

IBM ENTREPRENEURSHIP PATH

Operating model

1. Background and needs

- In Finland, entrepreneurship is a significant mode of economic activity for immigrants.
- Nonetheless, the employment and entrepreneurship of highly educated immigrants often fall short of their potential.
- Challenges include language and cultural differences, weak networks and uncertainty about one's own abilities to operate as an entrepreneur in the Finnish work environment.
- The aim of the IBM project's Entrepreneurship Path has been the self-efficacy and the entrepreneurial hope of highly educated immigrants as well as their own network. This helps them build a path towards entrepreneurship.

2. Target groups

- International students.
- Highly educated immigrants who are interested in entrepreneurship or are considering starting a business in Finland.
- The groups have been multidisciplinary, which has increased mutual peer support and networking opportunities. The diversity of the participating groups is also reflected through their age, gender, and cultural backgrounds. All of that has provided a rich experience for the participants too.

3. Structure of the operating model

The core of the project is the workshop model in addition to one-to-one tutoring opportunities from experts from one of our partners.

Themes and methods of the workshops:

Self-efficacy and entrepreneurial identity

- Creative and participatory methods (e.g. storytelling, reflection).
- Identifying one's own skills and strengths.

Strengthening hope in entrepreneurship

- Experiential exercises and practical simulations.
- Visits by entrepreneurs of foreign background who share their own experience in Finland.

Maintaining hope and motivation

- Solution-oriented exercises and futures thinking.
- Visualisation of the personal entrepreneurial path.

Networking in Finland

- Peer networking opportunities.
- Networking meetings, mentoring and joint events organised by IMIB Network, such as the end of cycle events.
- Link to business advice.

Creative methods to support inclusion

- Art-based exercises, e.g. pictures, writing, and other art-related exercises.
- Creative methods strengthen the participants' self-understanding and recognition of the potential related to their own competence.

4. Process of the operating model

1. Planning and iteration

The workshops' content is planned based on principles of competence awareness and development, and the creative methods that can be applied to entrepreneurship. The iteration process takes place after each cycle, as lessons are learned, and adjustments are made in the content and the approach where necessary. The information regarding this part is included in the text above titled: Themes and methods of the workshops.

2. Recruitment of experts

Research about entrepreneurs of foreign background in Finland takes place. Invitations are sent to potential contacts, and they are offered compensation for their expertise. This means also that we do not have a fixed rate, which leaves a bit of freedom for the guests to feel comfortable with their own usual cost proposal. Afterwards, the dates are agreed and marked on the agenda of the workshops.

3. Marketing campaign

The design of the marketing campaign takes place. This includes all the relevant information about the workshops, including a link for registration as well as a QR code. The text is fully in English language. As with the content of the workshops, marketing iterations take place after each cycle to improve the reach of the target group, and adjustments have been made to the marketing formats and content. For instance, a main flyer is prepared and promoted on various channels, internally and externally. The marketing campaign takes place, for example in our partners internal communication with staff and international students; with associated partners in employment services such as Espoo Talent Hub and Vantaa Employment Services. Communication with them is close, and when they have special requests, the team has designed new marketing elements, i.e. a one-pager with information about the upcoming guests. Additional external marketing is done through LinkedIn via the IMIB Network's own channel, and the team members do it independently referencing to the IMIB Network.

Furthermore, the marketing campaign continues between each workshop. Thus, while it initially takes place before the start of the season, the team does the marketing to maintain the motivation of the registered participants and to gain new ones.

4. Recruitment and orientation

This part involved reaching the target group in cooperation with educational institutions, organisations, and TE Services. People who have registered are reminded every week about each workshop, and the upcoming guest is also mentioned. Participants are asked for confirmation of participation.

Additionally, since catering is included in the workshops, participants are asked about their dietary requirements.

During this phase, the guests are also supported with information about the session content, which can help them prepare for their own presentation. Some agree to come in person, while others do it online, for which we connect through Microsoft Teams.

5. Workshop cycle: five workshops per cycle

Each workshop has a clear theme, but also a process that builds continuity. The workshops require in-person participation. As the team has done iterations through the cycles, in two cycles, the workshops lasted for two and a half hours each; and, in two other cycles, the workshops lasted three hours each. The workshops take place every two weeks. That stretches the implementation cycle to two months. The location for delivery is the Laurea UAS Tikkurila campus. This location is easy to reach by train.

At the end of each workshop, participants are asked to write a short reflection about their experience and understanding of their entrepreneurial spirit and competences. This builds up another project target, which is a project work diary to inform about the progress of the participants in relation to the topic at hand, which in this case is entrepreneurship.

6. Marketing in between workshops

As mentioned earlier, after each workshop, the team continues marketing.

7. Tutoring

One-to-one tutoring is offered to the participants since the first workshop. This is done by inviting our partner who is an expert in the field. She presents herself and provides information to the participants, establishing trust and motivating them to pursue their business idea if they have it or when such takes place.

8. Reciprocity

This is an important component of the approach used in this process. Based on the experiences from the workshops, the team adjusts according to the found needs of the current group. This is not complex because the workshops use a flexible foundation.

9. Group and individual reflection

At the end of each workshop, participant feedback is collected as a form of reflexive exercise, which feeds towards the project diary. While this information is anonymous and not building up for a personal diary, it provides a picture of how participants develop during the entrepreneurship path. The team tested the abovementioned approach. For instance, in two cycles the information was shared during lunch where the participants were invited after the end of the whole cycle. In the following cycles, that has been done through focus groups interviews to go deeper in the reflective exercise.

Furthermore, their progress is assessed each cycle with the help of a personal interview (self-efficacy, entrepreneurial belief, hope). Data from the interviews have also been used in a conference presentation and paper publication.

Moreover, to facilitate the development of a personal project diary, the tutor offers that opportunity to those participants reaching out to her.

10. Certificates

The certificates for participation are prepared. They are handed out at a networking event or electronically to the participants according to the participants' own availability.

11. Networking opportunities

During the cycle, participants are invited to join other paths of the project, such as the career workshops and the Business Mentoring model. In addition, they are invited to the end-of-cycle event at the end of each cycle where they have further opportunities for networking with the project coaches, other project participants, and companies as well as entrepreneurs.

12. Follow-up and additional support

By the time the next cycle or cycle begins, the former participants are contacted via text message to check their entrepreneurial activities or interests. Support is offered to those who are moving on with their journey and regarding their specific entrepreneurial needs. Finally, we facilitate contact with mentors who can provide guidance as needed. From here on, they are motivated to work independently. On the other hand, those who respond not to be ready to pursue their business idea, are asked if they are interested in being contacted later.

5. Results and impact

- Participants have reported strengthened entrepreneurial identity and self-confidence.
- Expansion of networks and increased knowledge of the Finnish entrepreneurial field.
- Concrete entrepreneurial paths: developing business ideas and seeking business advice.
- The operating model supports integration, inclusion and a diverse field of entrepreneurship in Finland.

6. Reusability

- The model can be replicated for different areas and target groups.
- The workshops can be integrated into the entrepreneurship education studies of educational institutions, integration training or entrepreneurship training for organisations.
- Creative and participatory methods can also be integrated with other integration services.