' education and undeveloped social skills. Nonetheless, he was engaged in an ambitious social venture designed to reduce the stigmatisation of ex-child soldiers and facilitate their integration into society. Although Nelson is an extreme example, many other entrepreneurs in A2 and A3 shared his experience of either growing up in (or presently residing in) impoverished communities – such as urban slums or refugee camps. After the accelerator most of these entrepreneurs described learning important financial skills, but at graduation some had clearly learned far more than others.

During interviews, many of the entrepreneurs with a background in NGOs and similar organisations described skills associated with social impact. As noted earlier, one of these (the identification of a clear social value proposition) is linked primarily to outcomes that relate to perspective and communication. Nevertheless, another outcome relates to the *measurement* of social impact, with many entrepreneurs describing an increase in their knowledge and skills in this area. As the following quote from Kenny (A2) illustrates, the development of this capability once again seemed to involve both insight and the practical application of knowledge to the social venturing process:

(Duncan): "And then the second [thing you learned] was..."

"Measure impact. I send SMS to people teaching English vocabulary. How do I know if what they are listening to, they are using – if they benefiting? I just keep sending! For example: before I was sending, sending all the time... all I know is that it says, 'message sent'. Did the person get it: yes or no? Is he benefiting? Is he improved? Is it changing his life? It was a big issue for me... During the course of my accelerator, two months, eight weeks; I've been able to see ways on how I could imagine it."

(Duncan): "And actually measuring the impact then?"

“Yeah. I could now know... for example: I send the word to 1 000 persons. At the end of this month, the month of March, 800 replies. I ask a question on the 28th of this month. 800 people reply out of the 1 000.”

Having worked in NGOs myself I was initially surprised at entrepreneurs' enthusiasm over their new-found tools for social impact – in my experience most projects are evaluated. On reflection however, I realised that a possible explanation is linked to the conducting of a lot of development work in project form. Evaluation is not always conducted by those responsible for running the project – and even when managers are involved, the evaluation may take place at the end of the project (when managers are preoccupied with obtaining new funding), rather than on an ongoing basis. For many entrepreneurs therefore, their new capabilities in measuring social impact were linked to a new understanding of their enterprises – as ventures that needed to have a sustainable, long-term model of value creation.

4.5.5 FRIENDS: Learning Who – Expanded Network

In keeping with the observations of scholars such as Feld (2012) and Cohen (2013b) the *Booster* entrepreneurs identify the development of their networks as a key accelerator contribution. Although this outcome is not always framed in terms of entrepreneurial learning, Johannisson (1993) argues that the ‘know *who*’ aspect of entrepreneurial competency is important. He suggests that it involves developing not only knowledge about individuals and organisations that could benefit the enterprise, but also knowledge about how to make use of these networks. I emphasized the distinction between these two aspects of learning in my discussions with accelerator managers – and it is interesting that Hjorth (2013, p. 39) makes a similar observation in his study of the TCP¹⁰¹ incubator. Consequently, although I do not conduct a network analysis in this study, network development was clearly an important aspect of entrepreneurs' learning in the accelerators and is therefore discussed below.

When asked about the most important contributions of the programme, most of the responses provided by the social entrepreneurs included phrases such as the following:

“A larger network of people” (Barry, A1)

“Contacts. I met people who helped me a lot and who are still doing it”
(Gabriella, A1)

¹⁰¹ TCP / ‘The Creative Plot’ is an incubator in southern Sweden that focuses on startups in the cultural / creative sector.

“I was able to establish a partnership with [name of NGO and individual]. I met [her] at one of the *NSE Booster* events at *SocNet*” (Nelson, A2)

“Broadened my contact base with suppliers of goods and services relevant to my startup development stage” (Isaac, A2)

When examined in more detail, entrepreneurs’ responses suggest that several different types of contact can be found under the ‘umbrella’ term “network”. Despite the relatively low number of impact investors in Scandinavia, several entrepreneurs described making contact with individuals or organisations that were useful to them in terms of finance. This type of expanded network ranged from contact with charities that were willing to share existing sources of funding in Scandinavia, to contact with government-sponsored funds associated with development agencies such as *Sida*. On the whole however, the African entrepreneurs in A2 and the ‘expert’ entrepreneurs in all three accelerators were particularly disappointed at the relatively low level of impact investment available. Isaac’s response to the “what was missing?” question in the one year follow up is typical:

“There should have been a well-planned program to enable us as entrepreneurs to showcase our startups to impact and other investors. The few pitch events organized – and that those we attended lacked high-profile investors. International organizations and other entities with the resources for partnerships should have been invited”.

In addition to the financial role played by entrepreneurs’ learning about the ‘who’ side of enterprise, many individuals also commented that the accelerator had helped them gain access to people who had insight into particular aspects of their ‘industry’ – or of the geographical area they were targeting. Gabriella (A1) for example, described how she had come into contact with a firm that manufactured plastic containers. This contact enabled her to gain a more accurate idea of the cost of manufacturing her product and also provided input with regards to the technical parameters she needed to incorporate in her design:

“Though the main company who was up to be part of my startup got problems to develop the team project, I am still in contact with them and they keep on giving their advice”.

The above paragraphs suggest that present-day thinking about the contribution of accelerators with regards to networks, is generally accurate. In all of the accelerators there was a very real sense of the entrepreneurs ‘coming in from the cold’: of their moving from a relatively isolated position in which (as social entrepreneurs) they had little knowledge of who might be relevant to their enterprises, to a position of greater knowledge and ‘connectedness’. Furthermore, two of the ‘veteran’ entrepreneurs (Isaac-A1 and Thomas-A3)

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suggested that the accelerator also added value by providing them with access to ‘richer’ content in terms of a social entrepreneurial network, than that available in their home countries. One aspect of their development as social entrepreneurs seemed to be associated with their being able to relate to a larger social entrepreneurial community. In this community they were able to find individuals with the necessary experience to act as role models and advise them. They suggested that due to the relative newness of social entrepreneurship in their home countries (and the resultant small size of the SE community), they had previously been unable to identify such individuals. Isaac (A1) described his experience in the following way:

“Scandinavia I think by this time has an advanced social entrepreneurship fraternity, and so the problems that we’re going through here, social entrepreneurs in Scandinavia passed through them a long time ago. So the problems I was having in starting up and moving forward and scaling up my programme were something that they had already done [...] so they were able to advise me accordingly, and that was extremely helpful.”

In keeping with Granovetter (1973) therefore, one function of accelerators is to provide entrepreneurs with the network of weak ties they require to develop opportunities more effectively. This role appears to be especially important in programmes (such as *Booster* and *TCP*) that target less traditional startups – and where accelerators are required to take on a “door-opening” role (Hjorth, 2013, p. 41). It appears that in many developing countries the ‘knowledge about who to talk to’ is simply not available for social entrepreneurs to learn – at least not to the extent it is found in countries with a stronger tradition of social entrepreneurship. This is illustrated by Henrik’s (A1) comment in week two of the first accelerator:

“I’m building my network every day, much faster than in Brazil. I’ve collected piles of business cards.”

The African social entrepreneurs in A2 were particularly keen to learn about the ‘who’ of Scandinavian investors and social entrepreneurs. Accelerator managers experienced their interest as unbalanced and ‘exaggerated’ at times – but the work of Smith-Doerr and Powell (2005) may provide an explanation for their behaviour. These scholars suggest that when individuals are excluded from mainstream economic networks, they find ways to overcome this exclusion. Although they use female and immigrant entrepreneurs as examples, it is probably that many of the African entrepreneurs find themselves in a similar position. They are ‘excluded’ in a double meaning: firstly from traditional economic life (they are *social* entrepreneurs) and secondly, from the Western phenomenon of social entrepreneurship and impact investment. In their eyes, accelerators such as *Booster* may provide them with access to these networks and to associated financial resources. At the same time, it is also possible that the

intensive nature of accelerators provides entrepreneurs with short-term access to the ‘dense’ networks that Dufays and Huybrecht (2013) associate with the diffusion of ideas.

An interesting aspect of the *Booster* accelerators that may be a result of the global recruitment process is the ‘temporary’ nature of the cohort network. Scholars such as Feld (2012) and Hallen et al. (2013) emphasize the role played by accelerators in embedding entrepreneurs into a long-term ecosystem of helpful fellow entrepreneurs. Hallen et al. in particular suggest that accelerator ‘alumni’ become an increasingly useful resource for new cohorts, as they represent an existing and ‘committed’ network. This type of development is notably absent in the *Booster* accelerators, despite my suggestion to *NSE* managers that they spend more time maintaining contact with graduates. In the absence of a centrally coordinated network, entrepreneurs could nonetheless be expected to take their own initiatives with regards to networking after the accelerator – but this does not appear to have happened. One year after the accelerator, entrepreneurs from both A1 and A2 report that they only have sporadic contact with other graduates. They also report that even where they do stay in touch, that contact is of a primarily ‘social’ (as opposed to ‘business’) nature. Naturally there are a few exceptions: with Barry’s ‘adoption’ of Gabriella as an informal mentee an unusual example in A1 – and Peter’s ongoing contact with Kenny and Marie in A2. Peter’s comments on the nature of this ‘alumni networking’ suggest that the graduate network may be an untapped resource:

“[I have contact with] Kenny - we keep networking, information-sharing about upcoming opportunities for the good of our startups, like GSB¹⁰² [...] Young Leaders forum. Marie - we don't talk directly but she has made referrals for organisations to us, for information sharing and networking”.

4.5.6 FAMILY: Learning Who – Being a Social Entrepreneur

At the beginning of my study, one of the theoretical frameworks that I considered using to inform my analysis was that of situated learning – and in particular, theories related to ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, Trayner, & de Laat, 2011). Although this no longer forms the backbone of my study, many of the ideas of situated learning are clearly relevant to the education of social entrepreneurs and to accelerators, as testified to by Susan Howorth’s (2012) use of these theories in her discussion of the education of practicing entrepreneurs. In the *Booster* accelerators I usually initiated my first interview by asking participants how they usually introduced themselves to others – as a way of gaining insight into how they construed their own identities. I was then able to reflect on any changes in this identity as the accelerator progressed. Interviews

¹⁰² Global Social Benefit Institute

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suggest that for some entrepreneurs it is important to ‘become’ a social entrepreneur, while others appear disinterested. For example: in A1 Gabriella rapidly appropriated the ‘social entrepreneur’ identity associated with the accelerator, while Edward was dismissive of it. Importantly, both of them were experienced professionals in the design industry¹⁰³, with the main differences between them perhaps that of age (Edward was in his twenties, Gabriella in her mid-forties) – and background (Gabriella immigrated to Scandinavia as an adult).

During the A1 accelerator Edward commented on the term ‘social entrepreneur’ in the following manner:

“I still don’t really see myself as a social entrepreneur. What drives me is more the challenge, to dig into things... how ideas can be taken further and have more... impact. If you look at my education I’m an art director and I do that kind of job too, but no... I don’t know. I don’t go around calling myself a social entrepreneur. I hardly call myself an entrepreneur.”

A year after the accelerator Edward had abandoned his startup and his attitude towards the term ‘social entrepreneur’ had changed very little:

“Today I’m engaged in another startup, that probably matches all the criteria for actually being a social enterprise, but we never talk about ourselves using those terms.”

In contrast to Edward, his partner Alice described the introduction of the term ‘social entrepreneur’ as “an unbelievably welcome term” – perhaps reflecting the difficulty she had experienced in describing to colleagues and friends what she was going to do in the accelerator (“hippy advertising”!) Similarly, Gabriella (A1) also appropriated the term ‘social entrepreneur’ for herself eagerly. Early on in the accelerator she enthused over the term, describing how she had communicated her new identity to her friends in Argentina:

(Duncan): Had you heard this term ‘social entrepreneur’?

“No, never! I wrote to my friends in Argentina, those who are my customers. My customers are sort of my friends [laugh], and they work with NGOs... a lot. I sent a letter to one of them and asked, ‘Do you know what a social entrepreneur is? Because now I’m part of it!’”

Gabriella continued by describing her friends’ situation as part of the NGO community in Argentina – describing in passionate and colourful terms the ‘up and down’ existence of the NGO manager: the constant applying for money,

¹⁰³ I.e.: ‘knowledgeable improvisers’ from the perspective of Cope & Watts (2000).

working intensely when a grant was received and then reducing activities drastically as funds run out. She appears to have a missionary zeal for bringing her friends into the social entrepreneurial fold:

“I want to go to Argentina as soon as possible to tell them and to think about how we can change things or work in a different way, I want to do that.”

Unfortunately two years later – despite Gabriella’s enthusiasm, Frida (the A3 accelerator manager) commented to me that she believed Gabriella had now given up on her venture, even if it still exists on paper. It therefore appears that although the appropriating (or not) of a social entrepreneurial identity may be an interesting factor in the accelerator process, it is probably not a decisive one in terms of venture survival and impact.

Despite inconclusive evidence concerning the impact of the development of a social entrepreneurial identity on venture performance, it is worth noting that for many entrepreneurs their identity as ‘alumni’ of the accelerator was important. This was particularly so in A2 and A3 among entrepreneurs working in environments with a weak infrastructure for social entrepreneurship – but even the A1 cohort commented on their wish for such a network. For example, Henrik:

“It would be fun to have some kind of Facebook group or something, a forum for everyone who did Booster. I’m thinking of an alumni network or something similar.”

The A2 entrepreneurs from developing countries were especially concerned with maintaining a long-term relationship with *NSE* – something that managers initially seemed to have difficulty comprehending. In my A2 report I commented on this and Karen’s response was that *NSE* did not have the resources necessary to engage in the kind of follow-up the entrepreneurs desired. After A1, Karen’s response to my questions about follow-up was that she expected it to be self-organising and that if the entrepreneurs felt it was important they would organise it themselves. Consequently, in terms of consciously establishing a ‘community of practice’ and following up accelerator participants, there was clearly an initial mismatch between the expectations/wishes of the entrepreneurs and *NSE*’s own capacity and prioritising. After the A3 programme a Facebook group was created for the *Booster* alumni, administered by the programme managers.

4.5.7 FAILURE: Learning When – and If

Accelerator publicity often emphasizes the contribution of their programmes to enterprise development. Nonetheless, my survey of the *Booster* accelerators suggests that programmes can occasionally play an important role in ‘terminating’

ventures (or entrepreneurs) that are unlikely to succeed. Edward in A1 was perhaps the clearest example of this process, responding to the question about the accelerator's main contribution in the one year follow-up, in the following way:

"I learned how difficult it is to move from idea to having a working prototype".

Edward's partner in *GoodLink* was Alice, who took more time to arrive at the conclusion that their venture idea was not going to work. Alice tried to keep the venture going in her spare time for several months after Edward's exit. In contrast, after the accelerator Edward rapidly came to the conclusion that, based upon his new understanding of what was required in order for the venture to be a success, he was not prepared to go on. He described his main reason for abandoning his startup as having both an affective and resource-related aspect:

"Lack of motivation and resources to execute the idea".

When Edward's experience is compared to that of Marie (A2) and Andrew (A1), it is possible to discern three distinct types of 'closure' outcome in accelerators. Edward's closure was based on his learning about the 'pain' associated with developing a new social venture – and his judgement that he was not prepared to pay the price. Andrew's experience (closure after several months of attempted venture development after the accelerator) was based on his assessment that his venture was not making progress, despite participation in the accelerator. Marie's experience suggests a third model of closure, in that following the accelerator she felt unconvinced by the model she had developed and therefore replaced it with another one. Naturally it is difficult to demonstrate an irrefutable link between participation in an accelerator and the decision to terminate a startup, or abandon a product and/or a business model. Nonetheless, it is clear that in several cases the 'closure' decision was taken shortly after participating in the *Booster* programme. It is also difficult to judge whether closure was justified – but if we assume that it was, then the accelerator has clearly saved both the entrepreneur and society considerable resources.

4.5.8 FAME: Legitimacy and Exposure

In addition to the learning-oriented outcomes discussed in the preceding section, several other outcomes of the *Booster* accelerators were emphasized by the entrepreneurs. The most important of these are the related outcomes of 'legitimacy' and 'exposure'.

Despite the title of this dissertation, the experience of many social entrepreneurs in developing countries is that of being 'on an island'. Social entrepreneurship is a relatively new phenomenon and even if it gaining acceptance in many Western

societies, in emerging economies the idea of 'hybrid' enterprise is a new one. Writing of the South African context Kobus Visser (2011, p. 244) notes for example, that: "the experience in South Africa is one of narrow-mindedness and isolation [...] the role of social enterprise is neither recognized nor rewarded at any level". Consequently, social entrepreneurs often struggle to make themselves understood by government authorities and similar institutions, which are only familiar with 'pure' forms of enterprise: for-profit businesses and charities. Isaac (A2) described this situation in the following way:

"It's very difficult to establish a social enterprise of the nature of my enterprise in Africa, and you see most of the time many people don't believe you, and that being the case, what happens is that you are all alone fighting to succeed. Fighting to gain recognition first of all, fighting to launch your programme. Number two, fighting to get identified and accepted by the donors, and by other funding and financing institutions."

It is possible that social entrepreneurs in developing countries are unusually isolated from entrepreneurs with similar ventures. However, the accelerator literature (for example: Feld, 2012), suggests that even in Western contexts entrepreneurs suffer from a lack of recognition and that a key function of accelerators is to provide them with legitimacy – or 'fame', if we are to employ an 'F' word. Acceptance to (and participation in) a programme suggests to onlookers that participants are *bona fide* entrepreneurs.

In the *Booster* accelerators it was at times clear that the social entrepreneurs understood the important role of legitimacy more than the accelerator managers. In A2 for example, the 'African' entrepreneurs regularly asked managers to invite representatives from their embassies to accelerator events. Often the managers complied with their requests, although my impression is that they were initially puzzled by the request. Kenny's (A2) experience after the accelerator however, suggests that accelerators do confer a large degree of legitimacy on participating entrepreneurs:

"Actually at the accelerator... at the accelerator people believed in what I was doing, but when I came back people believed more because I had more authority: 'He has been trained, you understand; he knows what he is doing'. I got more involved with acquaintances, more respect, and all that. Like: 'Oh you've gone for training!' and 'You're doing okay!' – and stuff like that."

Some entrepreneurs began to make use of their increased legitimacy while the accelerator was still going on. Marie (A2) for example, used her participation in the accelerator as an excuse to ask individuals to advise her or to take an active role in her venture:

“I feel that I need to get a grip of this now and actually approach those who I want to have with me in this [her venture]. I think I get a little more courage from the accelerator. I take advantage of it quite a lot too, I say: ‘Now I’m at this point in my project’.”

Another ‘fame’-related outcome of the accelerator that is closely related to legitimacy, is that of ‘exposure’. Most entrepreneurs were very much aware of the publicity surrounding the accelerator and were eager to take advantage of it in order to market their enterprises. Edward (A1) described the accelerator as a “platform” and Thomas (A3) talked about his experience in the following way:

“Most importantly, coming back to a developed country... and being able to network with professionals, strategically. People who... learn about us – and it has an outreach affect that is useful, that we’re not just in our own world there doing what we do. That now we get the opportunity to reach more people, inspire people, and... build bridges and create synergies with people.”

Comments from entrepreneurs after the accelerator suggest that they are hopeful that their status as ‘alumni’ will continue to help them stay in the public’s (and investors’) eyes, months and even years after their graduation. Frequently, when asked about what *NSE* can do to support them in the future, they are unable to identify concrete training needs – but do ask that the organisation continue to publicise their ventures on their website and in the ongoing activities of *NSE*.

4.5.9 FINANCE: Investment and Revenue

4.5.9.1 Accelerator I

In this section I briefly comment on the development of the *Booster* ventures after the accelerator, in terms of income. This is not the main focus of this study, but enables readers to make a more informed assessment of the relative impact of entrepreneurs’ learning on enterprise development. Subsequently, in sections 4.5.10 and 4.5.11, aggregated data on survival and growth, and sourced investment and revenue¹⁰⁴ are shown for all of the A1 and A2 ventures in relation to entrepreneur type and venture stage.

Very few of the A1 ventures reported growth a year after the accelerator. It is difficult to determine if this was the result of a lack of investment, or if their lack of progress discouraged investment. Regardless of the cause, one year after the first accelerator, few entrepreneurs reported being able to raise investment (see

¹⁰⁴ In this section I distinguish between income that is sourced externally from investors, funders or loans (‘investment’) and income that ventures generate from sales or similar ‘internally driven’ processes (‘revenue’).

table 4.8). Henrik reported that he had managed to increase his revenue streams after the accelerator and almost two years later he is still marketing (and I assume selling) his product on the *Garbage Garments* webshop. Barry was initially successful in raising funding and managed to raise enough investment to receive a second round of matched funding from the *Sida Innovations against Poverty* programme. However, one year after the accelerator he was already foreseeing difficulties in raising further funding and commented:

“Current funding will last until September¹⁰⁵ and we are unlikely to get more funding [...] as the income doesn't cover the costs the prospects are not good.”

“Our product needs to be modified, version 2, based on all input we have gotten from customers, but we have no funding for this.”

These comments suggest that one year after the accelerator Barry was already beginning to feel the effects of the general lack of investment in alternative energy ventures that hit Scandinavia in 2013 (Fröberg, 2013). It appears that this lack of funding was an important factor in changing his level of engagement in *CellSun* from that of a full-time occupation to that of a part-time, or side-line activity.

Table 4-8: Investment & Revenue - Accelerator 1.

<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Venture</i>	<i>Investment after 2 years</i>
Alice	GoodLink	none
Edward	GoodLink	none
Andrew	C-Cure	none
Barry	CellSun	raised investment
Catrin	Imbani	raised investment
Gabriela	Brottle	none
Henrik	Garbage Garments	increased revenue

4.5.9.2 Accelerator 2

Although the ventures that participated in A2 were in considerably better health than the A1 ventures a year after the accelerator, the A2 ventures experienced mixed outcomes in terms of investment and revenue (see table 4.9). *Bottle Art* did not report investment, but described a significant increase in revenue from sales

¹⁰⁵ I.e.: about 1 ½ years after leaving the accelerator.

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– even if Heidi continues to donate her management services to the enterprise free of charge. Isaac’s venture expanded rapidly after the accelerator, as he received the large amount of funding from USAID that he applied for while at *Booster*. Jamal reported no investment or other type of funding, while Kenny reported obtaining a loan of € 3 000 from a local NGO.

Table 4-9: Investment & Revenue - Accelerator 2.

<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Venture</i>	<i>Investment after 1 year</i>
Heidi	Bottle Art	No investment, increased revenue.
Isaac	MobiClin	Major project funding.
Jamal	AgriTech	No investment.
Kenny	Afri-Text	Obtained loan from NGO.
Lewis	BioVolt	Status unknown
Marie	Better Work	Negotiating with investors.
Nelson	Pistols to Ploughs	Some project funding.
Peter	AfriPads	Significant project funding.
Steven	Bibl. Communitaries	Minor donations/sponsorship.

Marie hoped to finalise a partnership agreement with a large Scandinavian importer in the months following the one year follow up, but had not yet been able to source investment. *Pistols to Ploughs* obtained funding for a pilot project from an NGO that Nelson met at the accelerator. *AfriPads* (Peter-A2) received funding of €180 000 from *Sida’s* matching fund programme for social innovation and a further \$ 7 000 USD from the United Nations. Steven (A2) in contrast, had only received minor sponsorship from a local publisher.

4.5.10 FITNESS: Venture Survival and Growth

In this section, I provide details of venture survival and growth for accelerators one and two. As this dissertation is based on a longitudinal study only limited data are available however, for accelerator three.

4.5.10.1 Accelerator I

As noted previously, recruitment to the first accelerator took place in a relatively short period of time. This, coupled with *NSE’s* lack of experience in running accelerators, seems to be reflected in the performance of the participating ventures, as summarised in table. 4.10. Table 4.10 does not show all of the information pertinent to the ventures included, nor reflect the uncertainty associated with some of the data. Alice and Edward were the entrepreneurs least

interested in participating in interviews in A1 and this reluctance was also reflected in later responses to questionnaires. However, in Alice’s last response she commented that she was operating the venture in her spare time and that her partner taking care of finances (Edward) had left the venture. *GoodLink* is not listed on her LinkedIn profile and the only reference to the venture on the internet is the old film made about their product during the accelerator.

Table 4-10: Venture outcomes-Accelerator 1.

<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Venture</i>	<i>Status after 2 years</i>
Alice	GoodLink	Very low level of activity
Edward	GoodLink	Startup abandoned
Andrew	C-Cure	Startup abandoned
Barry	CellSun	Still operating, but side-line
Catrin	Imbani	Still operating
Gabriela	Brottle	Very low level of activity
Henrik	Garbage Garments	Still operating, but side-line

Consequently, it appears that the venture has either been abandoned or is operating at a very low level. Nonetheless, despite giving up on *GoodLink*, Alice’s venture partner Edward had not altogether abandoned the idea of creating social impact through enterprise. Commenting on his decision to leave *GoodLink* he wrote:

“Today I’m engaged in another startup that probably matches all the criteria for actually being a social enterprise.”

One year after A1, Andrew reported that he had abandoned *C-Cure*. Prior to this I heard that his partner in the venture had left the startup and begun to work for a large electronics firm. *Imbani* is still in business and has managed to source *Sida* financing through the *Innovations against Poverty* programme. However, on Catrin’s LinkedIn profile she states that she was involved with *Imbani* only until February, 2013 – seven months after the end of the accelerator. Gabriela’s venture still exists on paper, but one year after the accelerator she was very down and commented:

“Last November I was feeling that the project was so near to be real, but last May the whole thing felt down in a hole. I have found it hard to go on with it now, mainly because I got very disappointed”.

Almost two years after the accelerator it is clear that Gabriella is making very little progress and NSE manager Frida commented that she thinks that she has given up on *Brottle*. Henrik in contrast, maintains a low, but constant level of activity in *Garbage Garments* (see case study) – and has recruited a partner to the

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venture. Barry’s venture seemed to be the most promising in the months following the accelerator, but almost two years afterwards he now lists another occupation and organisation under “Experience” on *LinkedIn*. This suggests that he has recently been forced to make *CellSun* more of a side-line occupation – a suggestion supported by the lack of updates on his venture’s webpage and Facebook page.

4.5.10.2 Accelerator 2

Data is not available to enable a ‘two year after’ analysis of the A2 ventures and a ‘one year after’ analysis is provided instead (see table 4.11).

Table 4-11: Venture outcomes-Accelerator 2.

<i>Entrepreneur</i>	<i>Venture</i>	<i>Status after 2 years</i>
Heidi	Bottle Art	Still operating, some growth
Isaac	MobiClin	Significant growth
Jamal	AgriTech	Still operating, but side-line
Kenny	Afri-Text	Still operating, some growth
Lewis	BioVolt	Status unknown
Marie	Better Work	Still operating, some growth
Nelson	Pistols to Ploughs	Still operating, some growth
Peter	AfriPads	Still operating, some growth
Steven	Bibl. Communitaries	Still operating, some growth

As was the case with the A1 entrepreneurs, the outcome table does not do justice to the different type of development experienced by the accelerator participants. With the exception of Lewis (who did not reply to any of the follow-up emails and questionnaires) and Jamal, all of the entrepreneurs reported experiencing some kind of growth after the accelerator. In contrast to A1, no one reported abandoning their ventures – even if Jamal’s responses suggest that he has made little or no progress since leaving the programme.

Heidi reported that *Bottle Art* had moved into new premises and had employed several new employees. She summarises the progress made in the year after the accelerator in the following words:

“We opened a shop - hired four more full-time employees. We have expanded our product line, moved our workshop, increased production, created partnerships with retail outlets and other small production workshops that make things for our shop”.

Isaac's venture expanded rapidly after the accelerator, as he received the large amount of funding from USAID that he applied for while at *Booster* – as well as a smaller amount from the United Nations in response to a sudden spate of flooding in Indonesia. Consequently, he spent the following year travelling around Africa and Asia, recruiting personnel, and setting up his mobile clinics and local offices in the countries in question.

Jamal moved into a local incubator soon after the accelerator and began partnering with his coach there. He also made a visit to the farmers he was targeting in South Asia, but did not receive the response he expected. In his response to the question about current challenges in the one year follow-up he wrote:

“Difficulties in engaging the farmers. I travelled there and talked to them. It was hard to mobilise them. There are also other forces opposed to people becoming more independent – rich people in the area who need the farmers for cheap labour.”

More than a year after the accelerator Jamal is still struggling to identify exactly how his venture will operate and who he will partner with. Kenny reports that his texting service is still in operation and that he has been able to recruit new individuals to his team. He is also developing his product and has been able to secure a loan from a local NGO. Marie's venture continues to develop, despite a radical restructuring during the summer after the accelerator – during which she both changed the name of her venture and decided to develop a different product. After this change her mentor was convinced of the feasibility of the new idea and is now a partner in the venture. She is also close to finalising an agreement with a large Scandinavian wholesaler (who imports goods from factories in Asia and China) and is negotiating with several other large firms.

Nelson's venture continues to operate, but it is difficult to obtain reliable information about his activities. Throughout the accelerator his emphasis was on raising money for his venture and he appeared to expend far less effort on developing his business plan and social value proposition. The five month follow-up interview was difficult to conduct due to a poor internet/telephone connection and provided little new information about his venture's development. The same was true of the one year follow-up questionnaire, in which he lists the challenges facing the venture as simply: “Seek funding for Business”. Despite this apparent obsession with funding, Nelson's reply to the questionnaire makes it clear that he came into contact with a Scandinavian NGO while at the accelerator, that is prepared to partner with him. The NGO agreed to fund a pilot project and after a planned visit to West Africa, hopes to partner with *Pistols to Ploughs* in scaling up the project.

Peter's venture continues to operate and is in a phase of expansion and product refinement. *AfriPads* was expanding its network of female entrepreneurs and sales representatives as Peter responded to the one year follow-up and had received significant funding. Peter is also in negotiations with impact investors from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

Steven's venture (*Bibliothèques Communitaires*) expanded after the accelerator, setting up its first 'genuine' community library¹⁰⁶ and becoming increasingly visible as an actor in Steven's home country. Steven emphasizes the community-oriented nature of his enterprise and suggests that this may have been a factor in its slow development:

"My start up is a community driven programme and it requires some community mobilisation efforts. This takes time because grass root communities react differently to the concept".

Regardless of the reason for its pattern of development, *Bibliothèques Communitaires* has been able to source significantly less funding than most of the other ventures, only reporting a small donation from a local publisher.

4.5.11 Venture Type and Stage, and Performance

When venture performance is assessed in relation to the type of entrepreneur initiating the venture and to venture stage, several patterns emerge (see table 4.12).

First of all, in terms of survival, enterprises initiated by indigenous social entrepreneurs appear to stand a greater chance of staying in business after the accelerator process, when compared to all other types of enterprise. All of the ventures whose status is 'startup > part-time' and 'startup abandoned' are associated with expatriate social entrepreneurs. Even expatriate social entrepreneurs with long experience (such as Barry), reported reducing their engagement in their enterprises to that of a 'part-time' or 'side-line' occupation as time went by. In contrast, the only enterprise run by a more experienced indigenous entrepreneur¹⁰⁷ (Isaac), experienced significant growth after the accelerator.

Social enterprises founded by expatriate entrepreneurs who engage in a startup on the basis of their professional experience/identity (the 'knowledgeable

¹⁰⁶ The pilot library was located at the NGO office.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis (A2) is also classified as 'veteran-indigenous', but did not respond to requests for follow-up interviews, nor fill in the survey one year after the accelerator.

improvisers’) also appear less likely to survive and more likely to develop into part-time occupations. It is possible however, that stage is a factor in these outcomes, as many of the social entrepreneurs in the ‘knowledgeable improviser-expatriate’ category entered the accelerator at the vulnerable ‘concepting’ phase of venture development. In contrast, many of the *indigenous* social entrepreneurs in this category had already progressed to the ‘commitment’ or ‘validation’ stages. Unfortunately survey data is not yet available for most of these (A3) ventures, but interviews suggest that all of the ventures associated with this group are still in business – and in many cases, thriving.

Despite the general tendencies outlined above, several exceptions can be found, among both the ‘expatriate’ and ‘knowledgeable improviser’ entrepreneurs. Marie (A2, KI-E) had spent many years in the regions at which her product is targeted, and her enterprise developed healthily after the accelerator. Heidi’s venture (A2, I-E) also reported significant development after the programme. Although she did not have the professional experience of

Marie, Heidi is similar to her in having many years of experience in the region where her social enterprise is located – and her familiarity with the region may be enhanced by the fact that she lives there.

When the performance of the *Booster* enterprises in terms of *sourced investment and revenue* is related to entrepreneur ‘type’, and to venture stage; a less distinct pattern emerges (see table 4.12). Both ‘indigenous’ and ‘expatriate’ entrepreneurs succeeded in raising ‘substantial’ or ‘moderate’¹⁰⁸ investment after the accelerator, but it is important to note that for two of the ‘expatriate’ entrepreneurs this is a truth that requires modification. Barry (A2, ‘veteran-expatriate’) was able to raise initial funding, but was subsequently unable to raise enough funding to grow his enterprise. *Imbani*, the enterprise that Catrin (A1, ‘innocent-expatriate’) was associated with while at the accelerator, received funding from *Sida* more than a year after the accelerator – but by that time Catrin was no longer associated with the enterprise. When the *stage* enterprises were at during the accelerator is brought into the equation, it is clear that the two enterprises that had reached a more advanced stage – attaining what Start-up Commons (2014) terms “minimum viable product” and “validation” – were able to source significantly higher levels of funding. Both of these enterprises were led by ‘indigenous’ entrepreneurs. Only one venture that was at the ‘pre-startup’ stage during the accelerator (Marie /Better Work) reported sourcing significant investment within a year of graduation.

¹⁰⁸ Defined as at least \$ 5 000 USD.

Table 4-12: Venture performance related to category, stage and performance.

Name / Enterprise	Acc.	Provenance	Cat.	Status at start**	Status after 1 yr	Funding
Barry / CellSun	A1	Scandinavia	V-E	validation (1)	startup > part-time	moderate investment / funding
Lewis / BioVolt	A2	East Africa	V-I	commitment (0)	no information	no information
Isaac / MobiClin	A2	East Africa	V-I	scaling (2)	rapid growth	substantial investment
Thomas / TourFair	A3	East Africa	V-I	validation (1)	no information	no information
Alice / Goodlink	A1	Scandinavia	K-E	concepting (-1)	startup > part-time	none
Andrew / C-Cure	A1	Scandinavia*	K-E	concepting (-1)	startup abandoned	none
Edward / Goodlink	A1	Scandinavia	K-E	concepting (-1)	startup abandoned	none
Miriam / Better Work	A2	Scandinavia	K-E	concepting (-1)	steady growth	moderate investment / funding
Gabriella / Brottle	A1	Scandinavia*	K-E	ideation (-2)	startup > part-time	none
Olga / Rough Diamonds	A3	Western Europe	K-I	commitment (0)	no information	no information
Patience / FairCare	A3	East Africa	K-I	commitment (0)	no information	no information
Rebecca / Spread IT	A3	East Africa	K-I	commitment (0)	no information	no information
Vinay / Sunpower	A3	South Asia	K-I	validation (1)	no information	no information
Zayd / Puretech	A3	Middle East	K-I	validation (1)	no information	no information
Catrin / Imbani	A1	Western Europe	CE-E	concepting (-1)	left startup	none
Heidi / Bottle Art	A2	North America	CE-E	validation (1)	steady growth	none
Steven / Bibl. Communitaires	A2	Central Africa	CE-I	concepting (-1)	some growth	minor investment / funding
Nelson / Pistols to Ploughs	A2	West Africa	CE-I	validation (1)	some growth	some investment / funding
Peter / AfriPads	A2	East Africa	CE-I	validation (1)	some growth	moderate investment / funding
Willis / AfriChoc	A3	West Africa	CE-I	validation (1)	no information	no information
Henrik / Garbage Garments	A1	Scandinavia	I-E	commitment (0)	startup > part-time	minor investment / funding
Nadia / Femicharge	A3	Western Europe	I-E	concepting (-1)	no information	no information
Jamal / AgriTech	A2	Scandinavia*	I-E	ideation (-2)	startup > part-time	none
Kenny / Afri-Text	A2	West Africa	I-I	validation (1)	some growth	minor investment / funding

* Denotes an entrepreneur resident in Scandinavia who immigrated as an adult.

**Stage categories from Startup Commons (2014)

A challenge with regards to the analysis of indicators of venture performance (such as survival, growth and investment) is that it is difficult to know which factors are the causes and which are the results. For example: were ventures abandoned due to difficulties in sourcing investment, or is the lack of investment simply a consequence of entrepreneurs terminating their startups? Despite this difficulty, it *is* possible to distinguish a pattern for ventures operating in developing countries and led either by ‘indigenous’ entrepreneurs or ‘expatriate’ entrepreneurs living in developing countries (for example: Heidi-A2). These ventures tend to survive longer, but attract only low or very moderate amounts of investment/funding – even if some also report increases in their revenue streams. For more reliable conclusions to be made however, a more extensive quantitative analysis is necessary – and as this study emphasizes the learning *process* in accelerators, this is not a task that I embark on here.

4.5.12 Conceptualising Accelerator Outcomes

In the preceding sections the main outcomes of the *Booster* accelerators have been identified. For each outcome I have attempted to ‘dig beneath the surface’ in order to provide readers with a richer and more nuanced understanding of each area. I concluded by discussing the more obvious outcomes of the *Booster* accelerators, for example: venture survival, growth and investment. These outcomes are tangible in nature and therefore relatively easy to identify. In the initials sections however, I introduced several outcomes of learning that are more intangible and harder to measure (for example: expanded network, clearer ideas and increased confidence). Despite the ‘fuzzy’ nature of these outcomes, initial reports from the A2 and A3 entrepreneurs in particular, suggest that they enhance venture performance. Nevertheless, this study clearly demonstrates that the intangible benefits associated with accelerators are incapable of ensuring venture success *in isolation*. This is most apparent in the contrasting outcomes experienced by the two ‘veteran’ entrepreneurs Barry and Isaac. Despite the fact that both individuals participated in very similar accelerators, had long experience and extensive networks, and were highly committed to their ventures – one venture succeeded and the other did not. Some of the factors associated with failure are discussed in section 5.8.

The outcomes associated with the *Booster* accelerators are depicted in the figure below. The outcomes depicted by the triangles in the figure suggest that accelerator outcomes are not only related to the development of new knowledge, but also to other factors. These other aspects may involve knowledge, but in order to capture their meaning more sufficiently it is necessary to recognise that other factors are involved. For example: an expanded network is not only the result of an entrepreneur’s learning about the existence of other actors, but also these actors’ awareness of the entrepreneur and their willingness to interact with

them. For this reason I suggest that it is useful to refer to accelerator outcomes in terms of both enhanced knowledge and capabilities (Obrecht, 2011).

In figure 4.6 some outcomes are outlined in bold lines, while others are not. This is done in order to differentiate between outcomes that were clearly seen in the accelerators studied – and outcomes that were not so pronounced. For example: most entrepreneurs commented on the role the accelerator played in helping them clarify their ideas, but relatively few individuals were able to source financing after the programme. Similarly, all the entrepreneurs commented on the contribution the accelerator made in the form of an expanded network ('friends') – but comments that related to belonging to a community of practice ('family') of social entrepreneurs were less common

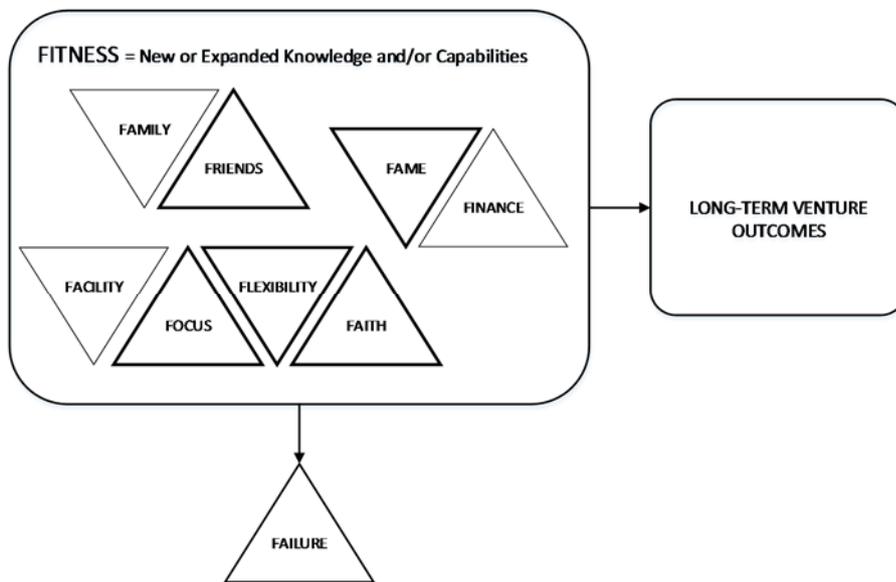


Figure 4-6: Main Outcomes of the Booster Accelerators

Despite differences in the frequency of a contribution being named by entrepreneurs, I believe it is nevertheless important to include each of them in the 'outcomes' diagram. An awareness of the different areas in which accelerators have the *potential* to contribute to nascent ventures can assist managers as they design future programmes. This understanding could help managers to 'niche' their accelerators, by focusing development efforts on particular areas such as network or skills development – or the exposure of participating ventures to a particular audience. Managers could emphasize the particular contributions of their programmes by using different-sized triangles to illustrate areas that their

accelerators pay particular attention to – or neglect. This in turn, would enable entrepreneurs to make more informed choices when considering applying to a number of accelerators.

Having identified the main outcomes of the entrepreneurship education ‘intervention’ discussed in section 4.3, I now move on to discuss the ‘why’ of social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators. What are the underlying processes that *explain* the outcomes of accelerator education?

5 Explaining Social Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators

5.1 Overview

In this section I develop a theory of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators. In chapter two I synthesised theories of entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneurship education and adult education in the figure reproduced below.

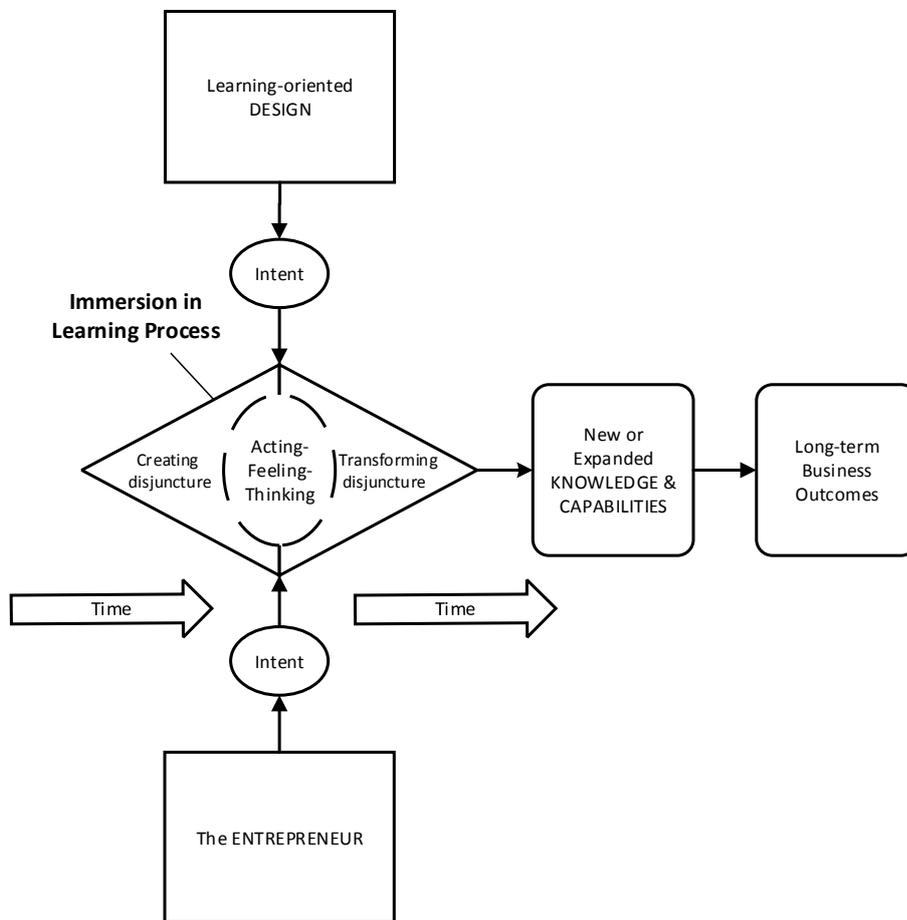


Figure 5-1: A preliminary model of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators

The figure is a basic conceptualisation of the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators and provides what Whetten (1989, p. 491) describes as a “framework for interpreting patterns, or discrepancies in our empirical observations.” As he points out however, in order to make a theoretical contribution it is necessary to begin to *explain* the processes associated with the ‘what’ and the ‘how’. In subsequent sections I therefore discuss my empirical observations using this figure as a conceptual ‘scaffold’. As I do so, I refine and modify the figure by first of all adding ‘meat’ to its ‘bones’ – and secondly, by modifying it where necessary.

5.2 Background and Stage: the Two ‘Givens’

Jarvis (2010) suggests that the ‘life-world’ of the adult has a significant effect on their learning. In keeping with Dewey (1938) he argues that individuals generally make sense of new situations by referring to previous experiences. In the context of accelerators the adults in question are entrepreneurs – and in this study *social* entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs’ accounts of the accelerator process suggest that initially, two main factors affect their learning: their backgrounds and their ventures’ stage of development.

5.2.1 The Entrepreneur and their Life-world

The complexity of the individual’s life-world is overwhelming and it is naturally impossible for a short academic text to do justice to its impact on the development of the person. Despite this complexity, entrepreneurs’ accounts of the accelerator process underline the idea that individuals do not enter the programme as ‘empty vessels’, but rather with intricate patterns of experience that affect their learning in distinctive – and at times unexpected ways.

As noted in chapter four, one of the outcomes of the second *Booster* accelerator had to do with the creation of a more ‘business’ oriented mindset among the entrepreneurs. The majority of participants in A2 came from an African background and had been active in ‘third sector’ organisations such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and charities. In A1, Catrin (a Western European) shared this orientation, suggesting the existence of a particular third sector ‘mindset’ that is linked not only with particular geographical settings (the developing world), but also with particular organisational contexts. Frequently, this mindset assumes that organisations prosper on the basis of funding, rather than investment – and by means of a cycle of projects, rather than an ongoing, sustainable business model. Despite the accelerators emphasis of the business case it was clear in both accelerators that ‘old habits die hard’. For example: after several weeks in A1, when asked about her particular needs Catrin asked for more input on writing successful grant applications. In A3 Willis was asked the same

question and asked for more contacts with funders¹⁰⁹. In A2 requests such as these coincided with entrepreneurs' comments that they were undergoing a radical change in how they thought about their enterprises. These comments appear to contradict one another and may indicate a contrast between what Argyris and Schön (1996) term the "theories in use" and "espoused" theories of the entrepreneurs. It is also possible however, that the comments reflect a genuine inner struggle and an ongoing, iterative (as opposed to linear) process of change.

The impact of a 'life-world' that is linked to development aid and third sector organisations also seems to be related to the entrepreneur's attitude to this world and their perception of the accelerator's place in it. Gabriella (A1) for example, had many friends who worked in NGOs and clearly had vicarious experience of the 'hand-to-mouth' life of project-based charity organisations. Consequently she was dissatisfied with the NGO/charity model and as she learned more about social entrepreneurship, she perceived it as a radical break with this negative experience. In contrast, it appeared that many of the entrepreneurs who had a background in NGOs understood the accelerator to be an additional actor in the development aid field, rather than an actor in a distinct organisational arena. This was particularly clear in the case of the entrepreneurs who were participating in an accelerator for the second time (Nelson and Peter in A2 and Willis in A3). Nelson and Willis had both participated in the programme run by the *Unreasonable Institute* and Peter had completed the *Global Social Benefit Accelerator* at Santa Clara University. Their understanding of the *Booster* accelerator appeared to be that it was not so much a radical alternative to aid-funded NGOs, but more of an additional actor in the same field – and not least, an excellent way of expanding their network of funders.

Building on the above examples, I suggest that entrepreneurs' 'life-worlds' have an impact on their learning in terms of magnifying or minimising their experiences of disjuncture. Writing as a social constructionist, Jarvis (1987) argues that the experiences that individuals are exposed to do not in themselves contain meaning, but that individuals attribute meaning to their experiences. In accelerators, entrepreneurs' perception of social entrepreneurship as a radical alternative to development aid is more likely to be perceived as a significant disjuncture when it contrasts with the experience of the entrepreneur. From the perspective of Piaget (1952) this in turn may stimulate a process of accommodation (the restructuring of mental models), rather than of assimilation (the modification of what seems to fit existing mental models). However, entrepreneurs who are relatively satisfied with the NGO/charity system – and who understand the accelerator as an actor in this system – may initially be less

¹⁰⁹ In both of these cases there is a small but significant difference between on the one hand: "grant application" and "business plan", and on the other hand: "funder" and "investor" (or venture capitalist).

disposed to experience the degree of disjuncture necessary to engage in accommodative, as opposed to assimilative learning. Entrepreneurs who are dissatisfied with the NGO/charity system (such as Gabriella-A1), appear to be more pre-disposed to engage in a restructuring of their mental models. However it is also possible to interpret the behaviour of the social entrepreneurs through the lens of Hjorth's (2011) Deleuzian theory. From that perspective one could argue that for the social entrepreneurs with an extensive background in aid/charity, a considerably larger "provocation" was required in order to create the affect needed for 'deterritorialisation' to take place.

What is useful about Hjorth's conceptualisation of the idea of 'provocation' is that it enhances our understanding of the 'black box' of disjuncture that educational theorists such as Piaget and Jarvis identify as the building block of learning. By introducing concepts such as deterritorialisation and decoding, it is easier to catch a glimpse of the micro processes associated with these experiences. However, the contrasting experiences of Gabriella – and Nelson, Peter and Willis (as described above) are important to analyse further. At first glance Gabriella might seem to be the entrepreneur with the highest potential for taking on board the ideas of social entrepreneurship. She has relatively little 'territory' to rid herself of and can quickly progress to the decoding phase of learning. However, the very fact that she has so little luggage to encumber her in this transition, also means that she takes very little with her on her 'new' journey – and indeed, with the passing of time her social entrepreneurial journey proved to be fairly short. Nelson, Peter and Willis on the other hand were required to undergo a more radical process of deterritorialisation (the "uprooting" from old "habits and practices"- Hjorth 2011, p.57), before they could engage in decoding and subsequently experimentation. Nonetheless, it is arguable that the depth of experience that accompanied them on the learning process – once transformed, was important to the development of their enterprises.

In addition to their professional backgrounds, aspects of the entrepreneurs' life-worlds that affected learning in the accelerator also include gender, ethnicity, religion and entrepreneurial experience. With regards to gender, Marie (A2) commented on her instinctive interaction with Heidi:

"Heidi and me, we've helped each other and given one another feedback [...] but we were the only women and... I guess, the only Westerners."

The interaction facilitated by shared gender appears to be reinforced by factors such as ethnicity and culture. Among the A3 entrepreneurs for example, Patience tended to interact more with Rebecca – who was not only female, but also came from the same country. This dynamic is clearly similar to that in A2, where Marie

Explaining Social Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators

and Heidi associated their interaction with both gender and culture¹¹⁰. In addition to this however, there was also a clear gender division in A3 when it came to interaction, despite the NSE's successful attempt at recruiting an equal number of males and females. Nonetheless, in A3 Patience commented on the way in which shared faith enriched her relationship with her mentor (they were both Christians) – suggesting that additional factors can contribute to interaction. Even the sharing of a simple habit such as smoking (A3: Willis and Vinay) appears to stimulate interaction.

The behaviours discussed above illustrate the impact that the life-world of the entrepreneur has on their interaction with other individuals. In more abstract terms it appears that when entrepreneurs enter accelerators, they are alert to signals from other participants that suggest commonality. Interaction is initially based on basic (or obvious) characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity. The case of Patience and her mentor however, suggests that if alternative sources of commonality are discovered, effective interaction can develop at a quicker pace. This idea implies that activities that foster the discovery of commonalities among accelerator participants may be an effective way of fostering interaction.

In addition to the factors discussed above, Diamanto Politis (2005) suggests that entrepreneurs are characterised by different career orientations. I suggest that these orientations (linear, expert, spiral and transitory) frequently interact with the entrepreneurial typologies developed in section 4.4 – and affect entrepreneurs' intentions and learning. Although the study of career orientations is not the main focus of this study, it appears that they do influence the accelerator outcomes. Henrik's behaviour prior to entering the accelerator for example, suggests that he values variety – and that his career orientation may be 'transitory' in character. The strong identification of Edward and Alice with their professions suggests that they have an 'expert' career orientation – and it is possible that this orientation is common to entrepreneurs in the 'knowledgeable improviser' category. Barry displays many of the characteristics of the 'spiral' career orientation (emphasising creativity and personal development) – while Isaac and Lewis' concern with status implies a 'linear' (hierarchical) orientation. Nonetheless, an additional 'others-oriented' career orientation appears to be at work in many of the *Booster* entrepreneurs, suggesting that the four career orientations discussed by Brousseau et al. (1996)¹¹¹ may not adequately explain the orientations of social entrepreneurs. The definition of this 'fifth' career orientation lies however, outside of the scope of this study. Nonetheless, my

¹¹⁰ These two female entrepreneurs did not come from the same country, but shared a common 'Western' culture.

¹¹¹ Politis' (2005) discussion builds on the ideas of these scholars.

empirical material clearly suggests that career orientations exist and that they are an important part of entrepreneurs' 'life-worlds' when they enter accelerators.

A final way in which the entrepreneur's life-world affects their learning in an accelerator has to do with their entrepreneurial experience. Bandura (1965; 2006) suggests that individuals are able to learn 'vicariously' by observing others directly or, as they become more capable, by learning about others through text or narrative. Blenker and Christensen (2010) discuss the roles that practicing entrepreneurs can play in entrepreneurship education and suggest that in education *for* entrepreneurship; entrepreneurs can take on the roles of mentor, reality check or role model. The experience of the entrepreneurs in the *Booster* accelerators extends the ideas of these scholars by suggesting additional factors that facilitate vicarious learning. Once again the idea of similarity is central. Several entrepreneurs comment that their interaction with practicing entrepreneurs helped them learn, primarily because of perceived common ground. In A1 for example: Henrik enthused about the visit by a well-known Scandinavian social entrepreneur:

"I thought he was really good. Mostly I think because it was so unbelievably good to talk to him, as he had sort of done the same things as I've done, we understood each other really well and he had experienced a lot of what I had experienced in Brazil."

In A3 Rebecca made a similar comment after a study visit to a successful Scandinavian social enterprise. However, her comment reflects not so much shared startup experience, but rather experience in the same environment:

"I was amazed with the idea and it inspired me to be more innovative. They have a solution at almost at every stage... So I was inspired, yeah. And they also have a branch in East Africa and the scenario that they described was very familiar. So, I kind of identified myself faster with them and I liked their solution."

The above examples illustrate not only the contribution of practicing entrepreneurs to entrepreneurship education, but also the role played by the individual's previous experience¹¹² in enhancing (or reducing) opportunities for vicarious learning. Rebecca refers to her awareness of areas of commonality as part of a process of 'identifying' with visitors. For both Henrik and Rebecca shared experience seems to infer relevance – and relevance in turn encourages a positive attitude to learning. Importantly, Rebecca suggests that commonality accelerates 'identification' and hence, learning.

¹¹² Part of what Jarvis refers to with the term "lifeworld".

In the context of student-oriented entrepreneurship education, Blenker and Christensen (2010) emphasize that care must be taken when involving practicing entrepreneurs in teaching activities. They suggest that the individuals be selected who are appropriate to the purpose – or the envisaged end result – of the education. This clearly implies that the educational strategy espoused by Blenker and Christensen involves a ‘future-oriented’ logic. This is perhaps inevitable, as their discussion relates primarily to the education of students with little entrepreneurial experience. My study suggests however, that a different logic operates when nascent [social] entrepreneurs participate in education. Nascent entrepreneurs appear to assess the relevance of education (in this case the input of practicing entrepreneurs), by being alert to comments that indicate *shared experience*. This implies that when interaction with practicing entrepreneurs is included in the education of nascent entrepreneurs, a ‘past-oriented’ strategy needs to be combined with the ‘future-oriented’ strategy discussed by Blenker and Christensen. Nascent entrepreneurs seem to assess the relevance of inputs from practicing entrepreneurs with reference to past experience, before they are willing to take on board ideas that are more oriented towards the future.

5.2.2 Entrepreneurial Stage, Industry and Context

Among the *Booster* entrepreneurs, the impact of the individual’s life-world was not limited to factors such as ethnicity, gender, religion and experiences of entrepreneurship. In addition to these aspects; factors such as entrepreneurial stage, industry and geographical context also affected individuals’ interaction. After the first accelerator, entrepreneurs were asked what was most important to them as they interacted with their peers: being in a similar industry or being at a similar stage of enterprise development. Their response was remarkably consistent, with entrepreneurs who expressed a preference saying it was more important to be at a similar stage of development. Isaac (A2) expressed a similar preference, but nevertheless emphasized the importance of industry-specific input:

(Duncan): “I’m also thinking about the industry versus the stage thing... does it matter if you’re from different industries, if you’re at the same stage in the business process? Or is it even better to be putting like, health entrepreneurs together...?”

“Not really. Social enterprise, the concept is the same. You may be attacking a different problem, but the concept of developing an enterprise is the same.” [...] But away from that, separate industry specific coaching sessions must be organised and these individual coaching sessions must target or must look at where each enterprise is in the development stage.”

(Duncan): “So if I understand the way you’re talking about it, it should be more industry focused and less focused on the stage of the enterprise. If you have

to choose between the two, would you prefer to be talking to another entrepreneur at the same stage as you or somebody at a different stage but in the same industry? What is the best?"

"I'd rather be talking to an entrepreneur at the same stage as me. That's more relevant."

Naturally some social entrepreneurs commented that it was also useful if their peers were working in a societal context similar to theirs (for example: in sub-Saharan Africa). Some said that they had found it useful to interact with others who were using similar technologies (for example: mobile phones), but Barry (A1) was adamant that recruiting entrepreneurs from the same industry would have a *negative* impact on the cohort's creativity and diversity. These findings echo the experience of the entrepreneurs studied by Hjorth (2011) in the TCP incubator. In the TCP context, incubator managers emphasized the idea that cohort heterogeneity was a key factor in both establishing a culture of dialogue – and also speeding up the creation of this culture. These ideas have clear implications for practitioners and suggest that when recruiting startups, accelerator managers need to aim first of all for a homogenous group in terms of participating ventures' *stage of development*. It is also useful if entrepreneurs are targeting markets with similar characteristics. However, recruiting entrepreneurs from the same industry does not appear to have a positive impact on accelerator dynamics and may even reduce (or delay) the development of an effective learning climate. These observations are supported by Susan Smith's (2011, p. 230) research, in which she emphasizes that the creation of "peer-to-peer learning space" is dependent on entrepreneurs being in the same "boat". This study adds to her findings however, by suggesting that some aspects of the entrepreneur's 'boat' (such as 'stage') are more important than others, with regards to the development of learning-oriented interaction.

Entrepreneurs' ideas about the ideal make-up of the accelerator cohort suggest that the recruitment process is extremely important to the subsequent functioning of the accelerator – and not only because good selection procedures will enhance startup performance. Rogers (1969) suggests that individuals tend to engage more intensely in learning that is relevant – and therefore meaningful to them. This study suggests that for interaction with peers to be perceived as meaningful by accelerator participants, the accelerator needs to recruit entrepreneurs in a similar situation. Participants' comments suggest that for nascent social entrepreneurs it is the shared experience of being at a similar stage in the founding a new enterprise that is perceived as most meaningful. Although entrepreneurs tend to interact with one another on the basis of gender and shared culture/ethnicity, when they discuss the *relevance* of peer interaction a shared 'stage' of venture development takes precedence over other factors.

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Rogers' (ibid.) discussion of the role of perceived relevance on the learning process is a useful complement to Jarvis' ideas. It partly explains the 'same stage' principle of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators that is one of the contributions of this study. Nonetheless, insights from the literature on cooperative learning suggest that entrepreneurs may feel that they risk losing out, if their peers are at a different stage of development. Johnson, Johnson and Smith (2007) argue that learning is enhanced when individuals believe that their own success in learning is linked to the successful learning of their peers. They term this phenomenon "positive interdependence" and contrast it with a situation of "no interdependence". In accelerators A1 and A2 the entrepreneurs whose enterprises had reached a later stage of development (Barry and Isaac) described their learning in terms very similar to those that Johnson et al. (ibid.) use to describe a situation of no interdependence. For example, Barry (A1) described his reason for advocating a 'same stage' recruitment in the following way:

"I think it's good if you're at the same stage. If someone is commercialising and someone else is... well, I guess you could learn from one another, but then you'll be completely uninterested in each other's problems."

Johnson et al. (2007) characterise learning in a context of no interdependence as "a situation in which individuals perceive that they can reach their goal regardless of whether other individuals in the situation attain or do not attain their goals" (ibid., p.17). In A1, veteran social entrepreneur Barry interacted with his peers at a level similar to that exhibited by the other entrepreneurs, even if he commented that he received very little back apart from inspiration. In A2, Isaac (also a 'veteran') was forced to rely on his mentor and on visiting speakers for new learning. In contrast to Barry however, he was less inclined to engage in interactions where he felt that he was more often on the 'giving', rather than the 'receiving' end.

Entrepreneurs' comments on their interactions with one another suggest that the literature on cooperative learning may provide future studies of accelerators with important insights. In particular, the notion of positive cathexis (the "investment of positive psychological energy in objects outside of oneself") appears to be useful (Johnson & Johnson 2007, p.17). A more complete account of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators might be created if Jarvis' ideas are complemented with those of Revan's (1969) – on the role of meaning and relevance in education – and with the ideas of cooperative learning scholars. These additions appear to offer credible explanations of the underlying psychological factors that affect learning in the context of a group (or cohort) of learners.

By adding detail to the conceptual scaffolding described at the beginning of this chapter, it is now possible to refine the part of the initial figure that was labelled

“The Entrepreneur”. My discussion of the impact of entrepreneurs’ life-worlds on the accelerator process suggests that it is problematic to model accelerators from the perspective of a single individual. Instead it is more useful to focus on the characteristics of the *cohort*. Consequently, the initial scaffolding can now be modified to take this understanding into account (see figure 5.2).

Figure 5.2 illustrates my suggestion that some characteristics of accelerator cohorts are more important than others and furthermore, that they influence outcomes in different ways. The black horizontal bars indicate factors that relate primarily to the potential for peers to contribute to the development of other participants’ ventures. [Shared] *stage* is printed in bold to emphasize its overriding importance in stimulating peer interaction that relates to venture development. The white horizontal bars indicate cohort characteristics that were observed to influence the probability of peers forming bonds that facilitated effective interaction – and hence, learning. It is important to note however, that some of these factors are less universal in operation and may only be important when other factors come into play. Gender for example, did not appear to have a significant impact in the first accelerator (which was ethnically more homogeneous than the two subsequent cohorts). It appeared to have more of an impact in the second and third programmes – while in the second accelerator gender and culture coincided, making it difficult to know which of the two factors had the most impact on the group dynamic.

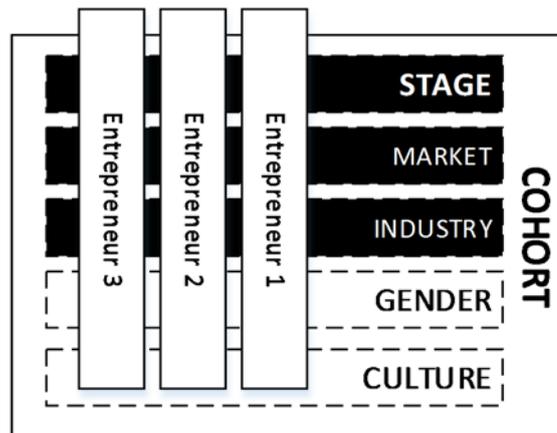


Figure 5-2: Entrepreneurial characteristics that influence interaction in accelerator cohorts

To summarise therefore: initial experiences of commonality (gender, culture, ethnicity) appear to provide a basic, yet clearly significant foundation for peer interaction. These basic sources of commonality represent the first ‘stage’ of a two-stage learning ‘rocket’ where the contribution of peers to the second stage

(effective venture development) is primarily influenced by the experience of being at a similar stage of venture development.

5.3 The Perceived Task

Boud and Walker (1991, p. 15) suggest that among adult learners, *intent* has a significant impact on learning – providing “a particular orientation within a given situation [...] a reason why learners come to the particular learning event [...] a particular focus of consciousness: the direction of our perception along particular lines”. Entrepreneurship scholars discuss among other things the development of the intent to start a new venture (Krueger, 2009a; Mair & Noboa, 2006), but these discussions tend to focus on a more macro, long-term vision of venturing. Although there were some exceptions in the *Booster* accelerators (for example: Edward A2), the majority of participants had already developed an intent to found an enterprise. Consequently, they were participating in the programme with the overall intent to found a social enterprise – but came to the accelerator with a more specific *task* (or set of tasks) in mind. For example: to connect with investors, write a business plan or develop some aspect of their venture.

Interviews with accelerator participants suggest that the tasks entrepreneurs have in mind as they enter the programme have a significant impact on the accelerator process. This was particularly apparent with regards to some of the A2 participants with a background in African NGOs. Several of these entrepreneurs apparently believed that in Scandinavia funding and investment would be easy to obtain. Consequently, when asked about their needs, concerns and expectations in an early focus group; fundraising, investment and the setting up of an office in Scandinavia (to nurture funders/investors) were among the entrepreneurs’ priorities. For example:

Isaac: “I need to get assistance on how to set up office presence in Scandinavia and use it as a gateway to access funding from Europe.”

Nelson: “To get connected to funders and investors for my project.”

These expectations contrasted with the needs identified by other entrepreneurs in A1 and A2. These participants focused more on outcomes that had to do with learning and networking – even if they did not omit the investment aspect altogether. For example:

Catrin (A1): “Business model, individual coaching, writing grant applications (prioritised); marketing to customers, product/service design, networking, team-building, leadership (useful, but not a priority).”

Jamal (A2): "To get help with the business plan. To get interaction and reflections from fellow participants and others. To establish business partnership and connections. To get information about available funding."

Hjorth (2013) suggest that fourth generation incubators make heavy demands on the skills of their management teams, who he portrays as institutional entrepreneurs attempting to cater to the particular needs of each incubatee. The managers in the *Booster* accelerators were faced with similar challenges as they met a diverse set of expectations from the social entrepreneurs in each programme. Consequently it emerged that an important managerial task was that of 'managing expectations'. Although managers had attempted to do this during the recruitment process, in A2 in particular it was clear that they had been unable to do so. Consequently, they were faced with the uncomfortable task of bring several of the entrepreneurs 'down to earth'. As the A2 manager Karen commented:

"When you talk to Lewis he comes with a lot of different inputs, but I still have the feeling that he... it's a bit of a Utopia, he sees that which he wants above all else."

The matching of entrepreneurs' expectations with the capacity of the accelerator and the characteristics of the entrepreneurial ecosystem seems to be important, as not all entrepreneurs were able to come to terms with the reality of the accelerator offering. Lewis for example, was highly critical of the A2 accelerator's failure to take care of participants' practical issues (such as cooking) – and halfway through the programme he was clearly concerned at the prospect of finishing the accelerator with 'only' his learning as an outcome:

"We have to move forward and really get the required financing to start the business, because it would be... self-defeating, if out of this we go without financing the business."

After leaving the accelerator Lewis appeared to cut himself off from *NSE* and the other social entrepreneurs, with the exception of Isaac – ignoring requests for interviews and the one-year follow-up questionnaire. He represents perhaps the most extreme example of how expectations affect entrepreneurs' attitudes to the accelerator, even if traces of disappointment over the difficulty of raising investment are found in several other interviews. During the A2 accelerator, managers were acutely aware of the African entrepreneurs' unrealistic expectations with regards to finding investment – and they discussed and attempted to manage these. With the benefit of hindsight however, it is possible to see that other A2 entrepreneurs also had expectations of the accelerator that were not fulfilled – for example: with regards to the quality of interaction

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between entrepreneurs. Heidi and Marie were particularly concerned about the failure of the cohort to provide a high level of peer coaching, but their expectations were not managed as actively by accelerator managers as those of the ‘funding-oriented’ participants.

What is important to understand about the task-orientation of entrepreneurs is that it appears to influence their participation in the accelerator. It is difficult to isolate the effect of entrepreneurs’ expectations on the accelerator process from the impact of other factors such as the practical concerns in A2. Nonetheless, the task-orientation of participants did seem to have an impact on the way in which entrepreneurs approached the programme. Nelson for example, seemed to perceive the entrepreneurial task during the accelerator as primarily one of sourcing funding. Lewis seemed to be intent on sourcing funding, but was also keen to increase the legitimacy of his venture and hoped to develop his business skills. Subsequently, in the accelerator environment, Nelson appeared less keen to maximise his learning in seminars – even if he seemed to ‘wake up’ now and again, when a subject he perceived as particularly relevant came up. Lewis took copious notes during seminars and even recorded many of them – but neither of the two appeared particularly interested in contributing to other entrepreneurs’ ventures, nor of taking on board ideas from the other social entrepreneurs. In week 7 of A2 I made the following field note after a chat with accelerator manager Karen:

“The strain of running the accelerator (and participating in it) is showing and Karen is very tired and feels unable to live up to the diverse expectations of the entrepreneurs. She commented that she is finding the behaviour and attitudes of two entrepreneurs (Lewis and Isaac) especially irritating, as they seem unable/unwilling to take feedback, despite being good at providing it for others.”

The apparent ‘disengagement’ of some entrepreneurs in A2 was something that irritated not only the accelerator managers, but also other entrepreneurs. This irritation was not only an emotional burden, but also affected the learning of other accelerator participants and their willingness to engage with the rest of the cohort in an inclusive manner. Marie’s experience in A2 has already been described (section 4.4.2), but Heidi (A2) also described similar feelings. However, she added an account of her *strategy* for coping with her irritation:

“I was getting quite frustrated at the beginning [...] and I mean it doesn’t really have anything to do with me so it shouldn’t really bother me, but when everyone’s just talking about funding and... connecting with people and I was like ‘did you *read* any of the emails? Have you *looked* at the website? [laugh] This *isn’t* what it’s about, you know’. Or for me that’s not what it’s about”.

“But I've got over it basically. Whenever we have the seminars and people they... their phone's still going off, people are on their computer the whole time. And I just sit in the front, so I can't see them and then... whatever, if they're looking bored and not paying attention and whatever, I'll just do the best that I can to get as much as I can out of it.”

These quotations illustrate primarily the negative impact that other entrepreneurs' attitudes can have on the learning environment of the accelerator. Naturally, when entrepreneurs display a positive attitude the learning environment improves dramatically, both in the seminar sessions and often in the more informal peer-to-peer interaction. Entrepreneurs' disillusioned comments in week 4 of A2 contrast for example, with Rebecca's comment in week 4 of the third accelerator:

“In a few weeks we have become like siblings!”

Naturally, when accelerator participants were irritated with one another they were less likely to interact with those whom they found irritating. The entrepreneurs did not explicitly describe avoiding other participants or 'freezing them out' – but by asking them who they tended to talk to *most*, clear patterns of interaction and 'non-interaction' surfaced. Entrepreneurs tended to talk to those individuals who they felt were attentive and learning-oriented – and also receptive to others' ideas. Conversely, they seldom described interacting with those individuals who they portrayed as arrogant, disinterested and concerned only with the progress of their own ventures. Entrepreneurs' understandings of their 'primary task' in the accelerator appeared to affect their engagement in seminars and with their peers – and as a result, their own learning and that of others. Importantly, there is a possibility that as entrepreneurs progress through the accelerator they may come to view their primary task differently. However, this was not obvious in the *Booster* accelerator, even if entrepreneurs (such as Isaac) – who were initially sceptical of programme activities – came to appreciate them more as time went by.

When the content of the above paragraphs is summarised in graphic form, I suggest that in the accelerator context, Boud and Walker's (1991) 'intent' is more accurately captured by the term 'perceived task'. The *entrepreneurs'* understandings of what they wish to achieve through the accelerator affects their attitude to learning and towards their peers. This relationship and the new factor 'attitude' is depicted in figure 5.3 and expanded on further in the next section.

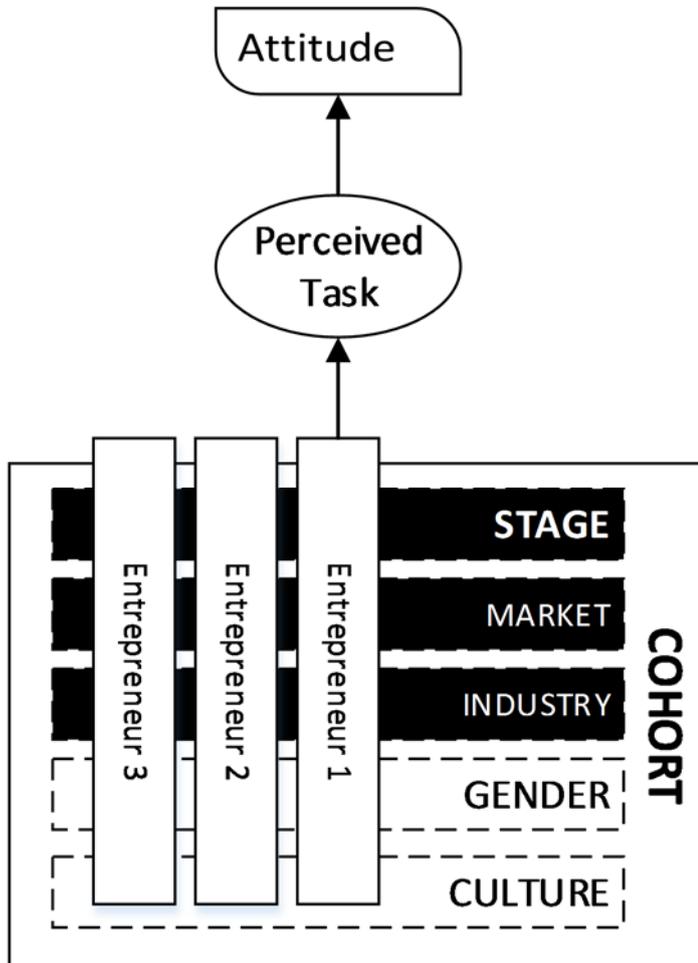


Figure 5-3: An expanded model of factors that influence entrepreneurs' participation in the education process

5.4 Perceptions of Value and Effectiveness

In the above paragraphs I have described the impact of entrepreneurs' perceptions of the task at hand on their attitudes towards learning and interaction. My interviews and observations of the three *Booster* accelerators suggest however, that 'perceived task' is not the only factor that influences attitude. Two other factors also appear to influence entrepreneurs' attitudes: the way in which they view programme content and their perceptions of their peers.

5.4.1 Perceived Value of Content

As with entrepreneurs' understandings of their primary task during the accelerator, interviews suggest that participants' views of the value of the *educational* content of the accelerator can vary as the programme progresses. However, to a certain extent it also appears that attitudes to the content of the accelerator were influenced not so much by the confidence of the participants in their own abilities, but rather by the position they chose to adopt to the content. Barry (A1) was one of the most experienced entrepreneurs, yet appeared to be very open to new ideas and to the critiquing of his venture by individuals with less experience than himself. A similar attitude was displayed by Peter (A2) who despite having been through the *St. Clara* programme described his attitude in the following way:

"I'm open to learning, so I didn't have that [a low patch]. Everything to me counts [...] when you reflect over it, take what is relevant and leave what is not relevant. So when I was coming, I came empty. So everything that you give me it's like – I come like an empty car. You go to a fuel station, they put gasoline in you, once the car is full, you go."

Isaac (A2) and Lewis (A2) in contrast, were more critical of the educational content of the accelerator – and their first impressions may have been influenced by the fact that it was a woman running the programme¹¹³. Consequently, and in contrast to his fellow 'veteran' Barry (who attended most of the seminars), Isaac was initially clearly selective with regards to the seminars he attended. However, with time his sceptical attitude changed and he came to appreciate the content of the accelerator more, as Karen describes:

"I talked to him in the second week and said I completely understood that he had made quite a lot more progress than most of them and has a lot of education and that maybe all the lectures won't give that much [...] Then he said 'No problem, don't worry about that.' I said that we would understand if he felt he had to go home to take care of business.

Then he said he wanted to stay, because he gets a lot out of this and has found another perspective – that there are other ways of finding funding then just applying for development aid."

¹¹³ During A2 some of the entrepreneurs suggested that the reason some of their colleagues were sceptical of the content was due to the managing of the accelerator by a woman. The possibility of this interpretation being correct is supported by the (positive) comment of another African entrepreneur in A3, who during the first week expressed surprise that such a good programme had been put together by a female team.

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The data gathered in the three accelerators suggests that entrepreneurs display four basic types of attitudes/behaviour, with regards to interacting with the formal educational activities of the programme. Firstly, less experienced ‘innocent’ participants such as Gabriella (A1) found *everything* interesting:

“My idea was a little aside in my working life. Now thanks to Booster, the project is more alive than ever. I could not have reached so much information and so much interesting feedback from people with the right knowledge, if I had kept on working on my own.”

A second type of behaviour was displayed by more experienced entrepreneurs such as Peter, Marie and Edward (‘knowledgeable improvisers’ and ‘confident entrants’). They appeared to attend most of the sessions, but paid more attention to new material (Peter: “you reflect over it, take what is relevant and leave what is not relevant”). The *most* experienced entrepreneurs (‘veterans’ Barry, Isaac and possibly Lewis) displayed a third type of behaviour, in that were more selective with regards to accelerator content and often chose to skip a session in order to concentrate on other tasks. Nonetheless, experience (i.e. familiarity with the content on offer) does not entirely explain the attitudes of *all* of the entrepreneurs towards the programme content. Social entrepreneurs who perceived their primary task at the accelerator to be that of sourcing funding (Nelson, Isaac and Lewis) often displayed a fourth type of attitude/behaviour, namely a general disinterest in the content of seminars, regardless of topic.

5.4.2 Perceived Value of Cohort

Social entrepreneurs’ attitudes to the accelerator programme appeared to be influenced not only by their perceptions of their primary task and the value of the programme’s educational content, but also by their initial perceptions of the value of their peers. In all the accelerators, entrepreneurs naturally came to value interaction with certain of their peers more than others. For example: in a focus group in the final week of A1, Barry talked about Catrin’s venture being most similar to his own and therefore the most interesting for him. Nonetheless, in both A1 and A3 entrepreneurs’ attitudes to the accelerator seemed to be influenced by their assumption that *everybody* in the cohort was of value and in a position to contribute to one another’s’ ventures. Although entrepreneurs did not explicitly voice this assumption, the inclusive atmosphere of trust described by Henrik (A1) seems to take this for granted:

“I think it’s [the accelerator] been very good for all of us, especially as we all trust each other. We were very open to one another in Booster and that was fantastic.”

As noted earlier, the atmosphere in A2 contrasted greatly with that in A1 and A3. In trying to identify the reasons for this difference, it appears that one root of disunity was the attitudes of some of the entrepreneurs to one another. In particular there appeared to be a social divide among the African entrepreneurs, based on the status attached to Isaac and Lewis' experience in large projects and the United Nations. Both men were at pains to describe their previous experience of top management in the introductory sessions of week one – and Lewis emphasized that he was at the same 'level' as Isaac in a subsequent interview:

"Somebody that I have interacted with, based on his background, is Isaac. Me and him have been consultants: community development, training and also public health areas, so we've had a lot of commonalities. [...] and those commonalities really are relating our experiences at a different level."

"We [Isaac and Lewis] interact a lot and we really look at issues and we share a lot. Not that I don't want to share with others. You always find someone at your level."

The positioning by Isaac and Lewis of themselves at the 'top' of the entrepreneurial pecking-order in the A2 accelerator, was not appreciated by other entrepreneurs. Many individuals found this positioning offensive, particularly those at the 'bottom' – such as Peter, who continued to farm part-time despite graduation from university. Peter described the tension in the group in the following manner:

"Something else... people are bossy, others want to show that they *know* a little bit. I don't like that crap, so as I told you I'm to myself. But I'll not talk it out, I will not share, I will just..."

(Duncan): "Ignore it?"

"Yeah. Ignore it. Which is common, I think that I've seen that it is common in our group. We have people who want to be high... and then others, you know, want to be like [makes 'stuck up' noises] and you're like: 'All right, okay, but that's you!' We all have different... characters."

The significance of the perceived positioning of individuals in the group is important, not so much because it is 'good' or 'bad' behaviour – but rather because of its impact on the group dynamic. In A2 it was clear that, in contrast to A1, there was very little venture-oriented peer-to-peer interaction when the entire cohort was present. At a check-in in week seven I made the following observation:

"The entrepreneurs responded with total silence to Karen's question about their business plans and looking around the room, there were quite a few

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folded arms (Kenny, Lewis: suggesting a closed, defensive attitude?). Karen appeared to unconsciously reflect this attitude as she in turn folded her arms as she continued to speak. Jamal made a few non-committed comments, as did Heidi – and Jamal’s role as one of the spokesmen for the group was clear. Nelson was busy on his computer Skyping, but stopped after about 10 minutes as the discussion became more engaging.”

To a certain extent the above observation may reflect the ‘roller-coaster’ nature of the accelerator process. Accelerator managers commented on the challenge of managing the unpredictable emotional ‘swings’ in the cohort – pointing out that a few evenings before the awkward discussion described above, the group had celebrated Isaac’s birthday in an apparently cheerful manner. Nevertheless, Peter’s comments suggest that one of the sources of the underlying tension in the group was the perception of several entrepreneurs that they were not ‘valued’ by Isaac and Lewis. As noted previously, Karen also felt that the pair was willing to *give* feedback to others, but not to receive it. It appears therefore that an attitude of ‘give and take’ is important, if a “dialogic culture focused on learning” is to develop among the accelerator cohort (Hjorth, 2013, p. 38). This reciprocity in turn appears to build on the perception among entrepreneurs, that all of their peers have at least something useful to contribute. Where this attitude is missing, the evidence from A2 suggests that the cohort rapidly splinters into smaller constellations of peers.

When the factors discussed in the above paragraphs are included in my graphic portrayal of the accelerator process, detail is added to the additional component of ‘attitude’ that was added in the last section (see figure 5.4). In the context of the TCP incubator Hjorth (2013) emphasized the need for potential incubatees to display “coachability” during the screening process. This aspect is clearly part of the attitudinal component of the entrepreneur’s ‘life world’ as they enter accelerators. However, although it may only be necessary for entrepreneurs in incubators to display openness to learning from managers and other ‘senior’ incubator figures – in accelerators there appears to be a need for entrepreneurs to display an openness to learning from other individuals in the cohort.

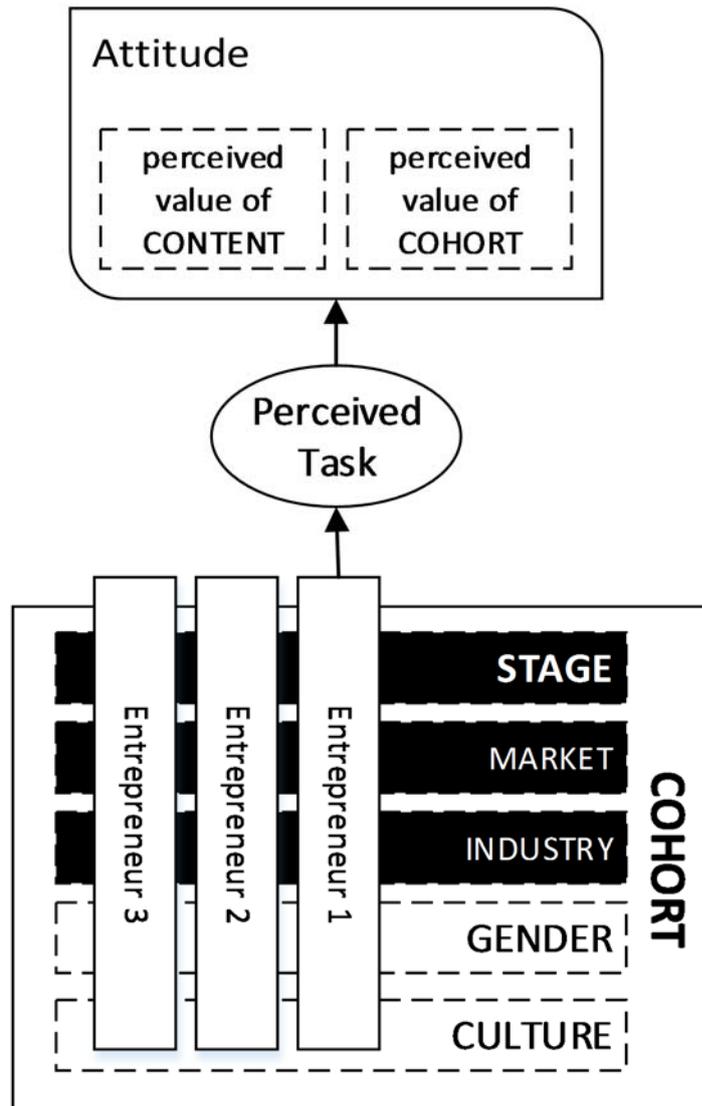


Figure 5-4: Factors that influence entrepreneurs' attitudes towards learning-oriented activities in accelerators

5.5 Splace for Learning

In his study of the TCP incubator, Hjorth (2013) concludes by suggesting that future incubators will become effective by focusing on ‘space’ rather than ‘place’. In other words on the ‘climate’ of the programme, rather than the location of entrepreneurs in a physical location. While I agree with this emphasis, my study strongly suggests that it is not easy to disconnect the one from the other. In this section I discuss various aspects of the ‘space’ created for social entrepreneurs by the *Booster* accelerator. To begin with my discussion focuses on the ‘climatic’ or ‘cultural’ aspects of the programme, but as I progress it will become clear how the physical, material aspects of ‘place’ make themselves felt. Consequently, a key implication of this section is that effective accelerators succeed by working with ‘splace’. “Splace” is a term used by architecture student Paul Hajian (1982, p. 3) to discuss “the qualities of the places we love, those essences that make space place”. However it is a term also used by Flossie Peitsch (2012, p. 260), who defines it among other things as a “context within which one can construct meaning”. Peitsch cites human geographer Edward Relph (1976) in arguing for the inseparability of place and space. Relph argues that “however we feel or know or explain space, there is always some associated sense or concept of place” (Relph 1976 cited in Peitsch, 2012, p. 258). As will be seen in the following paragraphs, the evidence collected in this study suggests that Relph’s observation is accurate.

From the perspective of learning theory, I suggested in chapter two that a key objective in non-formal entrepreneurship education is the creation and resolution of disjuncture. This infers that accelerator design needs to focus on facilitating situations that help entrepreneurs experience these two processes. However, it is important to recognise that learning is not the only goal of accelerators. The ‘focus’ part of the accelerator contribution centres as much on enhancing the entrepreneur’s ability to devote time and effort to their venture, as it does on learning. To coin Hjorth’s (2013, p.51) term, it is important to create “space” for both learning *and* doing. Similarly, although learning about the ‘who’ is part of the networking ingredient in accelerators, it is not the only part. Consequently, accelerator design usually involves a compromise between several different objectives, only one of which is learning.

In this section most of the answers to research question two¹¹⁴ are developed. However, as will become clear in later sections it is difficult to completely isolate the impact of accelerator design from other factors. The ‘people’ factor addressed

¹¹⁴ In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs influenced by the non-human ‘objects’ (primarily educational design) that are associated with entrepreneurship education in accelerators?

by research question three¹¹⁵ is especially important; as mentors, coaches, managers and peers provide the ‘filling’ for the various ‘vessels’ that make up accelerator design. On the one hand it is possible to depict the activities of these four groups of individuals by means of the structured diagrams – or schedules – of accelerator activities (see section 4.3.3). At the same time it is important to remember that these individuals are independent agents who sometimes behave in an unpredictable manner within this frame. As will be seen, they may even create their own frames. Nonetheless, in this section accelerator design is discussed based on the assumption that individuals’ behaviour *can* be managed to a certain extent – by means of (among other things) non-human, material objects. In the next section (5.6), the limits to this predictability are noted – and the impact of the ‘human’ side of accelerators discussed.

5.5.1 Managing the Formal – Non-formal mix

In chapter two I noted La Belle’s (1982) argument that both formal and non-formal contexts of learning typically include some of the characteristics of all three emphases (formal, non-formal and informal). This suggestion is mirrored in the *Booster* programme, where there it is possible to identify several core ‘formal’ activities (primarily the regular lectures and the obligatory assignments), interspersed with non-formal and informal activities. In chapter four I described how the *Booster* programme generally follows the traditional accelerator educational model of ‘lecture by expert’, followed by ‘individual coaching by expert’ and ‘application by individual’. Lectures are held at specific times for the whole group (mirroring the educational model of formal settings), but from then on the educational process becomes increasingly that of non-formal contexts of learning. In the individual coaching session with the ‘expert’, the entrepreneur and the session speaker have an equal say in what is brought up for discussion. After this session the onus is entirely on the entrepreneur with regards to *what* to focus on from the session – and *when* to focus on this content (if at all). This progression from an expert-driven process to one that is learner-driven is depicted in figure 5.5.

The lower part of the figure – depicting the gradual move from expert-driven to learner-driven learning at the ‘micro’ level in the accelerator – can also be used to model the accelerator process from a more macro perspective. Although this progression was never entirely achieved in the *Booster* accelerators in terms of formal design, in practice managers tended to ‘relax’ their expectations of entrepreneurs as the accelerator progressed – with regards to lecture attendance

¹¹⁵ In which ways is the learning of social entrepreneurs influenced by their interaction with the different human actors within accelerators (managers, mentors, coaches and peers)?

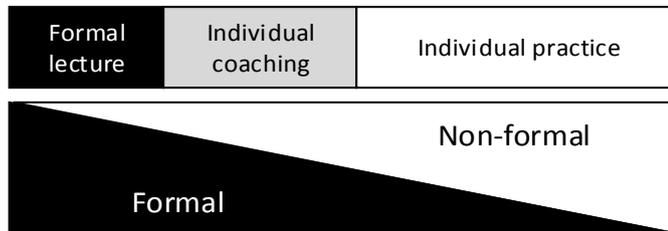


Figure 5-5: The move from a formal to a non-formal learning orientation

and even assignments. Entrepreneurs were expected to attend all activities in the first four to five weeks of the accelerator. However, as managers became more aware of the status of entrepreneurs' ventures and of their particular development needs, this expectation was toned down. In some cases an effort was also made to arrange extra sessions to cover emergent learning needs that had not been foreseen at the start of the programme. Marie (A2) suggests that this progression from general to specific is important:

"Towards the end you didn't want to have those general lectures, but rather to dig into the details. Then it might have been better to have been able to choose what you wanted help with. After a while perhaps you could tailor it a little more. The basics to start with, work with the basics for the first three weeks and then specialise in whatever you feel you need the most."

A similar process of refinement also appears to be necessary as the accelerator progresses, in terms of the intensity of the more 'formal' programme ingredients (such as lectures and individual coaching sessions). In accelerator one in particular, managers were forced to revise the programme schedule towards the end of the accelerator – in the face of entrepreneurs' protests that they were no longer able to fit the accelerator 'puzzle' together. It was apparent that a series of accelerator activities (assignments, networking and venture development activities) peaked during the last two to three weeks of the programme – and that few entrepreneurs could cope with this pressure.

From a theoretical perspective, the impact of the intensive nature of accelerator programmes on learning may be explained by reference to several processes – and in particular to the twin processes of creating and resolving dissonance. Jarvis (1987) emphasizes the idea that for learning to occur, individuals must first recognise the existence of dissonance and secondly, respond to it. In his discussion of 'non-learning' in non-formal educational settings, he suggests that when practitioners have "too many commitments" they may be prevented from

considering the lessons available to them in a learning situation (ibid., p.139). He terms this type of non-learning “non-consideration”. This type of non-learning is reflected in entrepreneurs’ descriptions of their experiences in accelerators – and it has important implications for programme design. To begin with, it underlines the importance of striking an appropriate balance between the creation of dissonance and its resolution. Entrepreneurs make it clear that they can only cope with a limited amount of information during their short ‘stay’ at the accelerator, even if it is unclear as to what this limit is¹¹⁶. In order for learning to be effective therefore, it appears that accelerators first of all need to be designed so that the most strategic areas of dissonance are brought to the attention of entrepreneurs. However, programmes also need to be designed so that it is realistically possible for entrepreneurs to both consider dissonance *and* resolve it. Furthermore, this process of learning needs to be designed so that it occupies a space in the accelerator that is proportionate to other tasks, such as networking or the practicalities of venture development. As Barry (A1) makes clear, if this balance is not achieved, accelerator activities begin to compete with one another:

“In a lecture, it’s not just if it’s boring that I think about other things, it’s almost the opposite. It *has* to be inspiring, because if it’s boring I start to think about my to-do list and so on”.

Entrepreneurs’ experience seems to suggest that accelerators need to be designed in a manner that facilitates significant experiences of dissonance early on in the programme, or at least in the first four to five weeks (assuming an eight-week programme). This design parameter would theoretically allow for accelerator staff to support entrepreneurs in resolving this dissonance during the remainder of the programme. It may also be important to compartmentalise ‘packages of dissonance’ to particular periods of time in the accelerator programme. This possibility is discussed further in the section ‘forests and trees’.

The above paragraphs describe how the *Booster* accelerator programmes are designed to facilitate a learning process that progresses from being primarily expert-driven to being increasingly learner-driven. This can give the impression of an increasingly unstructured learning environment, but this is only true to a certain extent. At the end of A1 several entrepreneurs suggested that future accelerators incorporate clearer, obligatory ‘assignments’ into the programme. Even ‘veteran’ managers such as Barry underlined the usefulness of being given ‘homework’ and the important role played by having someone else follow up on it:

¹¹⁶ And naturally, the limit can be expected to vary between individuals.

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“I would suggest that you look at the model [name of a Scandinavian incubator] has for its startup course, with meetings once a week that are very intense, followed by homework until next week’s session. Then the next session is started with a review of the homework and discussions around it”.

Comments such as these led accelerator managers to be clearer about their expectations of entrepreneurs in subsequent programmes – expectations that specified both *what* needed to be achieved and by *when* it needed to be done. When asked about their feelings about this apparently formal, ‘school-like’ ingredient in the otherwise non-formal learning environment, entrepreneurs were without exception positive. As Rebecca (A3) commented¹¹⁷:

“At the end of the day we are looking at a situation where it’s benefiting my enterprise. So... everything should have a time limit. Because you cannot tell me ‘Okay, you send me your business plan after going back to East Africa’. It would be a different setting”.

“We achieve, but in our own kind of sluggish way. You might say that within a week – but within a week, which particular day? So I really appreciate that about our programme and I think it’s something positive, if you’re to progress.”

The *Booster* entrepreneurs emphasized the role that structure played in keeping them on target and helping them make progress. Several entrepreneurs also commented on the probability of tasks *not* getting done in their home environments. Consequently, it appears that accelerators first of all facilitate learning by creating space for the transformation of experience through *action*. Accelerators provide space for entrepreneurs to do things that they never get round to doing in the everyday lives of their startups – and this action is frequently associated with learning. Importantly however, the character of the space that accelerators create is initially *structured* and not simply empty. Furthermore, programme structure is not based entirely on educators ideas of what needs to be learned (a formal learning environment), nor only on entrepreneurs’ instincts about what they need to learn (a learner-driven, informal context). Instead, learning space in accelerators is non-formal in character, striking a delicate balance between the experience of educators and the needs of the nascent venture.

¹¹⁷ Rebecca made these comments in two different interviews, with four weeks between them – suggesting that for her, this was an important characteristic of the accelerator.

5.5.2 Working with the 'Forest' and the 'Trees'

A comment made by entrepreneurs in all of the accelerators had to do with the difficulty of working on so many different areas of their ventures at once. The intensive nature of the *Booster* programme often resulted in several speakers visiting the accelerator in a single week and at times giving lectures on very different aspects of social entrepreneurship. This was especially so in A1. In A2 and A3 it was possible to plan speakers' visits more strategically – but at the same time, managers also decided to invite speakers back to the accelerator after two to three weeks. The spacing of their visits was intended to give the entrepreneurs time to put into practice what had been taught in the first session, so that speakers had more 'material' to work with on their return. In both A1 and A2 however, entrepreneurs complained that the design of the programme tended to 'splinter' their attention. As a result they had trouble in remembering the content of earlier sessions and experienced difficulty in making progress with so many 'balls' in the air at once. Barry (A1) therefore recommended that *NSE* adopt the more modular approach he had experienced in another startup course:

"It frees up time for everyone to work on their ideas and develop them further with the new knowledge that has been acquired, before starting the next subject/session/lesson".

From a theoretical perspective, entrepreneurs' comments suggest that substantial thought needs to go into the timing and number of educational activities that focus on the creation of disjuncture. Clearly, during the *Booster* accelerator social entrepreneurs experienced a series of disjunctures in a relatively short period of time, yet felt unable to resolve all of them to their satisfaction. Cohen (2013a) describes a similar experience of "mentor overload" in her study of 'general technology' accelerators in North America. Indeed, it seems probable that it was this 'peppering' of participants with experiences of disjuncture, that led to almost all of the entrepreneurs describing their experience of the accelerator as 'intense'. In A1 Henrik made it clear that he associated "lots and lots of information" with physical tiredness and a risk of "burn-out". Kenny's colourful comments in A2 also suggest that the intensity of the accelerator may not always be conducive to effective learning:

"Here... [referring to weeks 6-8 on his diagram of the stress levels in the accelerator] too many deadlines, too much rush, too many... it creates this [making rapid banging noise]. Until now I've not recovered!"

As noted before, a major challenge in accelerators is to create an effective balance between the recognition of disjuncture and its resolution. Entrepreneurs' comments suggest however, that this process is not only a question of quantity, but also of balance and structure. In other words: although it may not be possible to completely 'isolate' the different activities of a nascent venture from one

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another, most participants agreed that it was helpful to focus on one area at a time and as far as possible, to ‘finish’ that area before moving on to a new area.

Entrepreneurs’ comments about the importance of ‘compartmentalising’ learning appear to be in tension with one of the contributions they associated with the accelerator, namely: the development of an overview of their ventures and insight into their ‘place’ in society. This perspective seems to emerge in three distinct ways. First of all, accelerator participants (particularly in A1) increasingly came to understand themselves as part of a global movement of social entrepreneurs. In A1 more sessions were devoted to introducing social entrepreneurship as a specific category of entrepreneurship and it was clear that several entrepreneurs incorporated this ‘message’ into their own identities. At times the development of a social entrepreneurial identity was ‘reactive’ in character and grounded in frustration with what they perceived as the ineffectiveness of other solutions to societal challenges (such as charities). For example, early on in A1 Gabriella commented:

“I worked all the time with NGOs and in Argentina, they still work with the same system of funding and they have to look for money, sometimes money comes, sometimes it doesn’t”.

“All my friends in Argentina [...] I send my projects or my posters that they ask me to do – as NGOs. I sent a letter to one of them and asked, ‘do you know what a social entrepreneur is? Because now I’m a part of it!’ (laugh)”

The development of a social entrepreneurial identity illustrated by Gabriella’s comment emerged primarily in A1 and reflects aspects of what Etienne Wenger (1998) terms a ‘community of practice’. Nevertheless, Gabriella’s development of identity was unusually ‘reactive’ in character. Other A1 participants (such as Henrik) discussed the development of a social entrepreneurial identity more in terms of discovering a ‘label’ for their activities (“the understanding about what it is we are doing”). Interestingly, in A2 fewer sessions focused on providing entrepreneurs with a background in social entrepreneurship and participants rarely commented on their status as social entrepreneurs. This implies that accelerators are able to influence the way in which entrepreneurs ‘frame’ themselves and their ventures. In terms of design therefore, accelerators can give participants a sense of being part of a bigger movement by helping them interact with both other members of their cohort and more experienced social entrepreneurs. In *Booster*, meetings with the latter often took place at ‘events’, such as the social entrepreneurship evenings at *SocNet*. Nonetheless, it appears that greater impact is achieved by combining the experience of meeting other social entrepreneurs with factual sessions that explain this experience.

The second way in which the *Booster* accelerators helped entrepreneurs gain a perspective on their enterprises, was by providing them with the tools to see their

ventures as a ‘whole’, as opposed to only seeing parts of it – and in particular those parts that demanded attention. Heidi (A2) for example, describes both what tends to happen in the everyday life of a startup and the difference the accelerator programme makes:

“You really need to... take time with these things. And that’s why it’s really good to be here. Because otherwise, you can say, ‘I need a communications strategy. I’m going to communicate, okay. That’s my strategy!’ (laugh) But here, then you really have to think what... even if you don’t write it down, have a... You know? It needs to be... cohesive and go with all your business, all these things.”

Heidi’s comment illustrates the ‘focus’ contribution of accelerators, in that she describes how the programme forced her to focus attention on important areas of her venture, for a long enough period to make a difference. Interviews with other entrepreneurs (for example: Marie-A2) suggest that accelerators’ provision of *time* is an important factor in enabling participants to get to grips with the details of their ventures, while also attempting to see the ‘bigger picture’. ‘Focus’ is therefore a factor that is both liberating and constricting in its effects. Entrepreneurs are ‘freed’ *from* the pressures of their every-day venture operations, but at the same time they are freed *to* a fairly stringent set of requirements and expectations. They are not only expected to spend time developing the nitty-gritty ‘pieces’ of their ventures – but furthermore, to assemble all these pieces together in a single, cohesive unit. Many of the *Booster* entrepreneurs found the ‘business model canvas’ tool helpful in integrating the diverse set of narrow themes addressed by visiting experts. By introducing this tool at an early stage in the accelerator, managers provided entrepreneurs with what David Ausubel (1960) terms an “advance organiser”. However as noted earlier, participants¹¹⁸ also underlined the role of the visits by practicing entrepreneurs in helping them ‘capture’ the essence of their enterprises.

Entrepreneurs’ experiences suggest that for optimal learning to occur in accelerators, they need to be designed in a manner that constantly cycles between the ‘forest’ and the ‘trees’. As learning theorist Winifred Hill (1997, p. 150) comments: “Given the complexity of structure [...] there is a constant danger of not seeing the forest for the trees, of [...] missing the most important aspect of what one is trying to learn”. In accelerators entrepreneurs need to be able to work on specific aspects of their ventures, without losing their sense of the bigger picture. Nonetheless, the bigger picture of the enterprise is one that not only exists in the present, but also in the future – implying that there is a need for entrepreneurs to manage what Barbara Bird (1995, p. 59) terms “temporal tension”. Experiences from *Booster* suggest that it is relatively easy to help

¹¹⁸ For example: Marie (A2).

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entrepreneurs with specific areas of venture development, primarily through visits by experts in those fields. Support in achieving an impression of the venture as a whole is a more difficult task and seems to be achieved by a combination of factors, including material tools that help create ‘wholes’ (such as business model canvas) and ‘structure-breaking’ visits by experienced entrepreneurs. This suggests that the creation of ‘forest’ is not only achieved by ‘advance’ organisers as suggested by scholars such as Ausubel (ibid.), but also by ‘ex post facto’ organisers. That is: individuals or tools that help entrepreneurs place previous episodes of learning into context. These aspects of accelerator design resemble the sensemaking strategies discussed by Weick (1995), who also emphasizes the ‘backwards looking’ character of learning.

The third way in which the *NSE* programme helped accelerator participants gain perspective was by enabling them to see alternative courses of action. Often entrepreneurs came to the accelerator ‘locked into’ a particular mindset or course of action, but left with an understanding that a broader set of alternatives existed. As Marie commented in A2:

“I became aware of different roads that I could take, with regards to how you can... I haven’t applied for any money, but still you see ‘Yes, there are actually these possibilities...’ Yes, a bit like that.”

In terms of design, the generation of alternative courses of action seems to be an ‘instinctive’ contribution of accelerators. Simply by coming in from their ‘islands’ entrepreneurs are exposed to a large number of alternative models – whether in theoretical terms (options presented by experts) or through the practical examples they are exposed to. The latter examples are often seen in the accelerator cohort, or in entrepreneurs that visit the accelerator – or to whom the cohort pays a visit. Naturally, mentors and other entrepreneurs may also suggest alternative courses of action, as individual entrepreneurs interact with the various actors present in the accelerator ‘ecosystem’.

5.5.3 *Managing the Dynamics of Place – and Space*

Although I have characterised accelerator programmes as non-formal contexts for entrepreneurial learning, it is clear from entrepreneurs’ experiences that significant amounts of learning also take place in informal settings. Marswick and Watkins (2001, p. 25) suggest that informal learning “may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner”. In the *Booster* accelerators, important contexts in which this type of learning occurred were the areas in which entrepreneurs interacted when they were not participating in formal accelerator activities. For example: *SocNet* and their accommodation. Despite the ‘learner-driven’ character of informal learning, it is important to note that

accelerator activities can be designed to facilitate informal learning, by providing conducive environments and opportunities for entrepreneurs to interact effectively with one another. *Booster* managers recognised the need for consciously promoting interaction in each of the accelerators, but initially underestimated the need to promote interaction *throughout* the programme – and even afterwards. This insight is reflected in the inclusion of team-building sessions at the beginning of each accelerator, sessions that were however phased out as the programme progressed. Marie (A2) was especially critical of this omission:

“There was nothing [interaction] scheduled and nobody wanted it. I think it’s both the group and the [accelerator] leadership. [...] If we are to be able to give stuff to one another, then you have to put it into the schedule.”

Marie’s comment suggests that interaction is not only a result of effective design, but also entrepreneurs’ attitudes (more of this in the next section). It does appear however, that because interaction is one of the prerequisites for informal learning, in the *Booster* accelerators more effort could have been made to facilitate interaction among entrepreneurs in the later stages of the accelerator.

When it comes to the impact of the *SocNet* ‘space’ on informal learning the entrepreneurs’ comments were generally positive. This suggests that the placing of accelerator participants in an environment conducive to interaction with like-minded peers was an effective strategy for enhancing learning. As noted earlier however, learning is only one of several goals associated with accelerators. Consequently, several entrepreneurs described the *SocNet* environment as being conducive to interaction, but not to concentrated work (such as writing a business plan). In a focus group that discussed the role played by *SocNet*; Edward, Catrin and Alice (A1) described its function in the following manner:

“I would say it was good to have that space, but it didn’t really work for me or for us. To sit there really getting things done.” (Edward)

“So quite often, if I go to SocNet it’s because I know I don’t have really focused, serious work to do.” (Catrin)

“The whole atmosphere is still very much inviting – for just the fact that you’re like, standing up and not sitting, like... so most people will feel they can approach you and start talking.” (Alice)

What the above quotes do not clarify is the dynamic interplay between the *SocNet* environment and entrepreneurs’ interactions with others. Many entrepreneurs worked from their accommodation when they wished to ‘get things done’. Naturally therefore, towards the end of the accelerator – as deadlines approached and they were trying to complete tasks – they tended to spend less time at *SocNet*

and more time in their accommodation. This in turn reduced the amount of interaction they were exposed to. In A3 this tendency was apparent as early as week four, with Nadia commenting that s/he wished there were more scheduled activities at *SocNet*. Her response when I asked her to explain why (“this would commit people to come here and to work more here”) suggests that many of the *Booster* entrepreneurs were already conducting a large proportion of their work from their accommodation. Nadia was not sharing accommodation with the other A3 entrepreneurs and clearly felt that her interaction with the cohort was reduced by this behaviour. From a design perspective therefore, the trend described above suggests that as accelerators progress, it becomes increasingly necessary for managers to consciously facilitate informal learning.

In the first accelerator the question of accommodation appeared to be a non-issue. The cohort was fairly homogenous in terms of ethnicity and background, and the social entrepreneurs interacted well with one another in formal, non-formal and informal settings. In the second and third accelerators, it became clear that ‘secondary’ space¹¹⁹ had a greater impact on interaction than was anticipated. In particular it was clear that the ‘borders’ created by accommodation often carried over into the cohort, reinforcing differences of ethnicity and gender. In A2 this provoked the creation of at least two sub-groups within the cohort, based primarily on ethnicity (the Africans and the ‘other’s). In A3, the cohort also displayed a tendency to interact on the basis of sub-groups, even if this behaviour was less obvious than in A2 and was based on both gender and ethnicity. The development of the group dynamic in both A2 and A3 strongly suggests however, that the design of ‘secondary’ spaces such as accommodation has a significant impact on interaction – and consequently, on informal learning.

The idea that physical spaces can influence entrepreneurs’ learning fits well with the experiences of the entrepreneurs studied by Hjorth (2013) in the TPC incubator. Physical space at TPC was characterised as un conducive to creativity and networking¹²⁰ – and manager Debora noted that she was forced to “broker” relationships between participants “due to the logistics of space” (Hjorth, 2013, p. 28). Hjorth only discusses the impact of what I term ‘primary’ space in his study – and interestingly, suggests that managers need to emphasize ‘space’ over ‘place’. I agree with the logic underlying his suggestion and it is worth noting that Susan Smith (2011) also prefer to discuss learning in terms of socially constructed ‘spaces’, rather than in relation to physical ‘place’. However, both the *Booster* experience and his own study at TPC strongly suggest that in many contexts it is

¹¹⁹ This term assumes that *SocNet* can be referred to as ‘primary’ space. Susan Smith (2011) suggests that spaces are ‘enacted’ by learners and consequently does not discuss place and space in the same manner I do. Her concept of ‘social space’ is however, very similar to what I term ‘secondary’ space.

¹²⁰ An entrepreneur commented: “I don’t spend much time here, because the place itself is dead boring” (Hjorth 2013, p.33).

difficult to create ‘space’ for entrepreneurial development, without taking into account the impact of physical ‘place’. Consequently, in the next section I add ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ [physical] spaces to my diagram of the accelerator process¹²¹, as factors that provide a setting for programme activities. Interaction does not take place in a vacuum, but in particular physical environments that influence the character and outcomes of the accelerator process.

5.5.4 The Dual Nature of Time

Until now I have discussed ‘space’ in terms of the physical environments in which accelerator activities take place. The locations associated with accelerators can either *facilitate* interaction (by locating the programme at *SocNet* accelerator participants were able to interact with a larger group of social entrepreneurs) – or they may *constrain* interaction (entrepreneurs’ interactions were shaped along gender lines at their apartments). Nonetheless, it is also possible to conceptualise space as a *temporal* phenomenon that facilitates and constrains entrepreneurs’ activities, in a less obvious – yet just as effective manner – as physical space.

Hallen et al. (2013) suggest that from a theoretical perspective, the short duration of accelerators has the potential to affect entrepreneurial development *negatively*, both in terms of learning and tie formation. My study confirms this to a certain extent, as several entrepreneurs make it clear that the pressure to make progress during a limited period of time affected their behaviour. In A1 for example, entrepreneurs asked managers to remove planned sessions so that they could devote more time to completing key aspects of their ventures (such as business plans). Entrepreneurs also displayed a tendency to spend more time by themselves in the last weeks of the accelerator, in order to complete tasks. This move by the social entrepreneurs back towards their ‘islands’ could mean that opportunities for learning are lost – *if* we assume that interaction with experts and peers is the primary vehicle of learning in accelerators. However, it is also possible that by engaging in practical work entrepreneurs may still be engaging in the resolution of disjunctures created in earlier stages of the accelerator. From the perspective of Jarvis (1987) therefore, it is possible that entrepreneurs resolve disjuncture *through action* in the latter stages of accelerators. In other words, although opportunities for the creation of disjuncture appear to become fewer as the accelerator progresses, this does not mean that learning has ceased. Instead, it is possible that different types of learning characterise different stages of the accelerator. The creation of disjuncture and its resolution through reflection and emotion may characterise the earlier stages (weeks one to five), with the resolution of disjuncture through practice becoming increasingly dominant as the accelerator progresses (weeks six to eight).

¹²¹ See figure 5.6.

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Despite Hallen et al.'s (ibid.) suggestion that the short duration of accelerators may affect entrepreneurs' performance negatively, the experiences of the *Booster* social entrepreneurs suggest that 'time' has primarily a positive impact on venture development. Almost all the entrepreneurs commented on the importance of being able to dedicate time to the development of their startups – time they would not otherwise have made available. As Jamal (A2) commented:

"I think I was given enough time to develop the idea, work on my business plan and so on, so it's given me quite a lot."

The suggestion by Hallen et al. (2013) - that entrepreneurs in accelerators may engage in sub-optimal learning - is based on the idea that if they had not participated in the accelerator, they might have learned other things during the same period. Social entrepreneurs' reflections after the *Booster* accelerator however, suggest that the learning that takes place in accelerators is qualitatively different from the learning that takes place in the day-to-day life of nascent social entrepreneurs. This difference is emphasized by Barry (A1) who was surprised by it:

"It wasn't conscious, but I notice it now when I'm sitting here on this course [...] there are parts of my brain that are otherwise far too inactive that relax and cut loose."

As noted earlier, some scholars have suggested that the ties formed in accelerators may be too weak to be of any use in transferring significant learning among participants. This study suggests however, that although this may be a risk, many entrepreneurs were able to develop surprisingly 'thick' ties during the eight week programme – and that these ties did not thicken only towards the end of the accelerator, but relatively early on¹²². My findings are therefore more similar to those of Cohen (2013b) – whose study noted that peer bonds in accelerators form quickly, but deeply.

What I found surprising in the *Booster* experience, is the short-term nature of the ties formed during the accelerator. For the entrepreneurs interviewed by Hallen et al. (2013), the expanded network facilitated by the accelerator was a key long-term contribution¹²³. Although it is too early to assess the impact of the A3 programme, follow-ups of the first two accelerators suggest that entrepreneurs were able to form relationships of surprising intensity in a short period of time – but that they maintained very few of these relationships after the programme. This may be a result of the global nature of the *Booster* cohorts when compared

¹²² Rebecca's (A3) quote reflects the speed of this process: "In a few weeks we have become like siblings!"

¹²³ For example, one entrepreneur is quoted as saying: "The network is the thing that's really lasted."

to the cohorts of more traditional accelerators, but could also be linked to the perception of *NSE* staff that they did not have the resources needed to help graduates keep in touch with one another.

From a design perspective, the experiences of the *Booster* entrepreneurs suggest that managers need to be aware of how time influences entrepreneurs' learning. Knowing that the pressure of time influences entrepreneurs to interact less with one another towards the end of a programme, might lead managers to include more structured forms of interaction during this period and to reduce the number of formal, content-oriented activities. Understanding time as a resource might also lead managers to structure programmes in such a way as to provide entrepreneurs with sufficient time to accomplish key objectives, such as business plans. On this note it is worth reflecting on the fact that several of the social entrepreneurs (Peter, Nelson and Willis) were participating in an accelerator for the second time. When I asked Willis why, he said that he needed to participate in at least two programmes in order to gain a more complete understanding of the concepts they introduced. His comment lends weight to my earlier suggestion that there seems to be a limit to the amount of knowledge participants can absorb, during the duration of an accelerator.

When the time factor is included in my conceptual 'scaffold' it is possible to depict its dual nature (i.e. as both a source of stress and as a resource) in the manner depicted in figure 5.6. In the figure, the multi-faceted nature of 'entrepreneurial learning space' is first of all depicted by locating the vital *process* of learning 'as a whole person' (through emotion, action and reflection) at the core of the overall context for learning. Learning takes place through the experience and resolution of disjuncture, but is always situated not only in temporal space (time) – but also in human and material¹²⁴ 'space'.

Drawing on Smith (2011) I suggest that 'space' in accelerators is oriented towards dialogue, reflection, community-building and action. Smith suggests that four 'human' concepts of learning space exist and proposes a further concept, that of "peripheral space". However, she does not identify what I term 'action-oriented space'. I omit the former category and add the latter one, based on my interpretation of the empirical data gathered during my study. Smith also uses the term "social space" to refer to what I term 'space for community building'. The development of 'human space' is discussed in more detail in section 5.6. Before that however, I will briefly comment on the impact of pedagogy on entrepreneurial learning in accelerators.

¹²⁴ Material space could also be referred to as 'place', but I retain the term 'space' to emphasize that it is one of several types of 'space', all of which enhance or detract from the entrepreneur's ability to learn.

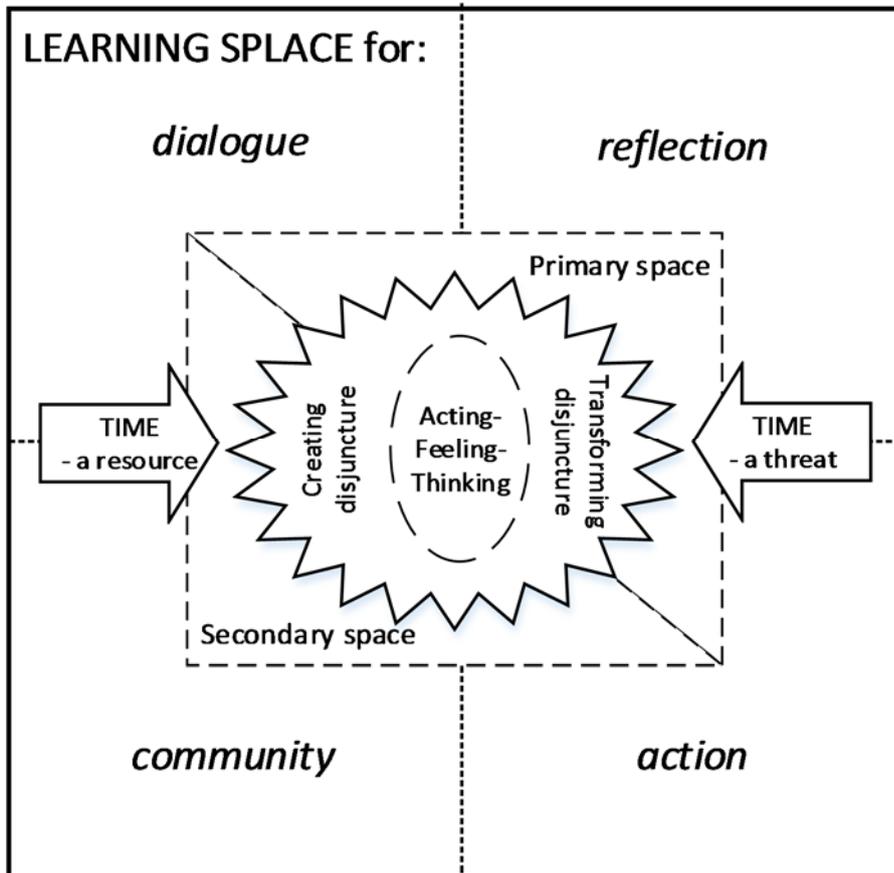


Figure 5-6: A model of learning 'splace' in accelerators, depicting the interplay of 'human' space, time, and primary and secondary physical space.

5.5.5 Pedagogy for Nascent Social Entrepreneurs

Initial impressions of entrepreneurs' comments about the learning process in the *Booster* accelerators seem to support the general mood of opinion among scholars of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial learning. That is: the idea that learning for and in entrepreneurship is most effective when it is based on an experiential philosophy. Entrepreneurs were often critical of speakers who they felt spent too much time talking about theoretical concepts, rather than practical application. When discussing how to improve the accelerator in an A1 focus-group, Edward made a comment that illustrates this:

“More individual coaching I think. Maybe fewer lectures, more individual coaching and above all... lectures versus workshops. Like some speakers we’d rather have had in a workshop. So that instead of talking, act¹²⁵. Jackie for example: good lectures, but I would rather have had her in a workshop where we sort of worked with our... business models.”

Comments such as the above were common and suggest that in accelerators, relatively short lecture sessions – followed by practice and coaching, are often effective in achieving knowledge-oriented objectives. Several of the social entrepreneurs from developing countries had relatively short experiences of formal education (i.e. primary and secondary school, and college or university). These individuals appeared to ‘switch off’ in lectures earlier than their peers, suggesting that an even more appropriate structure might have been a series of concept-practice ‘sandwiches’. In other words: the structuring of instruction so that a lecture that would normally be given in a single one-hour session, would instead be given in four fifteen minute portions – with each part followed by practical work, coaching and discussion. Such a didactical strategy would take into account Gagné’s ‘conditions of learning’ concept, which refers to (among other factors), “the initial capabilities of the learner” (Gagné, 1984, p. 21).

Despite entrepreneurs’ clear preference for action-oriented learning, their comments suggest that it is important not to confuse their demand for relevance with a preference for a form of education based on ‘do, then reflect’ – nor with a desire for basic skills training. In A1 an attempt was made to structure entrepreneurs’ learning by means of weekly reflections, but few participants were willing to structure their learning in this (for them) artificial manner. As Alice commented:

“Personally I would still cut down on the reflection part. But again, I’m giving it a chance to prove itself useful before disregarding it actively [...] this is very new and somewhat uncomfortable for my way of working”.

In section 2.1.3 I noted that several scholars suggest that effective entrepreneurship education should be based on strategies such as those of the ‘reflective practitioner’ or ‘action learning’. Entrepreneurs’ comments do not contradict these recommendations, but they do modify them somewhat. Instead of following a clear ‘act then reflect’ cycle (the reflection on action of Argyris & Schön, 1978), the *Booster* entrepreneurs seemed to engage in both activities simultaneously. Their practice seems to be more accurately reflected by Schön’s (1983) later discussion of how professionals reflect *in* action. In A2 I was fascinated by Nelson’s account of his learning process during a lecture¹²⁶. He

¹²⁵ The Scandinavian [sic] word used here can also be translated as “do!”.

¹²⁶ There is no audio recording of this account, but I made a note of it shortly afterwards.

described how he listened to the lecture (apparently drifting in and out, attention-wise), while working on his website and asking questions of his mentor at the same time, via email (during this particular session his mentor was online. During a period of no more than two hours, four to six emails that referred to modifications he was making to his website (as he received input from the lecture) were sent – and responded to. This illustrates the capacity many *Booster* entrepreneurs seemed to have, for ‘thinking on their feet’: evaluating new knowledge, applying it to their ventures and then re-evaluating it – in quick succession.

Interviews with entrepreneurs suggest that a philosophy of experiential education does not necessarily require the emphasis of primary experience over secondary (or vicarious) experience. The acquisition of practical skills and the reinforcement of operations-oriented knowledge (such as financial analyses) seemed to be facilitated by educational structures that interwove the acquisition of new knowledge with its application. In other words: education based on what Jarvis (2010) terms ‘primary’ experience. Nonetheless, knowledge that seemed to play a more *strategic* role in venture development (such as a move towards hybridity or the development of a social value proposition), seemed to be acquired through both primary and secondary experience. This infers that what practicing social entrepreneurs evaluate in the context of education, is not so much the mode of education (learning by doing or learning from others), but rather its *relevance*. This supports Gibb’s (2002) advocacy of a ‘need-oriented’ educational strategy when working with practicing entrepreneurs.

To scholars familiar with the practices of entrepreneurs and small business owners, Gibb’s educational strategy may appear self-evident. Nevertheless, this study contributes to our understanding of what nascent entrepreneurs mean by the term ‘relevance’. First of all, it is important to understand that ‘relevant’ is an adjective that is subjective, rather than objective in character. A coach or mentor may look at the entrepreneur’s venture and identify a specific contact or body of knowledge as of relevance. However, if the entrepreneurs themselves do not consider this input useful, then from an educational perspective, the input has not yet achieved the relevance necessary to catch their attention. Furthermore, entrepreneurs are not that different from other adults and consequently, as Boud and Walker (1991) suggest, relevance is largely determined by purpose (or intent). If an entrepreneur arrives at an accelerator primarily in order to raise investment, they are unlikely to pay attention to managers’ suggestions that they contact someone with valuable technical experience – unless somebody can convince them that this contact is aligned with their intentions. Alternatively, it may also be possible to support entrepreneurs in *expanding their intentions* and consequently, the ‘filters’ that define what is and is not relevant to them.

Two final factors that seems to strengthen or weaken entrepreneurs' perceptions of relevance; have to do with credibility, and emotion and empathy. The *Booster* entrepreneurs appeared to assess speakers from both a cognitive and emotional standpoint. With regards to the cognitive aspect they seemed to prioritise speaker 'credibility' above the 'plausibility' of the session content. For example: in A3 an external speaker held a session entitled 'social, environmental and corporate governance'. She had a background in large organisations and the A3 entrepreneurs were unanimous in critiquing the session for being too theoretical and too distant from their own experience. They did not so much suggest that what she said was untrue (assessing content plausibility), but rather that it was unlikely to be useful to their own ventures – implying a perceived lack of credibility due to the contrast in context. In the *Booster* accelerators, practicing entrepreneurs often seemed to make an initial assessment of the value of a session's content, by referring to the *credibility* they attached to the speaker. Credibility appeared to be established on the basis of similarities of experience, for example: with regards to having started a venture, developed an effective product or service, and having worked in a developing country.

The above paragraph gives the impression that the assessment of speaker credibility is primarily a 'cold', cognitive process. Entrepreneurs' comments however, underline the role played by emotion in establishing credibility and hence, the potential for relevance. Kenny (A2) provides a particularly clear account of what a mentor needed to bring to the accelerator, in order to relate effectively with him:

"He will see my struggle, he will see my pains. You understand? He will understand... he will appreciate my efforts more. [...] If you don't like business, for example, I'll tell you what I've been through in my course of being an entrepreneur. You will not value it, you will think it's nonsense."

What Kenny appears to be expressing is the idea that pedagogy for nascent social entrepreneurs needs to be characterised by *empathy*. He seems to be saying that he will be more inclined to listen to individuals who make him feel understood. Indeed, the input he is appealing for seems to be almost therapeutic in nature. Meetings with experienced entrepreneurs are valued not just because they are associated with good advice at a cognitive level, but also because these individuals are more likely to not only recognise the pain associated with entrepreneurship, but also to *value* (or appreciate) it. The experience of several of the *Booster* entrepreneurs is similar to the experiences identified by Hytti and Heinonen (2013) in their discussion of identity work among academic entrepreneurs. In their study, the entrepreneurial intentions of some academic staff were often related to the extent to which experienced entrepreneurs shared their painful, yet successful experiences of starting a new firm. Kenny's comments suggest that if experienced entrepreneurs interact with accelerator participants in an empathetic

manner, they are more likely to judge their input as relevant – and consequently, are more prepared to engage in vicarious learning. This aspect of relevance is however primarily affective (or emotion-related) in nature. Furthermore, it also appears to promote the intention-oriented accelerator outcomes that I have grouped under the label ‘faith’. By discussing the pain and anxiety of social entrepreneurship, experienced entrepreneurs do not ignore the affective aspects of education. Instead, they appear to infuse the painful experiences of less-experienced entrepreneurs with *meaning*, enabling them to transform these experiences into intention and insight.

An interesting difference between the *Booster* entrepreneurs and the prospective academic entrepreneurs studied by Hytti and Heinonen (2013), is that the *Booster* entrepreneurs were rarely enthusiastic about sessions with “heroic” entrepreneurs who glossed over the challenges of entrepreneurship. In Hytti and Heinonen’s study, male academics appeared to relate more to entrepreneurs who adopted this approach in their visits – while females welcomed the more “humane” approach of entrepreneurs who were open about the problems they had faced. This contrast suggests that there is not a single, ideal pedagogy of entrepreneurship education. For example: the roles that experienced entrepreneurs are able to play in entrepreneurship education may not only be related to the *purposes* of educators (as suggested by Blenker & Christensen, 2010), but also to the characteristics of the learner. Practicing social entrepreneurs for example, appear to require experienced entrepreneurs to adopt approaches that express empathy – whereas prospective entrepreneurs (such as students) often have fewer entrepreneurial experiences for visitors to emphasize with. Clearly, an approach that is effective in the education of prospective entrepreneurs, may be less effective when working with practicing entrepreneurs – or even counterproductive.

When the non-formal character of accelerator education is linked to a recognition of the subjective nature of entrepreneurs’ perceptions of relevance, it becomes clear that a pedagogy appropriate to practicing entrepreneurs also need to be oriented towards contingency. Honig (2004) discusses the concept of contingency primarily in relation to the role of business plans in entrepreneurship education. Nonetheless, his ideas are also applicable to the more general theme of pedagogy in non-formal approaches to education (such as accelerators). Honig argues that neither entrepreneurs nor educators are able to predict a venture’s development and that venture documents (such as business plans) therefore need to be able to cope with this uncertainty. A similar argument can be made for non-formal approaches to entrepreneurship education. Managers gather extensive information about entrepreneurs’ backgrounds and about their ventures, but can never predict the exact path along which a venture will develop. They are therefore faced with the choice of either attempting to persuade entrepreneurs of the relevance of their pre-accelerator design choices (i.e. the initial, rigid

schedule of accelerator activities) – or they can attempt to accompany entrepreneurs on a somewhat less-structured journey of discovery.

In section 5.5.1 I suggested that learning in effective accelerators is characterised by a gradual move from a formal strategy of instruction to one that is non-formal. Non-formal pedagogy however, does not consist in simply abandoning entrepreneurs to an instructional ‘vacuum’. To be effective it needs to involve a deepening of the educator’s awareness of their situation and of emergent opportunities for learning. In A3 for example, as managers became more familiar with the ambitions and needs of the entrepreneurs, they arranged additional study visits for some individuals. Furthermore, although the visits of most of the speakers were scheduled before the start of the accelerator, it appears that some coaches adopted a pedagogy of ‘structured contingency’ as they worked with the entrepreneurs. Drawing on the comments entrepreneurs made about effective coaches, this strategy appeared to first of all entail the coach familiarising themselves with the entrepreneurs’ ventures *before* the visit. During their subsequent visit, as they talked about their area of expertise, this knowledge enabled them to ask ‘informed’ questions about entrepreneurs’ ventures, in relation to their topic. Often an entrepreneur’s response would align sufficiently with the topic under discussion, so as to become part of the session. In effect, coaches who adopted this pedagogical strategy were bringing a large number of figurative ‘Lego bricks’ to the educational table. Figuratively speaking, they engaged with accelerator participants by placing their bricks¹²⁷ on the table and asking the entrepreneurs to add their own bricks to the pile. Coaches would then select some of the entrepreneurs’ bricks to add their own in order to develop the topic – or add each entrepreneur’s ‘brick’ to their own, one after the other. Entrepreneurs’ comments suggest that this was an effective approach:

“It was useful. It was good that the coach made it simple and applicable for each case. It was good that she was detailed.” (Olga-A3)

“[name of coach] studied all our websites and gave hands-on tips on how to improve them.” (Nadia-A3)

The above comments illustrate the idea that a ‘contingency-oriented pedagogy’ can involve both a ‘macro’ and a ‘micro’ perspective. At the macro level, the non-formal approach allows managers to provide entrepreneurs with content that was not designed into the programme at the start of the accelerator. At the micro level the content of a session whose general theme was pre-determined varies, depending on which of the entrepreneurs’ ‘bricks’ the coach decided to build upon (and the number of bricks made available). What is important to understand in both cases is that the process and the outcomes associated with a

¹²⁷ That is: key insights or capabilities, based on their particular field of expertise.

pedagogy of contingency, are *emergent* in character. Williams, Mackness and Gumtau (2012) associate this type of learning with a paradox, in that learning is “ordered yet unpredictable”. An important contribution of this study is its identification and discussion of this unpredictability. In section 4.3.7¹²⁸ I identified the variance in accelerator outcomes, despite strong similarities in programme structure. In the next section I attempt to explain this variance, suggesting that it occurs because entrepreneurial learning in accelerators is not simply the product of management design, but instead the product of a complex process of co-creation.

5.6 Co-creating Entrepreneurial Learning

One advantage of studying a series of accelerators run by the same organisation – yet populated by different entrepreneurs – is that this research strategy facilitates a discussion of the relative impact of programme design. To use the language of Giddens (1984) it becomes easier to distinguish the impact of the ‘structure’ from that of the ‘agent’. Although the design of the *Booster* accelerators evolved to a certain extent from A1 to A3 – and despite the fact that different managers coordinated the three programmes, accelerator design was more characterised by continuity than by change. Consequently, a large part of the variance in both accelerator processes and outcomes appears to be linked to differences between the entrepreneurs who participated in them. Hallen et al. (2013) suggest that accelerators will tend to become more effective over time, as they learn to “better structure their content and activities”. To a certain extent my study supports this conjecture. However, the contrast in quality of interaction between A1 and A2 – despite a refinement in programme design – suggests that accelerator outcomes are affected by more than simply structure and networks. A key contribution made by this study is the evidence it provides for the *co-creation* of learning in accelerators. Learning is developed through the interaction of the relatively constant population of managers, mentors and coaches – with the constantly changing combinations of entrepreneurs. This process is discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5.6.1 *The Distinctive Roles of Mentors and Coaches*

In several publications (Cohen, 2013m; Hallen et al., 2013), scholars discuss entrepreneurs’ interactions with the individuals formally associated with accelerators using the single term “mentor”. Cohen for example, uses this term to describe both the single individual with whom entrepreneurs interact for the duration of the programme *and* the variety of visiting speakers¹²⁹ with whom they

¹²⁸ Similar structures, dissimilar interaction.

¹²⁹ Her “four or five mentors a day” (p.23).

interact on a one off basis. Consequently, one contribution of this study is its distinguishing of the several different types of ‘outside expert’ roles in accelerators.

In *Booster* entrepreneurs were allocated a single person upon entering the programme, whose role it was to be their personal advisor for the duration of the accelerator. Accelerator managers used the term ‘mentor’ to refer to these individuals and this is the meaning given to this term in this section. The mentor’s role was intended to be a broadly developmental one, providing the entrepreneur with someone who was uniquely dedicated to the success of their venture for at least the duration of the accelerator. Brockbank and McGill (2006) suggest that two types of developmental role are associated with this type of long-term relationship. One that focuses primarily on *identifying* opportunities for development (“development alliance”) and one that functions to *provide* opportunities (“traditional mentoring”). They suggest that both of these types fall under the general umbrella of mentoring, but that the first type is more mentee-led, while the second type tends to be more organisation-driven.

Although it is not the primary purpose of this study to discuss the different roles mentors can take on, the *Booster* mentors often tended to emphasize *one* of the above functions. Some entrepreneurs noted that their mentor’s main contribution was to provide them with useful contacts (the traditional mentor role, according to Brockbank and McGill). Other mentors focused more on helping entrepreneurs develop themselves or their ventures, by means of ‘awareness-raising dialogue’ (the development alliance model) – and some mentors contributed in both areas.

In addition to the individuals that follow entrepreneurs throughout the duration of the programme; accelerators usually recruit a second, larger group of experts. These individuals interact with entrepreneurs at specific points during the accelerator and provide them with expert advice on a particular part of their ventures (for example: financial management or marketing). Brockbank and McGill (2006) suggest that, in common with long-term mentoring activities, short-term developmental interaction can also be distinguished as either person-oriented or organisation-led. They term person-oriented interventions “counselling” and suggest that it relates primarily to problem-solving. Organisation-led processes are termed “coaching” and focus mainly on skills development.

In the *Booster* accelerators, visitors to the programme could be seen to fulfil both of the above roles and frequently this was facilitated by the design of accelerator activities. A typical visit by an ‘expert’ began with a lecture-type session of instruction that was designed to improve entrepreneurs’ skills in a certain area (the coaching role). In a subsequent session (usually in the afternoon of the same

day), the expert met with the entrepreneurs individually to discuss the application of the skills introduced in the previous session, in their particular context. This follow-up session was typically characterised by an approach that focused on application and problem-solving (the counselling role). Despite the two different roles taken on by short-term visitors, it appears nevertheless that they engaged in a very different kind of interaction with accelerator entrepreneurs than that engaged in by mentors. 'Expert' visitors to accelerators tended to ignore the 'forest' of the entrepreneur's venture and devoted their attention almost entirely to their own particular 'tree'. Indeed one entrepreneur commented wryly that each visitor appeared to think that their own particular area was the most important. Mentors on the other hand appear more able to assist entrepreneurs in ascertaining the relative importance of each expert's contribution to the particular needs of the startup.

In view of the differences discussed in the above paragraphs, I suggest that it is important to distinguish between the role of long-term¹³⁰ mentor and short-term expert. I suggest that the term 'mentor' be used to refer *only* to the individuals allocated to entrepreneurs for the duration of the accelerator, for the purpose of venture development. This is in keeping with contemporary scholarly practice in the fields of psychology and leadership. The use of the term however, should not ignore the fact that mentors can play different roles in venture development. Previously I suggested that it is important that entrepreneurs be assisted in gaining a 'birds-eye' view of their enterprises, so that they do not become bogged down in the details of a single part of their startups. Clearly, mentors are in a unique position to assist with this task and from a theoretical perspective this role is an important ideal to strive for. In reality, not all mentors fill this role effectively and may only contribute with very specific feedback that reflects their (narrow) expertise. Their contribution may also be limited to providing contacts that enable entrepreneurs to expand their networks, and gain access to additional knowledge and resources. The most effective mix from the standpoint of the social entrepreneur, appears to be one where mentors support entrepreneurs' learning in both ways. That is: learning not only about 'who' (in order to gain access to expertise and investment), but also about 'what' and 'how' (for example: by helping them identify the value they seek to create or develop an effective business model).

I suggest that it is useful to refer to the experts that visit the accelerator for a relatively short period of time, as 'coaches'. Nonetheless, as with the mentor label, it is important to understand that coaches often engage in at least two types of role: that of problem-oriented counselling and that of skill-developing

¹³⁰ In the context of accelerators 'long-term' refers to a period that may be as short as the duration of the programme, even if some mentors continue to engage with entrepreneurs after the accelerator.

coaching. Nonetheless, when a coach is also an experienced [social] entrepreneur, these roles are often complemented by that of the role model.

Although mentors and coaches do not vary from accelerator to accelerator to the same extent as entrepreneurs in terms of personality and behaviour, it is clear from entrepreneurs' accounts that they are as much 'agents' as they are 'structure' in the programmes. What this implies, is that each meeting with a new entrepreneur – or cohort of entrepreneurs – is unique in terms of the interaction that takes place. This is particularly so with regards to mentors, who are usually chosen to 'match' specific entrepreneurs in each accelerator. As a result, several new mentors are often recruited to each new accelerator to address the particular needs of each social entrepreneur. These mentors bring new approaches to relating with the social entrepreneurs and to mentoring, which makes it difficult for managers to 'standardise' the content of mentoring. Nevertheless, even in the case of coaches, interaction may follow different patterns in each accelerator; as entrepreneurs elicit different responses from the coaches – and vice-versa. In a programme such as *Booster* (which recruits social entrepreneurs globally), the potential for variation is perhaps unusually large – as A2 demonstrated. In the second accelerator coaches interacted with two entrepreneurs with extremely different backgrounds. On the one hand, Isaac: with a university education, polished manners and long management experience in prestigious aid organisations. And on the other hand, Nelson: the ex-child soldier with little formal education, little business experience and a weak understanding of Western social codes. Although I interviewed very few coaches, entrepreneurs' accounts suggest that the way in which coaches interacted with them affected their attitudes and behaviour. For example: when Nelson describes his interaction with his mentor, he clearly describes her attitude towards him and his venture:

"Most importantly I have had my mentor who is very loving and who cares for the project that I'm running, who also has developed passion for the project and wants to work with me".

The above quote is short, but full of implications. Not only does Nelson describe his *response* to his mentor's attitude (he now considers his interaction with her to be one of the most important contributions of the accelerator), he also shows that his mentor's attitude to his venture has *developed* over the course of the accelerator ("...has developed passion"). The idea of the development of a shared passion is something discussed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) in their foundational discussion of co-creation processes. They position dialogue as a key factor in the co-creation process, but suggest that it must "center around issues of interest to both" (service providers and consumers) if it is to be effective (*ibid.*, p.9). Nelson's experience was not shared by all of the entrepreneurs, which suggests that interaction between mentors/coaches and social entrepreneurs develops differently in accelerators. This variation supports my suggestion that

programme design is just one ingredient in the accelerator process. An important second ingredient is the interaction that is co-created by the different agents in the accelerators, two of which are mentors and coaches.

5.6.2 Managers' Roles

A useful contribution of this study is its discussion of how social entrepreneurs' interaction with mentors, coaches and peers contributes to their learning. Studies of incubators (for example: Hjorth, 2013; Lichtenstein, 1992) at times emphasize the role of programme managers¹³¹ in enhancing the learning of incubatees, but pay less attention to the impact of other relationships. Naturally however, managers also influenced entrepreneurs' learning in the *Booster* accelerators. Staff took on several different roles over the three year period that is discussed in this study, but the number of staff involved in the accelerators also varied. The implications of this variation are discussed below.

The five main roles that managers in the *Booster* accelerators took on were those of *designer*, *facilitator*, *problem-solver*, *opportunitior* and *cohort cultivator*. As described in section 4.3.2, managers were responsible for designing a set of activities that would help entrepreneurs develop their ventures. This 'designer' role is worth noting, as it contrasts markedly with the prominent role played by Cohen's (2013a) "director experts" – as advisors to the entrepreneurs. In *Booster* a lot of the design work was done prior to the accelerator, but as each accelerator progressed and entrepreneurs' particular needs surfaced, there was an opportunity to customise and refine the programme. In section 5.5.1 I suggested that as time goes by in accelerators, there is often gradual shift from a formal to a non-formal learning environment. Importantly, this shift implies a change of emphasis in managers' roles. as they come to rely less on 'predicting' entrepreneurs' needs (the role of the traditional designer) – and more on obtaining an accurate impression of these needs and adapting programme design in order to create an environment conducive to their solution (the role of the facilitator). This change in roles reflects Sanders and Stappers' (2008, p. 15) discussion of "generative design thinking". These scholars discuss how co-design involves a 'mixing up' of roles and emphasize a new role for researchers and designers, as providers of "tools for ideation and expression" (p.12). In the *Booster* context, the 'emergent design' implied by this thinking was most obvious in A1 and A3, but was less apparent in A2. In the second accelerator, a third role – that of the 'problem solver' – severely limited managers' ability to engage in the facilitator role.

In A1 and A3 *NSE* was able to recruit several assistants to help with the practicalities of running the accelerator. These individuals helped with tasks that

¹³¹ See for example: Hjorth's (2013, p.46) discussion of managers as "institutional entrepreneurs".

ranged from setting up coffee breaks to booking accommodation and travel. In A3, one was even involved as a coach – while her companion coordinated the ‘networking’ side of the accelerator. In A2 however, only one assistant was initially available and the practical responsibility for the day-to-day coordination of the accelerator rested on manager Karen’s shoulders. This drop in staffing coincided with the decision to recruit social entrepreneurs from developing countries, with all the practical and cultural complications that this entailed. After the accelerator, Karen described her frustration over being forced into a ‘problem-solver’ role, which in A2 involved an apparently continuous process of ‘fire-fighting’. This role did not prevent Karen from engaging in design activities – most of which took place before the accelerator – but it did prevent her from operating effectively in the ‘facilitator’ role.

A role that is at times similar to that of the ‘problem solver’ is that of the ‘cohort cultivator’. This role is similar to the ‘group facilitator’ role described by Lichtenstein (1992) in his study of the Enterprise Development Centre¹³² (EDC) in Boston. It refers to the effort managers put in to helping entrepreneurs get to know one another and form productive relationships. In all three *Booster* accelerators managers devoted several days to proactive team-building at the *beginning* of the programme, but were criticised by several entrepreneurs in A2 for not sustaining this effort in the weeks that followed. In A2 in particular, it was difficult to maintain the initial proactive stance of ‘cultivation’ in the face of the conflicts among the entrepreneurs and managers were forced to engage in activities more similar to ‘weeding’ (i.e. conflict resolution). A3 entrepreneurs however, commented on the contribution made by managers in not only fostering good relationships (by stimulating and monitoring group processes), but also by designing for a positive group dynamic (the inclusion of a session on intercultural communication).

In my method section I discussed my own role as a ‘bearer of organisational knowledge’. This role was clearly also taken on by managers in the second and third accelerators. Managers were keen to learn from the accelerator process and to assess the relative merits of different sessions, coaches and mentors – as well as their own performance. Substantial efforts have been made to document the *Booster* processes, but naturally a great deal of tacit knowledge has been accumulated in the heads of the two managers involved in A2 and A3.

The final role that *Booster* managers clearly engaged in was that of the ‘pace-maker’ (or ‘task-master’). This role is similar to that taken on by manager June Lavelle in Lichtenstein’s (1992) study of the Fulton-Carroll incubator in Chicago. It is more directive in nature than the ‘cohort cultivator’ role and focuses on helping entrepreneurs progress through the accelerator programme. In practice

¹³² At the time of Lichtenstein’s study this was an incubator.

it involved managers engaging in activities such as asking entrepreneurs about their progress and reminding them about deadlines. At times mentors took on a similar role, but interviews clearly indicated that not all mentors adopted a 'bigger picture' perspective of the entrepreneurs' ventures – suggesting that it was important that managers took on this role.

The distinct roles and functions of managers, mentors and coaches can be conceptualised in the following way (see figure 5.7).

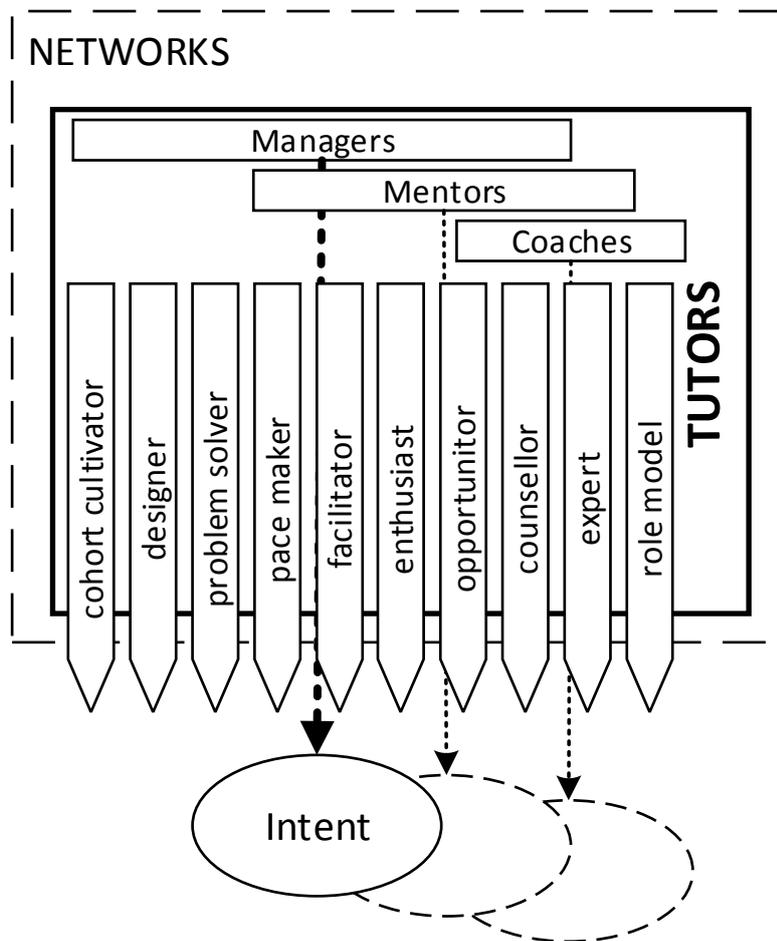


Figure 5-7: Tutor roles in the Booster Accelerators.

In this figure I note first of all the existence of three main learning-oriented actors in accelerators: managers, mentors and coaches. I label these actors “tutors”, given the orientation of the term towards educators who work with “a single pupil or a very small group” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). Although the entrepreneurial community surrounding the accelerator is not discussed in this study, it does play a role in entrepreneurial learning and is depicted in the diagram as a ‘network’ that the accelerator is embedded in. The various functions of the tutorial actors within the accelerator (for example: counselling and expert coaching) are included in the diagram. However, they are not restricted to any specific category – even if the figure reflects the tendency of managers to take on a greater *range* of roles than mentors and coaches. This reflects my observation that although some functions are more commonly associated with a particular group, at times other categories of tutor also carry out these functions. For example: although mentors often take on the ‘opportunities’ role (the provider of connections or similar opportunities for development), this role is at times taken by both managers and coaches. It is also important to note that although managers invite mentors and coaches to the accelerator, it is difficult to achieve complete agreement with regards to what should be achieved through their visits. This is represented in the diagram by the presence of a ‘shadow’ intent on the part of mentors and coaches.

5.6.3 The Impact of Cohort Characteristics on Learning

The interactions testified to by the entrepreneurs in the three *Booster* accelerators suggest that the effectiveness of accelerator education is a result not only of programme design, and the behaviour of mentors and coaches – but also of the various ways in which social entrepreneurs act (and react), as they participate in the accelerator. The diversity of ways in which individuals interact with a similar accelerator design and an apparently similar pattern of relationships, lends weight to my argument that accelerator outcomes are influenced as much by processes of co-creation, as they are by programme design. In the *Booster* accelerators at least three patterns of co-creation emerged that were particularly related to the characteristics of the entrepreneurial cohort. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

5.6.3.1 Tone-setters: the Role of Influential Individuals

In all three accelerators one or two individuals appeared to play a greater role than others in creating a particular ‘atmosphere’ within the accelerator –even if this was less pronounced in A1. In A1 Henrik appeared to play a significant role in creating a climate of cheerful energy and curiosity. In A2 two alternative climates appeared to battle for supremacy, with Marie apparently the champion of an open environment of equality and mutual engagement. The alternative climate did not appear to have a clear champion, but seemed to be characterised by one-up-manship, dissatisfaction and distrust. A3 was similar to A1 with

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regards to the positive ‘feel’ to its group dynamic, even if it at times appeared that Thomas was a little more proactive than his peers in taking steps to resolve conflict. Two pairs of similar incidents illustrate my argument that agency trumps design in the accelerator process. The first incident illustrates the vital importance of entrepreneurial agency to the accelerator process, while the second one (in the next section) illustrates the role of emotion in hindering learning.

As noted in section 4.3, in the third accelerator *NSE* staff decided to provide entrepreneurs from with a daily allowance, in order to allow them to devote more energy to the startup process and to minimise the conflicts associated with food preparation in A2. Despite these changes and a reduction in the distance between entrepreneurs’ accommodation and *SocNet*, in interviews with A3 entrepreneurs it emerged that the potential for conflict still existed. In A2 a combination of factors contributed to conflict among the large group of African entrepreneurs, one of which (the refusal of some individuals to do their share of household chores) appeared to be central. This conflict was partly resolved, but tainted the atmosphere in the accelerator for the duration of the programme. In A3 the climate in the group appeared to be energetic and cheerful, but when I discussed the group dynamic with Thomas it emerged that Willis had attempted to get Zayd and Vinay to do all his cooking for him¹³³. In contrast to A2 however, Thomas took immediate action to challenge this behaviour – apparently curtailing a pattern of interaction that could have had a negative impact on the group dynamic. Programme design in both accelerators was very similar, but the development of the climate in the cohort was affected in very different ways by the behaviour – and ‘counter behaviour’ of individual entrepreneurs.

5.6.3.2 Failing to learn: the role of emotion

In A1 and A2 two well-qualified entrepreneurs participated (Barry and Isaac), yet the two individuals were associated with very different processes. In A1 Barry adopted an attitude of openness and curiosity, apparently willing to receive feedback from entrepreneurs with far less experience than him. Although he did not get as much from the accelerator as he had hoped for, as a result of his experience he was able to make a substantial contribution to the group – and later took on the role of mentor for Gabriella. In contrast, interviews with A1 entrepreneurs suggest that Isaac was perceived as ‘too big for his boots’ by the majority of the A2 entrepreneurs. This impression influenced both the climate in the group and even managers’ attitudes towards him. Although the following quote does not refer to Isaac alone, it is clear from other interviews that he is one of the individuals ‘ignored’ by Peter:

¹³³ A strikingly similar pattern of behaviour to that displayed by some of the A2 entrepreneurs.

“Something else... people are bossy, others want to show that they *know* a little bit. I don't like that crap, so as I told you I'm to myself. But I'll not talk it out, I will not share, I will just... ignore it. Which is common, I think that I've seen that is common in our group”.

What is important in the above quote is not so much Isaac's perceived attitude, but rather the *impact* of his [perceived] attitude on other entrepreneurs' learning. Barry and Isaac were both experienced managers and it is probable that Isaac's peers in A2 could have learned as much from interacting with him, as Barry's peers did in A1. Drawing on Jarvis' theory of adult learning however, it appears that a similar experience of disjuncture (“Oh, this person knows more than me!”) generates two very different outcomes. It appears that in both cases the disjuncture is initially resolved by giving meaning to emotions¹³⁴. This suggestion is in line with Hytti and Nieminen's (2013) discussion of entrepreneurial learning. Drawing on Morris et al. (2012) they note that events produce “affective reactions” in entrepreneurs and that these reactions are linked not only levels of engagement, but are also characterised by either “positivity or negativity” (ibid., p.119). In *Booster*, Peter's language (“that crap”) clearly shows that Isaac's perceived attitude is associated with a negative meaning¹³⁵ that has effectively blocked Peter's willingness to learn from him – even if Peter naturally feels that he has learned something *about* Isaac. This example supports two arguments that I make in this study. Firstly, my submission that managers, mentors, coaches and entrepreneurs co-create accelerator processes together. And secondly, the suggestion that entrepreneurial learning is significantly influenced by emotion.

5.6.3.3 Failing to learn: the role of previous educational experiences

In section 2.2.3 I noted Le Cornu's (2005) suggestion that there is really no such thing as ‘non-learning’. Even when individuals do not form radically new interpretations of their experiences they still learn, even if this implies only the slightest reinforcement of previous interpretations. Consequently, it is perhaps more useful to coin Hallen et al.'s (2013) term “sub-optimal’ learning to refer to instances when entrepreneurs learned less than envisaged by accelerator managers, or perhaps developed different interpretations. In the *Booster* accelerators as noted previously, stress was a factor that appeared to foster sub-optimal learning – especially in the second half of the programme. However, it also appeared that entrepreneurs reacted in different ways to the non-formal environment that the accelerator provided for learning.

¹³⁴ See section 2.2.2.3 ‘Transforming experience’.

¹³⁵ This is the term Jarvis proposes. Based on their article, it is possible that Hytti and Nieminen would instead employ the term “negative affective state”.

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Non-formal learning contexts rest uncomfortably between the structured, teacher-centred expectations of formal learning environments and the unstructured, individually-determined freedom of informal learning. Furthermore, as I have noted; learning in the *Booster* accelerators tended to progress from taking place in a more structured environment, to developing in a slightly less structured form, as time went by. My impression is that this is a typical feature of accelerators and that it is also an effective design parameter, when the shift operates effectively. Most of the entrepreneurs appeared untroubled by the accelerator's non-formal approach to learning and adapted to it. This was particularly so with the more experienced entrepreneurs, who often had a clearer idea of their own capabilities and the knowledge or skills they needed to develop. Isaac (A2) described his approach to workshops and assignments in the following way:

"Sending somebody assignments through email is all theory, but the reality of it is that they can only do so much.

(Duncan): "Did you have to prioritise between them, in one way or another, or... did you sort of say, 'This one I won't do, because it's just impossible and this one is more important?'"

"Absolutely. For me, I look at first what is important for me. And I look at what is important for my business. [...] For instance, if you put me in a class where somebody is coaching the basics of budgeting, that becomes irrelevant for me. Absolutely irrelevant. I mean, it doesn't add any value to my... enterprise. So I decided to prioritise. And how I did it is by not taking certain assignments. I didn't see any relevance, quite frankly. [...] I prioritised and decided to take on only the few that mattered."

Isaac's comment suggests that he has understood the nature of non-formal learning and the importance of his own role as a conscious 'co-designer' of the learning process in the accelerator. He appears to perceive himself as having at least as much say as the accelerator managers, with regards to the tasks he engages in. He is also clearly prioritising between accelerator activities – to the point of choosing *not* to do some assignments. His attitude to education was very similar to that displayed by the entrepreneurs in A1 (who all had 'Western' backgrounds). In A2 and A3 however, many of the entrepreneurs with African backgrounds appeared more hesitant to prioritise among activities and in particular, to do so by *not* participating in a workshop or *not* completing an assignment. One explanation for this hesitancy could be entrepreneurs' perception of the accelerator as a 'formal' learning arena, similar to their previous experiences of education. Peter (A2) described this contrast in the following way:

"There is an element of practicality as in – it's hands on, that's the difference. It's hands on in terms of the mentors, the coaches, they give you

assignments. You do them, but way back some of us have been taught how to cram – you cram to pass. We are not taught how to... to do the thing your way.”

Although my impression was that Peter had adapted well to the non-formal environment of the accelerator, he commented several times, in different interviews, on the contrast between his experiences of learning at university and the approach that characterised the accelerator. My impression was that although he recognised the non-formal character of learning in the accelerator, he did not adapt to it to the extent of choosing *not* to participate in activities he found less relevant. When I asked him to identify ‘low patches’ in the accelerator he made the following comment:

“I’m open to learning, so I didn’t have that [a low patch]. Everything to me counts. Everything to me counts – but as I said, when you reflect over it, take what is relevant and leave what is not relevant. So when I came I came empty. So everything that you give me it’s like – I come like an empty car. You go to a fuel station, they put gasoline in you, once the car is full, you go.”

Peter’s comments suggest that he performed a mental ‘screening’ of accelerator activities: participating in everything, but ‘ignoring’ input he felt was less relevant. Veteran entrepreneurs Isaac (A2) and Barry (A1) however, seemed to engage not only in the mental screening described by Peter, but also in a ‘physical’ (or practical) screening. They recognised that assessing an activity as ‘irrelevant’ could have practical implications (don’t participate) – and they acted on their assessments. Both strategies appeared to be effective in helping entrepreneurs focus on the areas of greatest relevance to them, during the accelerator. What appeared to cause problems however, was the tendency of some entrepreneurs to treat a non-formal approach to learning as if it were formal. In A2, this appeared to be the reasoning underlying the behaviour of entrepreneurs such as Kenny and Steven. These entrepreneurs did not appear to assess accelerator activities in a proactive manner and instead seemed to approach workshops and assignments in a ‘school-like’ manner. As Steven commented:

“We don’t have time for interaction.”

(Duncan): “You don’t have time?”

“We have time for work, which is programmed by NSE. And when we get home we have to create time for ourselves to do our own homework.”

Steven’s comment suggests that he is framing learning in the accelerator in terms of a more formal approach (he uses the term “homework” and says that learning “is programmed by NSE”). Kenny appeared to adopt a similar perspective and both entrepreneurs seemed to view the structures for learning in the accelerator

(for example: assignments and deadlines) as taskmasters that needed to be satisfied, rather than aids to development. Consequently, they attempted to complete all the tasks assigned to them and participated in almost all of the scheduled workshops. Their approach was associated with feelings of pressure and overload, as witnessed to by Kenny's diagram of the pressure he experienced during the accelerator¹³⁶ - and by his interpretation of his drawing:

"Here [pointing to stress line on diagram]... too many deadlines, too much rush, too many... It creates this [making rapid banging noise]. Until now I've not recovered!"

My interpretation of entrepreneurs' behaviour is that previous experiences of learning can have a significant impact on the behaviour that entrepreneurs adopt in accelerators. Entrepreneurs who fail to recognise the distinction between formal and non-formal learning contexts – and who adopt a traditional student role – are less likely to distinguish between relevant and less-relevant input and to take action on their assessments. This can lead to high levels of stress, as it is usually difficult to complete *all* the tasks associated with accelerators in a satisfactory manner. Furthermore, by paying attention to 'everything', entrepreneurs are less likely to spend sufficient time on strengthening the specific areas of weakness (or strategic opportunity) associated with their particular venture.

5.7 Social Entrepreneurship and Accelerators

As I near the end of my discussion of social entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators, it is natural to ask whether there is anything 'special' about accelerators that educate social entrepreneurs. To what extent is my study relevant to accelerators that focus on for-profit ventures – and what findings are more restricted to 'social' ventures? This is a difficult question to answer with any certainty, as few studies of accelerators have 'dug below the surface' and discussed the accelerator process in detail, from the perspective of the entrepreneur. Randall Stross' (2012) account of day-to-day life in *Y Combinator* is an exception, but his account is primarily descriptive in character. Similarly, there are important differences in accelerator design and accelerator cohort, between the programme he studied and *Booster*. Despite these contrasts, there seem to be many similarities between the two accelerators with regards to process. Stross describes for example, a similar emergence of 'sub-groups' within the cohort – and *Booster* entrepreneurs would empathise with the constant pitch training that the *Y Combinator* entrepreneurs also faced. Furthermore, the critical assessment of participating enterprises is a common thread in both accounts. It also appears

¹³⁶ On Kenny's diagram the line representing stress rose rapidly towards 'high levels' from week five onwards, only dropping again in week eight.

that similar dynamics affect cohort selection. This study suggests that entrepreneurs who have clear alternatives to a career in social entrepreneurship (for example: the ‘knowledgeable improvisers’ and many of the ‘expatriate’ social entrepreneurs), may be more likely than ‘indigenous’ entrepreneurs to consider other career paths when the going gets tough. Managers at *Y Combinator* describe their recruitment strategy as focusing on twenty-five year-olds. The logic underlying this strategy revolves not around age, but because of entrepreneurs’ lack of alternative options: “no safe retreat” and “total commitment” (Stross, 2012, p. 22). Hjorth (2013) also comments on the importance of assessing entrepreneur commitment when recruiting to incubators. This study therefore contributes to our knowledge of both social entrepreneurship and accelerators, by developing our understanding of the degree of commitment associated with different categories of social entrepreneur. This knowledge can be expected to help accelerator managers recruit social entrepreneurs in a more informed manner.

The uniqueness of accelerators for social entrepreneurs appears to centre upon three different factors. The centrality of the social value proposition, the affective (or emotion-oriented) dimension of the accelerator and the move towards hybridity. Unsurprisingly, in view of the nature of social entrepreneurship, a key ingredient in *Booster* was its emphasis on helping entrepreneurs clarify, evaluate and communicate the social value they seek to create. Frequently, the issue of scaling was also addressed. These emphases can be expected to be found in other accelerators for social ventures, as the creation of social value undergirds funders’ willingness to provide ‘patient capital’ – or grants. This aspect of the *Booster* accelerators is seldom found in traditional accelerators, which tend to focus on the commercial viability of participating enterprises.

Despite the central role of the ‘social value proposition’ in accelerators for social ventures, the *Booster* experience suggests that programmes can ‘niche’ themselves by emphasising two *different* aspects of their offerings. First of all, accelerators can support entrepreneurs in clarifying their ventures’ contribution and marketing themselves. This was clearly something done at *Booster* and it is important not to under-value the accelerator’s role in helping entrepreneurs sharpen their focus. This was achieved by firstly, helping participants identify the core contribution of their ventures – and secondly, by encouraging them to channel more energy in that direction. However, a distinct contribution that accelerators *could* make (which was not quite as apparent at *Booster*) has to do with the effectiveness of ventures’ activities. In their applications entrepreneurs are asked which social challenge they are addressing, yet those who assess the applications sometimes lack the expertise necessary to judge the future impact of their products or services. For example: in the case of Steven and his library initiative (designed to help schoolchildren gain access to textbooks), the accelerator mainly focused on helping him develop a sound business plan, communication skills and convincing

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financials. Relatively little attention was paid to the foundational questions “Are libraries an effective tool for providing access to textbooks?” and “Are there better alternatives?”. Similarly, the coaching Steven received was not geared towards more effective libraries, but rather their establishment. Frequently, recruitment to the accelerator is based upon the assumption that an entrepreneur’s idea works and that by scaling it, it will provide an effective solution in a particular environment. The disadvantage of ‘global’ accelerators – in comparison to ‘local’ programmes such as *Y Combinator* – is that it is difficult for recruiters to assess the impact and viability of a product or service that is destined for an environment they are unfamiliar with.

The gist of the above paragraphs is that accelerators for social ventures are distinct from traditional programmes when it comes to their focus on the creation of social value. Furthermore, it is probable that accelerators can niche their offerings on the basis of what they emphasize within the social value ‘theme’. Are they primarily concerned with scaling up (and possibly commercialising) social ventures, or do they focus more on developing effective [social] services and products – that is: social innovation? The two emphases do not exclude one another, but accelerators may be more effective if they focus primarily on one or the other.

A second distinctive characteristic of accelerators for social ventures (based on the *Booster* experience) is the pivotal role played by ‘emotional’ learning. By this I refer to the ‘faith’ and ‘family’ outcomes of the accelerator, reflecting entrepreneurs’ accounts of how they developed confidence during the programme, became inspired and developed a social entrepreneurial identity. Nascent entrepreneurship is an ‘emotional’ affair, regardless of whether its intent is to create financial or social value (Doern & Goss, 2012). Nonetheless, Maija Renko (2013) suggests that nascent social ventures are characterised by their founders’ distinctive “affective commitment” to a particular cause or social group. She portrays this emotional ‘driver’ as more intense than the emotions associated with the startup ideas of more traditional entrepreneurs. What few scholars discuss though, is how social entrepreneurs *maintain* affective commitment – and the consequences of being unable to do so. Many of the *Booster* entrepreneurs associate the founding of a social venture in a developing country with loneliness, isolation and incomprehension on the part of other actors. Consequently, they often describe their experience of ‘leaving their island’ and participating in the accelerator, with enthusiasm – and they express concern that they will be ‘forgotten’ when the programme ends.

In the *Booster* accelerators ‘inspiration’ was an accelerator outcome that entrepreneurs commented on, regardless of category. The ‘family’ outcome (identity and belonging) in contrast, appeared to be particularly valued by entrepreneurs who felt they lacked the [social] entrepreneurial community that

the accelerator and *SocNet* represented. Both aspects however, seem to relate to the larger theme of ‘meaning’: the experience of being involved in something worth doing and of belonging to something bigger than oneself. The *Booster* accelerators therefore, appear to have functioned as ‘meaning-makers’ and ‘meaning-maintainers’ for many participants. Entrepreneurs gained energy and emotional resilience from the twin ‘messages’ expressed in most accelerator activities: “What *you* are doing is worthwhile!” and “We belong together and what *we* are doing is worthwhile!” Entrepreneurs’ comments suggest that these are not secondary accelerator outcomes, but important emotional experiences that play a significant role in helping them maintain focus and resilience.

A third distinctive outcome associated with the *Booster* accelerators is the development of a hybrid identity by many participating ventures. Although this is an outcome that not all accelerators for social ventures will produce, it would clearly be an unusual outcome in a traditional accelerator. Writing in the context of incubators, Vanderstraeten and Matthyssens (2012) suggest that enterprise support programmes can gain competitive advantage by aligning their competencies with their strategic position. In the context of social enterprise it is possible to distinguish ventures that already have a clear hybrid identity from those that are in the process of developing one (or wish to do so). This study suggests that for accelerators serving social enterprises, one ‘strategic position’ could be that of facilitating a move from a non-profit, grant-oriented identity to that of hybridity – or even full commercial viability.

5.8 There is More to Success than Learning!

A challenging outcome of my study of the *Booster* accelerators is one of its ‘secondary’ findings, namely its highlighting of the important role played by the entrepreneurial ‘ecosystem’. In section 5.7 I noted the relative isolation of social entrepreneurs in developing countries and the role played by accelerators in reducing this isolation. Nonetheless, one of the more discouraging aspects of my study relates to the difficulties experienced by ‘veteran’ entrepreneur Barry (A2). Barry seemed to have everything going for him: many years of experience in top management, openness to learning, ‘free’ R&D, an extensive network in developing countries and access to initial funding. Despite these apparent advantages, he has now returned to ‘conventional’, waged employment. In contrast, Isaac (operating in the more traditional environment of grant-funded development aid) seems to be prospering. Outcomes such as these suggest that ventures operating in the ‘middle ground’ between for-profit business and not-for-profits may be more vulnerable than enterprises that position themselves clearly in one or the other. Impact (or ‘patient’) investment is a relatively new phenomenon in Scandinavia and it appears that only a small proportion of ventures that would benefit from this type of capital are able to obtain financing.

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It is also possible to partially explain negative outcomes with reference to the wider investment climate for ‘new’ industries – such as alternative energy. While I was conducting my study the journalist Jonas Fröberg (2013) discussed the rise and fall of several ventures in the ‘cleantech’ industry. He noted that six firms had been identified as the ‘hottest’ ventures in 2008, but that only four of them were still operating with their original focus¹³⁷ in 2013. He commented:

“None of the ventures has shown a profit or been able to commercialise their product.”

Fröberg suggested that cleantech firms have difficulty in obtaining the investment necessary to scale. He also related this difficulty to the drastic reduction in investment in cleantech firms in Scandinavia, in the past decade – with Swedish investment sinking from 171 million Euros in 2009 to only 46.2 Euro in 2012. Fröberg cites an industry expert, who not only commented that it takes time to establish a new industry, but also identified the ‘catch 22’ challenge faced by the cleantech industry. That is: the difficulty of experiencing on the one hand a rise in the number of new ventures being established, while at the same time recognising private investors’ preference for investing in ventures at a later stage of development.

Although social enterprises cannot necessarily be grouped together as an ‘industry’, they do seem to face many of the challenges confronted by cleantech ventures. On the one hand, investors and funders are unfamiliar with the phenomenon of social enterprise – and this seems to be associated with a hesitancy towards investing in early-stage ventures. This idea is backed up by Renko’s (2013) study of the challenges faced by nascent social entrepreneurs. She concluded that “little support exists for those trying to make their way through the early hurdles of building new social ventures offering radically new solutions” (p.1061). At the same time, the total amount of capital available seems to be insufficient. For this reason, organisations such as the International Labour Organization (2012) underline the need for governments to improve the “business-enabling environment”, if firms are to be able to operate in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner. There is little use in third sector organisations recognising firms with honours such as the World Wildlife Foundation’s “Climate Solver” award¹³⁸, if other aspects of the entrepreneurial ecosystem do not facilitate the development of these types of enterprise.

¹³⁷ Of the remaining two: one had gone bankrupt and the other restructured into a property business.

¹³⁸ One of several awards given to Barry's product.

5.9 Modelling Social Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators

In this chapter I have developed the provisional model of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators that I introduced in chapter 2 (see figure 5.8).

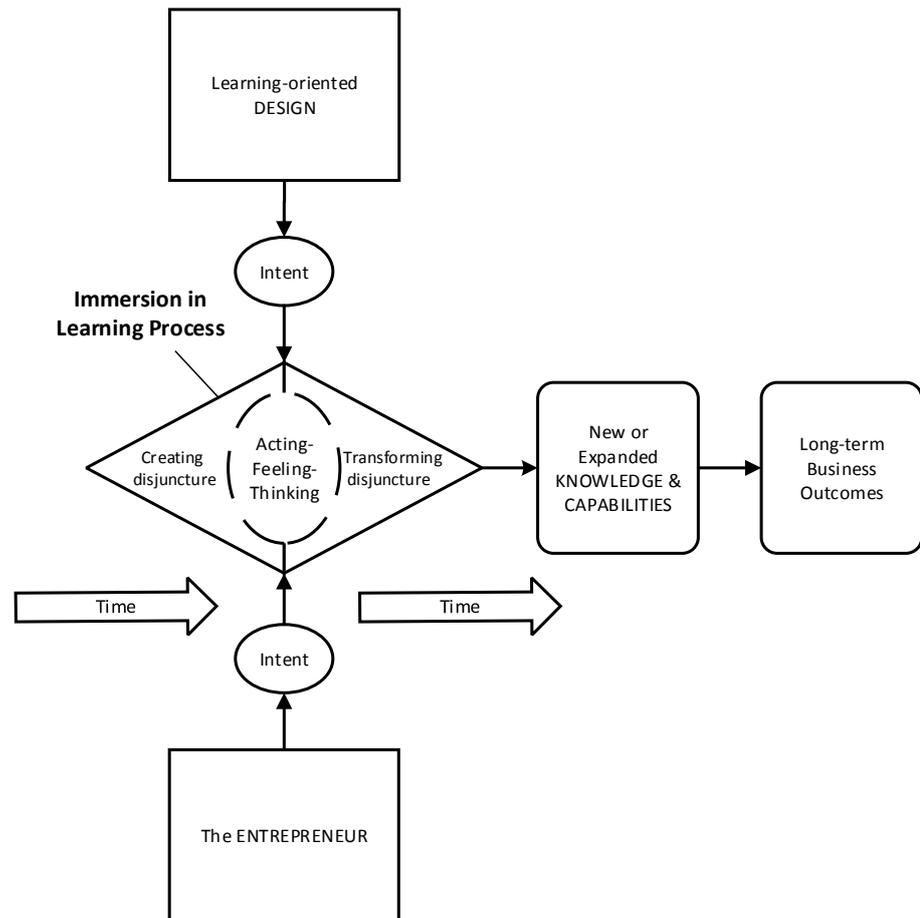


Figure 5-8: The Preliminary Model of Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators introduced in Chapter 2.

The original model was based on theories of learning derived from the literature on adult learning, entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship education. Although the original framework conceptualises the learning process in an informed manner, without studying entrepreneurs' learning in an actual accelerator it does not enable us to identify the relative impact of the factors

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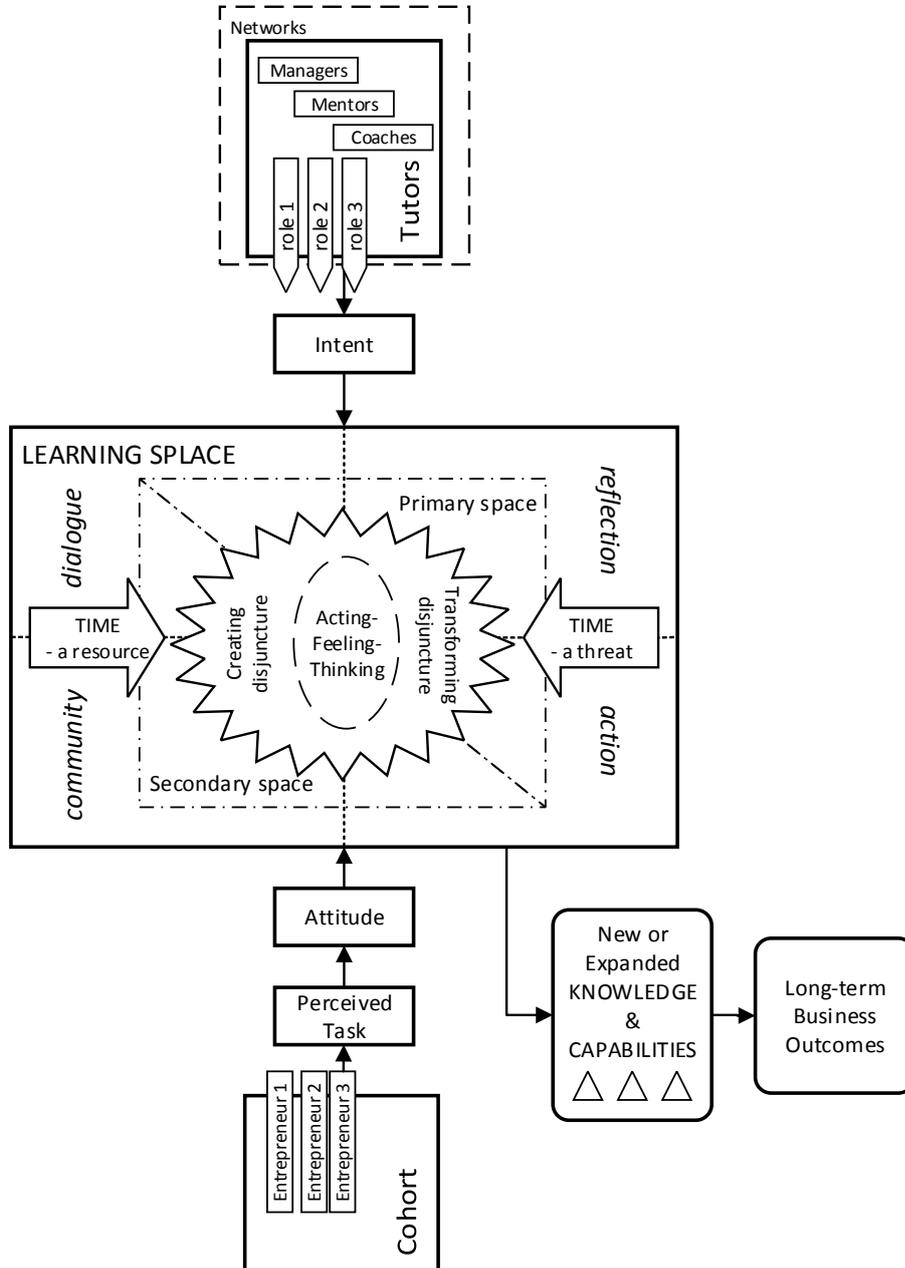


Figure 5-9: A Model of Entrepreneurial Learning in Accelerators.

involved. Nor does it provide a nuanced picture of the learning process, in relation to the *variation* that can be expected to be found in accelerators – with regards to individual factors (such as background) and firm-related factors (such as stage).

I have developed each part of the provisional model in a modular manner, adding detail to each of factors associated with the learning process. Although I cannot reproduce *all* of this detail in a single diagram, it is possible to show how my study of the *Booster* accelerators has enabled me to modify the original concept – and this development is seen in figure 5.9. As the figure shows, my empirical material has enabled me to first of all add detail to several of the components of the original diagram. For example: it is now possible to distinguish between different educator roles and I have refined the general idea of entrepreneurial intent to that of “perceived task”. More importantly however, my empirical study has enabled me to make substantial changes to my preliminary model. My understanding of entrepreneurial learning as co-created has for example, made me portray learning as a process that, despite its construction by the individual, is powerfully embedded in the accelerator cohort. Similarly, my original depiction of the learning process as primarily linked to the accelerator’s capacity to design learning experiences (the creation and transformation of disjuncture) has also changed. The revised figure reflects my new understanding of the learning process as both socially and materially ‘embedded’ (hence the term “splace”). I have also been able to distinguish several learning-related outcomes – depicted as triangles in the “new or expanded knowledge and capabilities” part of the diagram.

When the revised model of entrepreneurial learning in accelerators is related to my discussion of social entrepreneurial ‘types’ in section 4.4, it is possible to use the model to discuss *variation* in the accelerator process. My impression is that the revised model of the entrepreneurial learning process reflects entrepreneurs’ experiences in the *Booster* accelerators, regardless of entrepreneurial ‘type’ and stage. Nonetheless, because entrepreneurs entered the accelerator with dissimilar backgrounds and were at different stages of the entrepreneurial process, the factors that affected their learning took on differing levels of significance. To clarify this suggestion I discuss this idea below, with reference to two of the *Booster* entrepreneurs.

Veteran social entrepreneur Barry (A1) came to the accelerator in the hope of cultivating contacts with investors, to get ‘energy’ and to subject his venture to outside scrutiny. These expectations (represented as “perceived task” in the model), affected the manner in which he participated in the accelerator and the area(s) of ‘splace’ that were important to him. Naturally, his expectations were also linked to the roles that accelerator ‘tutors’ needed to fulfil in order for him to learn effectively. In practical terms therefore, Barry’s background and

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expectations were primarily associated with an emphasis of the “community” and “reflection” aspects of accelerator ‘space’. In view of his experience and the stage he was at in venture development, the ‘tutor’ roles that would have best matched his expectations were those of the facilitator, opportunist and expert coach.

Confident entrant Steven (A2) also came to the accelerator in the hope of finding investment, but was also eager to develop his enterprise with the help of experienced advisors. Anxious to promote the legitimacy of his venture he naturally emphasized the “community” aspects of ‘space’, while also seeking the advice of more experienced entrepreneurs (“dialogue”). As an African travelling abroad for the first time he naturally made substantial use of tutors’ roles as “problem solvers”. However, as the manager of a non-profit moving into the world of sustainable business he was also heavily dependent on tutors filling the roles of counsellor and expert coach. His decision to stay on in Scandinavia after the accelerator suggests that tutors did not fill the role of “opportunist” to his satisfaction.

In the preceding paragraphs I have not mentioned the issue of accelerator outcomes (the ten ‘F’s). It is however, reasonable to expect a match between the expectations of social entrepreneurs (their “perceived tasks”) and the type of outcome they experience in relation to their learning. For example, it was reasonable for Barry to expect to learn capabilities associated with ‘finance’ and ‘focus’ during the accelerator. He felt no need however, to engage in the learning associated with outcomes that other social entrepreneurs valued – such as ‘faith’ and ‘family’. It is nevertheless important not to over-emphasize the importance of an exact match between entrepreneurs’ expectations and the outcomes subsequently associated with their learning. One of the very foundations of learning is ‘dissonance’: an encounter with the unexpected that offers the potential for significant development. In *Booster* at least two outcomes of learning were unexpected (in terms of ‘perceived task’), but nonetheless valuable. In A1 for example, Edward’s learning was associated with the unexpected decision to abandon his startup (‘failure’). In A2 many of the African entrepreneurs came to Scandinavia perceiving their task to be that of learning who to obtain investment from (‘finance’). At the end of the accelerator however, many of them had begun an unforeseen journey towards hybrid enterprise (‘flexibility’).

When the revised model of the learning process in accelerators is considered from the perspective of ‘stage’ and the social entrepreneurial ‘types’ discussed in section 4.4, two important implications emerge. The first implication has to do with ‘coherence’ and relates to the need for accelerators to adopt a systemic approach to programme design. By this I refer to the need for matching *all* of the aspects of the learning environment to the ‘perceived task’ of the entrepreneur, and the outcomes managers and entrepreneurs hope to achieve through learning. Entrepreneurs with particular sets of expectations and at

certain stages of venture development, will often require corresponding areas of accelerator ‘space’ in order to learn effectively. Their learning will also be enhanced if their characteristics and expectations are matched with the tutor roles most suited to the enhancement of their learning.

The second implication of the revised model has to do with process management. The co-created nature of learning in accelerators implies a shift in emphasis on the part of educators, from prediction to control (to use the language of effectuation). It is more important that tutors be skilled in facilitating dynamic processes, rather than in implementing well-planned projects. In order to function effectively, tutors need to be adept in the skills associated with non-formal learning environments. This requires on the one hand, a perceptive and sensitive awareness of the needs of not only the individual entrepreneur, but also the accelerator cohort. It also demands an ability on the part of tutors, to take on different roles – not only in relation to the characteristics of each individual entrepreneur, but also to the learning they are engaged in at particular times during the accelerator.

6 Conclusions & Contributions

This study has developed our understanding of social entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators in several ways. Naturally, some of its findings corroborate what is already known about entrepreneurial learning and accelerators, even if this study frequently adds detail or nuances to what other scholars have discussed. However, this study does make several unique contributions to our understanding of entrepreneurial learning and accelerators, particularly with regards to the learning of social entrepreneurs and the roles accelerators play in the development of social ventures. In this chapter I begin by discussing the main theoretical contributions of this study, before moving on to discuss how my work is helpful to practitioners and policy-makers. After this, some of the limitations of this study are noted. Finally, I conclude that by conducting a detailed study of social entrepreneurial learning in accelerators, this dissertation increases our awareness of areas that we have *not* yet investigated with similar rigour – and which require further study.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

6.1.1 Contributions to Entrepreneurial Learning Theory

This dissertation's contribution to the entrepreneurial learning literature centres on four main areas: entrepreneurial learning in non-formal learning environments, the role of 'intent', the learning of nascent entrepreneurs and the learning of social entrepreneurs.

Extant scholarship at times depicts entrepreneurial learning as a homogenous phenomenon: entrepreneurs are assumed to learn in a particular manner simply because they are entrepreneurs. Frequently, scholars suggest that entrepreneurs learn primarily from experience (Krueger, 2009c; Rae & Carswell, 2001). Differences in background, industry, venture stage and other factors are not always taken into account. Furthermore, scholars often fail to discuss the role of *context* in entrepreneurial learning, despite a movement among entrepreneurship scholars in recent years, that emphasizes this factor (Welter, 2011; Zahra, Wright, & Abdelgawad, 2014). The aforementioned scholars argue that entrepreneurs are always embedded in particular contexts – and it clearly arguable that they also move from one context to another during the process of venture creation. A first contribution of this study is consequently its introduction of the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning environments to the entrepreneurial learning literature. The use of these concepts enables scholars to distinguish important characteristics of the contexts in which the learning of the individual

entrepreneur takes place. It becomes clear that scholars most commonly discuss entrepreneurial learning in informal environments, despite the fact that a significant number of entrepreneurs participate in more structured educational programmes. Building on this distinction, this dissertation discusses entrepreneurial learning in a particular, non-formal learning environment – namely the accelerator.

By studying entrepreneurial learning in a non-formal context, this dissertation has shown that the learning of entrepreneurs is associated with a variety of learning processes, not all of which are experiential in nature. In particular, this study suggests that in the non-formal environments associated with accelerators, entrepreneurs' learning is highly *social* in nature. Entrepreneurs make extensive use of dialogue as they learn – and often learn aspects of identity by being in the company of other entrepreneurs. Furthermore, although learning is at times associated with action; I have shown that in the accelerator context, entrepreneurs often associate learning with processes of reflection. This finding brings into question the apparent assumption among scholars, that entrepreneurs have a particular preference for an action-oriented style of learning. This study raises the possibility that it is instead the learning *context* that influences entrepreneurs' learning styles, rather than individual preference. This possibility is undergirded by another of this study's findings – namely, that when entrepreneurs move from informal learning contexts into more formal environments, they at times 'regress' in terms of learning style - and adopt instructor-oriented behaviour.

In adult learning theory, scholars emphasize the decisive role of *intent* in learning. Entrepreneurship scholars however, tend to discuss the development of intention, rather than its impact on learning – or discuss intent in general terms, as the ambition to start a business (Hopp & Sonderegger, 2014; Piperopoulos & Dimov, 2014). This study suggests however, that entrepreneurs are intentional at a much more 'micro' level and are often very aware of what they wish to achieve through a particular activity or interaction. Consequently this dissertation expands scholars' understanding of the role of intent[ion] in entrepreneurial learning. By framing intention as the "perceived task" of the entrepreneur, this study highlights how entrepreneurs' attitudes to learning are shaped by the relevance they attach to educational activities. Scholars have previously discussed the narrow learning foci of small business owners in general terms (see for example: A. A. Gibb, 1983), but this study begins to unravel the sub-factors that help determine entrepreneurs' perceptions of relevance. Relevance is framed as "perceived value" and is shown to relate to both educational content and human actors in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Importantly, this study notes that in contrast to entrepreneurship educators – who tend to adopt a 'future-oriented' view of relevance – practicing entrepreneurs often determine relevance in a

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manner that integrates a 'past-oriented' perspective that focuses on ascertaining the credibility of the people they interact with.

As noted earlier, scholars at times discuss entrepreneurial learning without taking into account factors such as context. This study discusses entrepreneurial learning as a process that is influenced by venture *stage*. Although all of the entrepreneurs in this study were at an early overall stage of venture development (i.e.: nascent entrepreneurs), it was still possible to identify stage-related differences in the content of learning and the learning process itself. This suggests that in non-formal learning environments, entrepreneurs engage in cycles of reflection and action as they work with their startups. In the conceptualising and validation stages learning seems to be associated with intense processes of dialogue and reflection, whereas in more 'practical' stages (such as commitment), entrepreneurs learn through the action-oriented processes more commonly discussed by scholars. That is: through experiential learning. Nonetheless, even where this is true this study suggests that scholars seeking to explain the process of experiential learning will benefit from drawing on the work of contemporary theorists such as Jarvis, rather than on the older work of Kolb¹³⁹. This dissertation contributes to the entrepreneurial learning literature by introducing the ideas of Peter Jarvis, as a means to understand entrepreneurs' learning processes that the Kolb cycle does not explain adequately. For example: entrepreneurial learning that develops through the resolution of experiences of disjuncture by both affective (emotions-driven) and cognitive (reflection-driven) pathways.

In addition to discussing entrepreneurial learning in relation to a particular category or stage of entrepreneurship¹⁴⁰, this dissertation also contributes to theory by discussing the particular case of *social* entrepreneurial learning. As noted earlier, this study emphasizes the idea that entrepreneurial learning is a heterogeneous phenomenon associated as much with variation, as with similarity. Evidence for this suggestion is provided by my discussion of the distinct learning outcomes associated with the learning of nascent social entrepreneurs, as well as by a smaller body of evidence that suggests they engage in slightly different learning processes. This study suggests that in terms of outcomes, effective social entrepreneurs learn to identify and give voice to a distinctive and convincing 'social value proposition'. More importantly, I identify a learning outcome that relates to a conceptual shift among some categories of nascent social entrepreneur, whereby they learn to operate as sustainable, hybrid enterprises – rather than as project-oriented charities or non-profits. In terms of the learning

¹³⁹ That is, on his depiction of the learning process as following the cycle of Concrete experience, Reflective observation, Abstract conceptualization and Active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

¹⁴⁰ That is: *nascent* entrepreneurship.

process, this study provides initial evidence for the centrality of affect in social entrepreneurial learning. It appears that for social entrepreneurs, emotions do not only play a role in inspiring individuals to begin the venturing process – but also in continuing with it. Experienced social entrepreneurs are often aware of the need to maintain affect and manage their learning in order to achieve both emotional and cognitive outcomes.

6.1.2 Contributions to Business Incubation Theory

When this study is viewed from the perspective of the literature on business incubation, several contributions emerge. First of all, this dissertation expands our understanding of a relatively new type of incubation – *accelerators* – about which scholars know relatively little. Scholars have called for studies of accelerators that provide a more detailed understanding of the accelerator process – and for studies of accelerators that recruit different categories of enterprise (Hallen et al., 2013). This dissertation responds to this call by conducting a detailed study of entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators – and by focusing on a programme that recruits a particular type of enterprise (social ventures). By gathering and analysing 'rich' data in an abductive manner, a process-oriented model of entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators is developed. This model contributes to our understanding of how entrepreneurs learn in the context of accelerators, by first of all identifying the main factors that influence entrepreneurs' learning – and showing how they relate to one another. However, the model also contributes to the development of scholarly knowledge about accelerators, by providing a conceptual framework that future studies can refine and expand.

By framing accelerators as non-formal environments for entrepreneurs' learning, this study expands scholars' understandings of how context influences learning. The distinction that I make between three types of learning environment¹⁴¹ is useful for understanding how and by whom venture-oriented learning is initiated. Maria-Carmen Pantea (forthcoming) also discusses the importance of social context with regards to the learning of youth entrepreneurs in non-formal contexts. Nonetheless, this study contributes to scholars' knowledge by moving beyond the conceptualisation of accelerators as non-formal contexts for learning – to a discussion of how accelerators' learning environments change as time goes by. In particular, with reference to the gradual shift from more formal, instructor-initiated learning – to a non-formal, learner-led form of interaction.

One of the more prominent contributions of this dissertation is its discussion of learning 'space'. Here this study contributes to not only the literature on incubators and entrepreneurial learning, but also to entrepreneurship education

¹⁴¹ That is: formal, non-formal and informal.

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scholarship. Although the concept of ‘learning spaces and places’ is clearly relevant to scholars of entrepreneurial learning, the subject has not been extensively discussed in the literature¹⁴². In contrast, the concept of space is attracting increased attention among incubator scholars (Hjorth, 2013). Consequently, this study contributes to entrepreneurial learning scholarship by adding the concept of learning spaces to existing knowledge. I suggest that this is a useful contribution, because the concept of space is not dependent on the existence of formal or non-formal learning environments. Instead, entrepreneurs can be expected to make use of different categories of space in both informal and more formalised contexts. With regards to the literature on incubators, this study contributes by adding considerable detail to scholars’ discussions of how space and place are associated with venture development. Here my use of the term “splace” underlines the interdependence of psychological ‘space’ and physical ‘place’. This dissertation also expands on previous work by showing how *time* both enhances and restricts entrepreneurs’ perceptions of incubator ‘splace’.

In the more formal learning environments of higher education it is probable that students’ learning can be optimised if educators pay attention to each aspect of ‘splace’. Many educators already emphasize activities that encourage students to spend time in ‘reflective’, ‘dialogic’ and ‘action’ space – but accord less attention to ‘community’ space. This study contributes to scholars’ knowledge by providing a conceptual tool with which they can assess the relative emphasis in a learning activity, of each of the four aspects. Additionally, my discussion of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ physical spaces contributes to the literature by highlighting the role played by the places in which learning takes place. Scholars of entrepreneurship education frequently discuss pedagogy as if the only factors in learning relate to instructor-, student- and technique. This study makes it clear that education does not take place in a vacuum and that the characteristics of physical spaces have an impact on learning.

The above paragraph hints at this study’s contribution to the literature, in terms of incorporating what Erdélyi (2010) terms a “material” perspective, into a theory of the learning process in non-formal environments, such as accelerators. Nonetheless, this dissertation also expands our understanding of incubator processes by identifying several key *human* ‘roles’ that facilitate learning. In doing so this study first of all creates a nuanced understanding of the roles referred to by scholars such as Cohen (2013a), and Miller and Bound (2011), using the generic terms “director experts” and “mentors”. This study shows how several of the more specific roles (or ‘functions’) that I identify, may be filled by different actors within the accelerator ecosystem. This places more emphasis on the task of ensuring that *someone* fills each of the roles, rather than on the rigid linking of

¹⁴² Smith (2011) discusses space and is an exception, even if the key-words in her dissertation suggest that she does not position herself as a scholar of entrepreneurial learning.

each role to a particular actor. Furthermore, this study also shows how the learning of different categories of social entrepreneur – at different stages of venture development – requires the emphasis of different educator roles, or combinations of role.

Diverse categories of social entrepreneur – and different stages of venture development – are logically associated with variations in the learning that entrepreneurs wish to achieve by participating in accelerators. This study extends scholars' understanding of how accelerators enhance venture development, by identifying ten 'F-words' that reflect different aspects of their impact. Many of these factors relate to foundational aspects of entrepreneurial capability that are not always identified in studies that use more quantitative measures of incubator performance¹⁴³. These factors provide a useful framework that other scholars might use in future studies of accelerators, but also serve to highlight less obvious, but nonetheless valuable programme effects. Outcomes such as entrepreneurial "failure" and "facility" may have a positive societal impact in the long-term, but can be difficult to identify with more simplistic, short-term measures.

Zahra (2007) and Davidsson (2005) note that scholars sometimes make a contribution by *reinforcing* knowledge about a particular phenomenon – often by examining it in a new context. Several of this study's contributions enhance knowledge in this manner, suggesting that some accelerator processes and outcomes (for example: the development of clear ideas and legitimacy) change very little, even when a different category of enterprise is in focus. Similarly, in keeping with the studies of scholars such as Cohen (2013a), Hallen, Bingham and Cohen (2013), and Miller and Bound (2011); this study provides additional evidence for their finding with regards to the main outcomes and ingredients of accelerators. Some of the 'F-outcomes' discussed in section 4.5 are also identified by these scholars, albeit using different terminology. Hallen, Bingham and Cohen for example, identify legitimacy (fame) and expanded networks (friends) as key outcomes that facilitate entrepreneurs' access to resources. They also suggest that accelerators become more effective as they gain experience, an idea that is supported by this study. Both Cohen (2013a), and Miller and Bound (2011) identify a process of refinement and a concentration on a core business proposition (focus) as an important ingredient in the acceleration process. Stross (2012) and Cohen (*ibid.*) also note that entrepreneurs can 'pivot' during the accelerator process to embrace alternative venture ideas. This development is very similar to the 'flexibility' contribution identified in this study in that it involves a widening of vistas, even if this takes place in the for-profit sector.

¹⁴³ For example: sourced investment and/or venture growth.

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A final contribution made by this study to the incubator literature – but perhaps one of its more important findings – is its conceptualisation of the learning process in accelerators as *co-created*. As Hjorth (2013) points out, policy-makers – and indeed, many scholars – often discuss incubator practice on the basis of an unspoken assumption that it is possible to distinguish a single, optimal design. This study clearly shows that learning processes in incubators are the product of the interaction of a large number of factors, among which the intention of the entrepreneur is particularly influential. By modelling the learning process in accelerators, this dissertation extends our understanding of incubator processes by not only noting that learning is co-created, but also by providing a coherent explanation of how this process evolves.

6.1.3 Contributions to Social Entrepreneurship Theory

In this study I make contributions that engage with more than one scholarly ‘conversation’. One such contribution has to do with my development of Cope and Watt’s (2000) entrepreneurial career typology (i.e.: their identification of entrepreneurs as ‘innocents’, ‘knowledgeable improvisers’, ‘confident entrants’, and ‘veterans’). Although it is clearly possible to develop their model further, this study incorporates insights from scholars of ‘international’ social entrepreneurship and uses these to develop the model further. My new typology enables scholars to distinguish distinct types of social entrepreneur, on the basis of not only their past experience (managerial or professional), but also on their degree of ‘embeddedness’ in the societies they target. Although I frame my contribution in terms of an enhancement of knowledge in the nascent field of *international* social entrepreneurship (Desa, 2012), it is clearly possible for other scholars to use the added factor of embeddedness at a more local level. For example: it may be more easy for a social entrepreneur with a background in inner cities, to grow a successful venture in that context – than for someone with an ‘outsider’ background.

I have chosen to ground this particular discussion in the social entrepreneurship ‘arena’. Nonetheless, in discussing social entrepreneurial learning in relation to previous experience and venture development, I am also contributing to conversations about entrepreneurial identity and entrepreneurial intentions. Markowska (2011) discusses the development of entrepreneurial competency in relation to entrepreneurs’ balancing of business-oriented and professional identities. I extend some of her findings by showing how the professional identities of social entrepreneurs at times limit the propensity of individuals, to adopt the social entrepreneurial identity ‘on offer’ in accelerators. This study provides further empirical support for her suggestion that professional ties are able to influence entrepreneurs’ development ‘at a distance’, without immediate physical proximity.

6.1.4 Contributions to Entrepreneurship Education Theory

I began this dissertation by arguing for the ‘bringing together’ of the at times distinct emphases among entrepreneurship educators, on either ‘education’ or ‘training’. This study has reinforced my conviction in this area, as the *Booster* entrepreneurs clearer engaged in a significant amount of abstract, conceptual reflection (surely a process associated with ‘education’?) – despite scholars’ portrayal of their learning as predominantly pragmatic and experiential. This study contributes to our understanding of entrepreneurship education by emphasising the common ground that exists between potential entrepreneurs¹⁴⁴ and practicing entrepreneurs, with regards to the centrality of *relevance*. Entrepreneurs and students both interact with educators in an intent-filled manner and their learning is shaped by whether or not they perceive content and process to be relevant to their ‘perceived task’. This study shows that in the context of accelerators, social entrepreneurs learn from a variety of didactical approaches. I suggest therefore, that the effectiveness of an approach relates not so much to the means by which knowledge is developed (lecture or workshop), but to the perceived relevance of the knowledge to the learner’s intent. The implication for entrepreneurship educators – regardless of ‘audience’ – is that it is more important to interact with learners with a view to creating relevant learning – than it is to focus on the ‘instrument’ of learning.

I have already discussed the concepts of formal, non-formal and informal learning environments as a contribution to literature on entrepreneurial learning. Nonetheless, by introducing these concepts I also make a contribution to entrepreneurship education scholarship. Rather than making an artificial distinction between ‘training’ and ‘education’ based on who is doing the learning (students or entrepreneurs) – or on the instruments used in education (lectures or workshops), it may be more useful to focus on the characteristics of the learning environment. This study positions the formal – non-formal continuum as a more useful means of classifying different types of entrepreneurship education. Instead of attempting to artificially classify learning-oriented activities as either ‘education’ or ‘training’, I suggest it is more useful to position them along a scale based on structure and learner-centeredness.

6.2 Contributions to Practice

One of the advantages of conducting interactive research is that research findings often have an impact on practice before they are published in academic circles. This was clearly the case with this dissertation and accelerator managers witness

¹⁴⁴ Usually students.

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to the impact that my study has had on the development of the *Booster* programme.

In more concrete terms this study has a wide range of implications for practitioners. With regards to the *recruitment of entrepreneurs to accelerators*, this study underlines the importance of enlisting individuals or ventures at a similar stage of development – but not from the same industry. In the context of social entrepreneurship the importance of ‘industry heterogeneity’ may need to be interpreted as the avoidance of cohorts that only recruit individuals with a background in charities or NGOs. As the learning process in accelerators is co-created, managers need to focus more on recruiting a group that can interact effectively and create value for one another – rather than the most promising individuals. Because learning is enhanced by ‘positive heterogeneity’ managers also need to pay particular attention to entrepreneurs’ intentions with regards to participation in accelerators. It is important that programmes have the capacity to fulfil individual’s expectations, but it is just as important that entrepreneurs come to the accelerator with an attitude of openness – not only to receiving feedback, but also to providing it.

With regards to the accelerator process itself, this study contributes to practice by emphasising managers’ roles as *‘facilitators of splace’*. ‘Positive splace’ is at the core of accelerators and is all about opportunity: entrepreneurs are given the possibility to do something they are otherwise unable to do – or would not be able to do in such a short space of time. By identifying key educator roles and linking these to different categories of entrepreneur, this study enables educators to maximise their contribution to the development of splace. As splace is co-created, manager behaviour cannot guarantee positive outcomes – but can make their development much more likely. This study helps managers become aware of the different factors that contribute to the development of splace – and this awareness can lead to proactive action. For example: by being aware of the existence of primary and secondary ‘place’ – and of how these factors affect the cohort – managers can take steps to enhance their positive effects and minimise their detrimental aspects. By being aware of the different combinations of roles that need to be filled in relation to distinct entrepreneurial types and stages, managers can ‘map’ existing educator roles and ensure that they not only adopt appropriate roles at different times – but also adapt their roles to the particular needs of each entrepreneur.

By identifying a large number of ‘micro’ learning processes and outcomes, this study enables practitioners to develop particular programme strengths and emphases. It will often be difficult – or even undesirable – for accelerators to excel in developing all nine of the ‘F-words’ associated with venture ‘fitness’. By becoming more aware of the *potential* learning associated with accelerators, managers are able to ‘niche’ their programmes – or to adapt them to the

characteristics and ambitions of different cohorts (Vanderstraeten & Matthyssens, 2012). As with many phenomena it is difficult to discuss factors that have not been ‘named’ – even if managers are instinctively aware that learning is taking place. This study gives managers the conceptual tools they need to discuss learning objectives with accelerator participants. However, it also enables prospective participants to make more informed decisions when applying to accelerators or when thinking about the timing of their participation.

6.3 Implications for Policy

Accelerators are trendy. The success of high-profile programmes has inspired not only investors, but also the public sector to launch their own initiatives. Nonetheless, these initiatives are seldom based on an informed understanding of the potential, risks and character of accelerators. This study is one piece in a larger ‘puzzle’ of research that enables policy-makers to take more informed decisions about support. For policy-makers faced with decisions about whether or not to fund accelerators, this dissertation provides a useful basis for conducting ‘due diligence’. Accelerator managers can be expected to show an awareness of the particular outcomes of learning their programmes have the potential to achieve – and the factors needed to facilitate these outcomes. They can also be expected to understand the types of role, instruction and ‘space’ needed to address the needs of diverse categories of entrepreneur. This study provides policy-makers with the conceptual foundation needed to address ‘intelligent questions’ to organisations seeking support in order to develop new accelerators.

This dissertation is also useful for policy-makers because it suggests that accelerators are useful tools not only for enhancing entrepreneurs’ learning at a specific stage of development (hence the term “seed accelerator”), but also at other stages. Because of the experimental nature of the first *Booster* programmes, an unorthodox ‘mix’ of entrepreneurs was recruited – at several different stages of development. This study suggests that accelerators are able to enhance the learning of entrepreneurs at many different stages of development, even if cohort dynamics improve when entrepreneurs are at the same stage. This finding opens the door for further experimentation – and the use of accelerators as focused instruments that can address entrepreneurs’ learning needs in a variety of industries and at many different stages.

This study focuses on accelerators for social entrepreneurs and an important finding relates to how managers of charities and NGOs learn to become more financially sustainable – and more focused. This ‘sideways’ move towards hybridity is an important accelerator contribution. It suggests that from the perspective of policy-makers with responsibility for development aid (for example: *Sida* and *DFID*), accelerators may be useful tools for helping organisations in emerging economies attain a greater measure of self-sufficiency

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and effectiveness. This study underlines however, the important role that ‘embeddedness’ plays in influencing venture outcomes. Only a small proportion of expatriate social entrepreneurs appear able to convert accelerator learning into healthy enterprises in emerging economies. At the same time, although ‘indigenous’ enterprises are linked to higher survival rates, only a small proportion have been able to capitalise on accelerator learning and grow their enterprises.

The challenges discussed in the preceding paragraph highlight a final contribution that this study makes to policy-maker knowledge, namely the vital role played by entrepreneurial *ecosystems*. A recurring complaint among the *Booster* entrepreneurs had to do with the lack of investment at the end of the programme. Entrepreneurs left the accelerator with refined, ‘do-able’ ideas – but were generally unable to turn these ideas into reality. This trend underlines the need for policy-makers to view accelerators as one important part of a greater entrepreneurial ecosystem. For accelerators to be effective the venture environment needs to provide programmes with optimal conditions both before and after acceleration. Accelerators need to be run in a context characterised by extensive and productive networks if participants are to be able to experience sufficient disjuncture – and to transform this disjuncture into effective learning. At the same time, resources need to be available in an appropriate form at the end of programmes, to enable entrepreneurs to build on their learning. In the context of social entrepreneurship the term ‘appropriate’ is especially important. Many of the *Booster* entrepreneurs were making the move from charity to hybrid enterprise. However, the social entrepreneurial learning ecosystem had not made the same journey and development agencies continued to interact with graduates on the basis of a ‘publicly-funded grant’ mentality. Money was made available (for example: in the form of the *Innovations against Poverty* matched grants). However, funding was associated with such a level of detail in applying for support – and reporting progress – that the entrepreneurs who received grants felt uncertain about whether the effort was worth it. Social entrepreneurs who have received support from the *European Social Fund* report a similar mismatch between the needs of the entrepreneur and the traditions of public administration. Consequently, this is clearly a part of the social entrepreneurial ecosystem that policy-makers need to address.

6.4 Limitations

As with any quantitative or qualitative discussion of learning, the findings of this study are limited by the author’s ability to pose relevant questions to the social entrepreneurs who participated in the study – and to interpret their responses correctly. This process was particularly challenging due to the heterogeneous sample of social entrepreneurs (in terms of nationality), in particular the second and third accelerators. Consequently, it is possible that a researcher with another

cultural background would have interpreted entrepreneurs' responses in a slightly different manner. Although I sought to minimise this possibility by means of interviews with accelerator managers, 'sounding boards' and in-depth discussions with the social entrepreneurs; I have naturally been unable to completely account for the impact of my own world-view in the stories I tell.

A second limitation of this study relates to the first and has to do with the theoretical 'lens' through which I interpret entrepreneurs' accounts. This study relies very much on the work of scholars of learning (such as Jarvis), who adopt a constructivist view of learning. Although I often integrate aspects of social learning theory in my discussion, I have not switched lenses completely – and so it is probable that a social learning theorist (such as Wenger), would have identified different aspects of learning than I have. A similar critique can also be made of my development of a social entrepreneurial typology in section 4.4. Few typologies are able to take into account all of the factors affecting behaviour and my categories are no exception. I have for example, accorded more weight to the ideas of Cope and Watts (2000) – and devoted less attention to Politis' (2005) ideas about career orientations. A more developed typology might be able to take the two aspects into account, as there is evidence in my empirical data of the influence of both.

A final¹⁴⁵ limitation of this study has to do with its generalisability. In this study my ambition has been to achieve what Firestone (1993) terms "analytical generalizability". My aim is to generalise to a *theory* (as opposed to a population), which naturally implies that my findings achieve relevance through analytical – as opposed to statistical – inference (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Although my study develops theory that is to some extent characterised by the logical coherence and parsimony that Pfeffer (1982) associates with 'good' theory, my findings are limited in the sense that they are not generalizable to a 'population' of accelerators. The *Booster* accelerators were in some ways different from accelerators that recruit 'traditional' for-profit entrepreneurs – and the Scandinavian context contrasts with the environment in which many accelerators operate (such as North America). Factors such as these should prevent academics and practitioners from assuming that factors that were important (or negligible) in this study, will have exactly the same influence in other programmes. Nonetheless, this limitation underlines one of the main findings of this study – namely; that because of the process of co-creation, no two accelerators will ever be exactly the same.

¹⁴⁵ By this I mean 'last in the list', as there are naturally other limitations to this study that I have not discussed here.

6.5 Future Research

This study has focused on some aspects of social entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators at the expense of others and as noted above, is not without its weaknesses. Although it has moved significantly 'closer' to entrepreneurs' experiences in comparison with other studies, it still relies excessively on individuals' retrospective accounts of the accelerator process. Consequently, it is probable that an even more detailed 'micro' account of the accelerator process would emerge, if other data-collection techniques were adopted. Kusenbach (2003) for example, advocates the phenomenological technique of the 'go-along' for developing an understanding of subjects' everyday lives, emphasising among other things the approach's usefulness for collecting information about how individuals interact with 'space'. Naturally, similar techniques such as shadowing (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007) and "diary dialogue" (Bergman & Johannisson, 2011), could generate the rich, 'minute-by-minute' data that would help scholars gain a deeper understanding of the accelerator process.

By prioritising insight into social entrepreneurs' experiences of the accelerator process, this study has devoted comparatively little energy to the study of the activities of managers, mentors and coaches. Cohen (2013a) has discussed managers' roles in more detail – but as noted earlier, this study suggests that the roles adopted by accelerator managers vary from programme to programme (and perhaps even from accelerator to accelerator, within the same programme). Consequently, future research could develop knowledge about entrepreneurs' learning in accelerators by examining differences in the roles taken on by these three categories of advisor, in different programmes and with reference to venture outcomes. It would also be useful to develop knowledge about social entrepreneurs' particular requirements with regards to educational content and process, at different stages of development and in different industries. In particular, further research is needed into the learning needs of practicing social entrepreneurs – especially those working in developing countries. The development of a social entrepreneurial 'arena' reflects that of the business community at large, in terms of its increasingly global character (Zahra, Newey, & Li, 2014). Consequently, it is probable that practitioners will have to integrate insights from the literature on international entrepreneurship into their activities, if accelerator programmes for social entrepreneurs are to develop and maintain their effectiveness.

Two additional areas of research merit future study, only one of which has been discussed at any length by accelerator scholars. A phenomenon that is hardly mentioned by scholars (with the exception of 'demo day') is the accelerator 'event'. Many accelerators hold several different types of event over the course of their programmes; ranging from grandiose, well-rehearsed events for investors – to more informal get-togethers for local entrepreneurs. These events appear to

provide accelerator participants with opportunities for networking, brainstorming and similar activities. Very little is known however, about the role these events play in the development of the entrepreneur and their venture.

Another theme that scholars could usefully explore is that of ‘individual vs. team’ participation. Cohen (2013a) suggests that accelerators which recruit venture teams to their programmes (as opposed to individual entrepreneurs) associate a wide range of benefits with this practice – including improved organisational communication, deeper knowledge of one another and better comprehension of the knowledge ‘on offer’. I am not aware of any studies of accelerators (or of entrepreneurial learning) that have conducted comparative studies of the learning associated with these two options. Such a study would lend new meaning to the emphasis inherent in the title of this study, namely: that no entrepreneur is an island!

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Appendices

1. 'Friday Feedback' Questionnaire (A1)

1. What is your name?
2. What are your strongest impressions from the past week? (please describe feelings, surprises, important issues that have come up – and things that you have learned/are learning)
3. What do you feel is the greatest challenge/issue that you and your emerging enterprise are facing just now? (name several issues if you wish)
4. If you have a question or comment, or if you feel worried or irritated about an issues, please write a little about this below.
5. What do you feel is the biggest change that could be made in the Booster programme to improve it?
6. If you wish, please feel free to make further comments below – if you feel these do not correspond to the above questions.

2. Interview Guide for Interview 1 (A1)

Sensitizing concepts

Identity, Belonging, Learning

Introduction

1. Background to interview, interview purpose and content
2. Information about confidentiality / anonymity

Background

3. Where do you come from/where did you grow up
4. What did your parents do (occupation)
5. Were you parents “socially engaged” in any way?

Previous work experience

6. Have you worked previously (prior to this start-up)?
7. With what? Where?

Venture development

8. Tell me the story of how the idea for (name of new firm/product) came about and how you came to be involved with Booster.

Previous understanding of social entrepreneurship

9. Do you know anybody who you would call a social entrepreneur?
10. Who? What do you they do?
11. Do you consider yourself to be a social entrepreneur?

Conclusion

12. Opportunity for comments and/or questions.

3. Interview Guide: Week 4 (halfway)

Introduction

Thank-you for taking time for this interview!

Today's interview should take between 30 and 45 minutes.

The main thing we want to know is how you feel you are getting on in the accelerator - and what we can do to make it more relevant to your needs.

But I am also interested in learning more about your particular approach to working in the accelerator. Perhaps you are doing something that helps you get more out of your time here?

If it's alright with you I record the interview, so that I can focus more on what you are saying instead of only taking notes?

Does that sound reasonable?

Some background

1. If you were to introduce yourself and your work to somebody, what would you call yourself? (e.g.: profession)
2. How did you find out about the accelerator?
3. What it was that made you apply to participate in the Booster programme?
4. What stage is your start-up at? Or, how far had you progressed before coming here?

Your experience

5. Please tell me about your experience of the accelerator so far...
- and when I say "accelerator" I mean everything associated with it, not just the formal sessions.
6. Is there anything that you have found particularly challenging (or difficult) so far?
7. What have been the *highlights* of the past 4 weeks?
8. Have there been any '*low*' patches, or experiences you would rather not have had?
9. Based on your experience at the moment, if you were to describe Booster's impact on the development of you and your business, what would you say is its main contribution so far?

Interaction

An important idea in *Booster* is that of 'interaction': interaction not only with your mentor, but also with the other *Booster* participants, visiting speakers and people at *SocNet*.

10. Have you found any particular individuals to be particularly helpful during the past weeks?
11. How much do you talk to the other entrepreneurs about your start-up?
12. In which ways do you find it helpful to talk to the other entrepreneurs?
13. Do you find any of the other entrepreneur's ideas particularly useful? (- and why?)
- Or maybe someone else's ideas almost *never* useful? (- and why?)
14. Could the accelerator be structured in another way, to help you get more out of the experience / skills of your fellow entrepreneurs?
15. How do you feel so far about the mentor who has been allocated to you?

Structure

16. What do you think about the way in which the accelerator is structured so far?
e.g.: is there a good balance between visits by speakers and time to work on your start-up, or network?
17. What do you think of the 'deliverables' and 'deadlines' that *NSE* have set up?
18. How useful have you found the sessions on Word & Excel?

Events

19. So far there have been several events. Have you found any of them useful? – and if so, in which way?
wk 1: Start-up Day @ [name of city] School of Entrepreneurship
wk 2: Kick-off event
wk 3: Mingle with business lab
wk 3: Social enterprise visit
wk 4: Speed-dating w/mentors

Suggestions for improvement

20. Can you think of any ways in which the accelerator could be *improved*?
e.g.: do we need to adjust the content, or perhaps the accelerator process?
- Perhaps you are aware of something or someone that is making it difficult for you to learn effectively?

Your specific needs / goals

21. Is there anything specific in terms of content or support that you haven't received so far, and that you would really like to get in the coming weeks?
22. Do you have any particular goals that you wish to achieve in the coming weeks?

Booster staff

23. What role have the Booster staff (names of staff) played in the development of your start-up in the past weeks?
- Can they do anything differently in order to help you more?

Conclusion

- I think that's about all my questions for today...
24. Do you have anything that you wish to add, that I have missed or that you want to comment on?
- Maybe you want to ask me a question?

Once again, thank-you very much for taking the time to talk to me!

4. Interview Guide: Week 8¹⁴⁶

Introduction

Thank-you for taking the time to talk to me, I know you are very busy!

Today I want to get your final impressions of the accelerator, focusing on 4 main areas... (impact, process, interaction and learning)

1. But first, tell me a little about *your* experience of the accelerator, what has it been like for you?

Impact

"the role of the accelerator in the context of the entire development of my social enterprise"

If you take a step back in your imagination and look at the big picture: "the development of your enterprise over time from birth to maturity"...

2. How would you describe the impact of these past 8 weeks in Scandinavia on you and your enterprise?
 - What parts of the bigger puzzle has Booster helped put in place?
 - In which way (if any) are you or your enterprise different, at the end of A1?
3. What have you achieved in the past 8 weeks?
 - Had you hoped to achieve anything that you *didn't* achieve?

Process

4. If you were to draw 3 lines to illustrate how much interaction, learning and pressure you have experienced during the programme, what would it look like?
(learning in green, interaction in blue, pressure in red)
5. Do you want to *comment* on what you've drawn?

¹⁴⁶ Graduation week

Appendices

Interaction

One of the main ideas in business accelerators is that to help you and your business to develop, we try and help you *interact* with accelerator staff, with your mentor, the other entrepreneurs, etc., etc.

6. Can you tell me a little about who you have interacted with most during the accelerator - and the interactions you found most helpful for your development?
7. Did you find that any particular events or contexts were *especially* good for interaction?
8. What was it like to have a mentor assigned to you, for the duration of the accelerator?

Learning

'learning experiences'

Finally, if we just talk briefly about the approach to learning which the accelerator has adopted...

9. What you think about the way in which the accelerator was structured, with regards to helping you learn?
 - Were there any speakers or sessions – or ways of structuring the different themes in the accelerator – that made it *easier* for you to learn? - or *harder*?
10. If you think about the speakers or sessions that sticks with you most, what was it that made it/them effective?

Conclusion

I think that's almost it from my perspective...

11. But before we finish: what do you think NSE could do to *improve* the accelerator?
12. What do you think about the composition of the cohort: who should we recruit? (stage, industry, etc)
13. Is there anything you wish to *add*? Perhaps you have a question for me?

Next step

After a few months I will send you a copy of your interviews so you can comment on them if you wish.

I will contact you in about 6 months' time for a second follow up:

- to get an update
- to get reflections on the impact of Booster with more perspective

Thank-you and good luck!

5. Interview Guide – Six-month Follow-up

Introduction

Thank-you for taking the time to help us with our follow-up of the *Booster* accelerator!

The interview today focuses on 4 themes:

- Your situation today (and that of your enterprise)
- A look back at the past 5-6 months since you left the accelerator.
- Your networking.
- The future.

Current situation

1) Are you still working on the start-up idea you worked on while at *Booster*?

a) If NOT:

i) Why not?

ii) What are you doing instead?

b) If YES:

Please tell me a little about your situation today? (please include some information about each of the areas below):

- progress on sourcing finance / investment
- progress on building a team
- how have the sales (or delivery) of your product/service developed?
- what social impact do you feel you are having?
- any other developments in your start-up that you would like to mention.

What “stage” in the start-up process are you at today? (e.g.: idea stage, developing product/service, testing your business model (pilot), scaling up, etc)

Looking back...

Now that you have had time to digest some of your impressions from the Accelerator:

If you look back at the past year (in which the accelerator has only been one of many happenings – a “chapter in the book” of your start-up):

- 2) In which ways do you feel that you or your start-up have developed?
- a) What was it that made this development take place? How did this happen?

Appendices

- 3) Did *NSE / Booster* have any part in the development that you describe?
 - a) And if so, what role did the accelerator play?
- 4) Do you feel that you do anything different today in relation to your start-up, if you compare your behaviour to what you did before the accelerator? Or perhaps you think in a different way?
- 5) Do you feel that the accelerator provided you with the support that you needed, in relation to your start-up's stage of development?
 - a) Do you feel that you needed a different type of support? Or should the support have been provided in a different manner?
- 6) Do you feel today that any of the accelerator activities were especially valuable? (which ones?)
 - a) If so, why does this / do they feel important to you?

Network & mentor

- 7) Have any happenings or any individuals been especially important for your own development, or your enterprises development in the past months? (and if so, describe these briefly)
 - a) Why have these happenings/these individuals been important? (i.e.: what impact have they had?)
- 8) Do you still have contact with your mentor?
 - a) If you answer no:
 - i) Why not? (please provide some details)
 - ii) Would you like to have more contact?
 - b) If you answer yes:
 - i) How often do you have contact?
 - ii) How do you contact one another? (e.g.: physical meeting, Skype, telephone)
 - iii) Does this contact help you or your enterprise develop, or is your contact more of a social nature?
- 9) Do you have contact with anybody else who you met during the accelerator?
 - a) Who do you have contact with?
 - b) In which way do you contact one another? (e.g.: Facebook, physical meetings, Skype)
 - c) What do you usually talk/write about?
 - d) Does the contact help your or your enterprise develop in any way? (and if so, how?)

Future

- 10) What do you feel is the next step that you need to take in developing your start-up? (and why?)
- 11) Which questions and challenges are you struggling with at the moment?
- 12) Is there anything in particular that you feel you need to learn how to do, in order to take the next step?
- 13) Is there any support (knowledge, infrastructure, tool, etc) that *NSE* could provide you with now or in the near future, that would help you work more effectively with your start-up? Or help you take the next step in its development?

Summary

- 14) Has anything else happened in your life since you left the accelerator that you feel has had an impact on your enterprise?
- 15) Is there anything you have a question about, that you would like *NSE* (or me) to answer – or is there anything else that you would like to add?

Thank-you very much for taking the time to answer these questions!

6. Questionnaire – 12 Month Follow-up

It is about a year since you graduated from the Booster Accelerator - and soon a new group of entrepreneurs will take part in a third Accelerator.

However, we haven't forgotten you and every now and again we hear news from you, or about you. Nevertheless, we would like to get a more structured idea of what you are doing now, and whether or not you are still involved in your start-up. So we hope you don't mind taking a few minutes to fill in this survey. It is very important for us, as without your feedback we will have difficulty in assessing the long-term impact of the Accelerator.

Thank you very much for your help with this!

1. What is your name?
2. What is the status of the start-up that you were engaged in when you participated in the Accelerator? (choose the answer that most closely mirrors your situation)
 - My start-up is still alive and is making a profit.
 - My start-up is still alive and is clearly making progress towards breaking even.
 - My start-up is still alive, but is not making progress (e.g.: developing product/service, team, sales, etc.)
 - My start-up is still alive, but I have left the start-up team.
 - I have shut down my start-up.
 - I have put my start-up on "hold" (e.g.: I am busy with other things, but haven't given up).
 - None of the above.

If you wish you can comment on your answer below...

3. If you are no longer involved in the start-up that you were engaged in when you participated in the Accelerator, what are the main reasons for closing down / leaving the team?

4. If you are still engaged in your start-up, what progress have you made since the end of the Accelerator?
- I have recruited other individuals to my start-up team
 - I have developed my product / service offering
 - I have tested my product / service
 - I have sold my product / service to customers
 - I have found investment / funding
 - I am in regular contact with investors / funders
 - I have developed my business "system" (marketing, financial management, sales, etc.)
 - I have increased my revenue streams
 - I have increased my profit/bottom-line income
 - I have increased my social impact (if yes, please specify how in the box below).
 - Other (please specify)
5. If you are still engaged in your start-up, which of the following alternative best describes your current situation?
- I spend most of my working week on running or developing my start-up.
 - I am self-employed and spend about half of my working week on my start-up, and the other half on activities that bring in money on a regular basis.
 - I am self-employed and spend most of my working week on activities that bring in money on a regular basis, I work on my start-up in my spare time.
 - I am employed by another organisation and work on my start-up in my spare time.
 - I am in part-time/full-time education and spend most of my working week studying, I work on my start-up in my spare time.
 - Other (please specify)
6. A year has now passed since the *Booster* accelerator finished.
- With the benefit of hindsight, what was the main contribution that the Accelerator made to your start-up?
7. With the benefit of hindsight, what was missing from the *Booster* Accelerator programme, which would have helped you with your start-up?
8. If you are still engaged in your start-up, what are the main challenges that you are facing at the moment?

Appendices

9. Has anything really exciting happened in your start-up in the past year? (if so please provide a brief description)
10. Have you encountered any significant set-backs in the past year? (if so please provide a brief description)
11. Which of the following individuals do you still keep in touch with - and in which roles¹⁴⁷? (i.e.: do you just keep in touch for social reasons, or do you also discuss ideas/issues that have to do with your start-up)
12. If you have been able to obtain funding, how much have you been able to source and in what form?
- investment from an individual (e.g.: 'angel' investor)
 - investment from an organisation (e.g.: venture capitalist)
 - project funding from an NGO or development agency
 - loan from an NGO or development agency
 - bank loan
 - crowd funding
 - gift / loan from friends/family
 - gift / donation from private individual(s)
 - gift / donation from a business/organisation
 - other (please specify in space below)

Approximate amount (please specify currency: USD, SEK, etc.). If "other" what is the source of your funding?

13. Additional comments, questions or ideas...

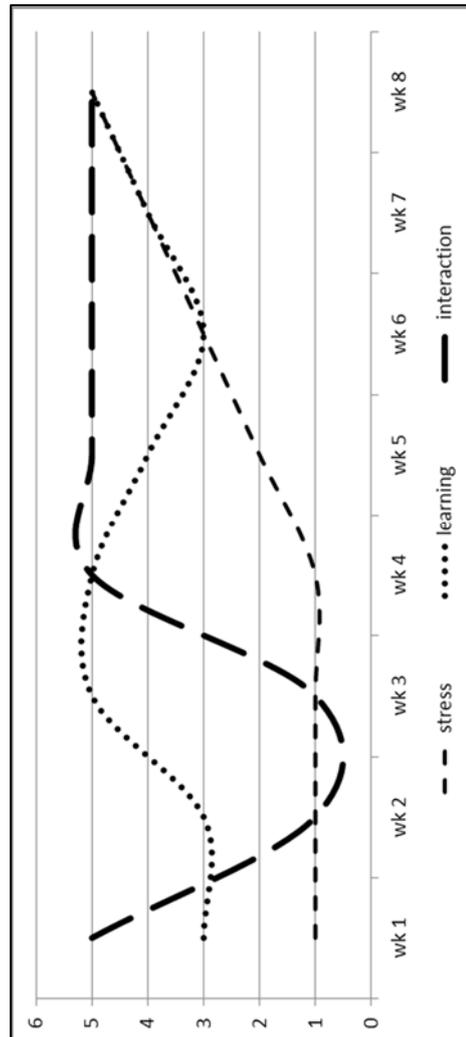
THANK YOU very much for taking the time to answer these questions.

Take care, good luck and stay in touch!

¹⁴⁷ On the questionnaire all of the names of the social entrepreneurs were listed. Respondents were asked to indicate whether the contact was primarily of a social or venture-related character.

7. Stress, Interaction & Learning Diagram

The *Booster* entrepreneurs were asked to draw three lines on an A4 sheet of paper divided into 'eight-weeks' (on the horizontal axis). The vertical axis represented a continuum of low to high and the three differently coloured lines represented stress, learning and interaction. The diagram below is that of Patience (A3).



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