

Fifty Rupees Venture

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Introduction

The Postgraduate Bioinformatics students of IBAB were given a highly interactive, experiential exercise involving becoming entrepreneurs for a few days. Detailed below are full details of the assignment, and the outcome thereof.

Learning Objectives

- To break the mental block that entrepreneurship is something only 'other' people do.
- To make entrepreneurship seem do-able.
- To excite the students about entrepreneurship.
- To set the stage for other lectures on entrepreneurship and make the latter more meaningful.

The Assignment

The class was made up of groups of 3, i.e. a total of 12 groups, on a Tuesday afternoon. Each group was given Rs. 50/- by the faculty member (from institute funds).

The students were given time in the timetable (about 1-1:30 hours), straight after the class, to plan what they were going to do with this money. It was advised that each individual first think on their own, and only then start working in the group.

There was no restriction on what they/their companies could do.

Separately, 3 hours on Friday afternoon were allotted for them to make their sales. The institute committed to issuing receipts in case that was required by their customers.

On Saturday morning, each group had to come and tell the class what they had done and how much they had earned. They also had to declare how much was net profit, and what other lessons they had learned about entrepreneurship.

The students were allowed to keep the extra money they had made. They were also allowed to keep the seed money of Rs. 50/- provided there was evidence that they had seriously tried to 'be a company' and had not frittered away the funds. If it appeared to be the latter situation, then they had to return the Rs. 50/-.

The Outcome:

- There was consternation in the class after they heard about the assignment. They are pure science or to a couple of entrepreneurs in the classroom as guest speakers and had sat through only 1-2 lectures on entrepreneurship before this class. It was something completely new and outside their experience. Within an hour this turned to a buzz of excitement as people started having ideas.
- There was a very wide range of service and product ideas, ranging from serving tea to faculty members to offering computer installation and insurance. There was even a potentially powerful novel product idea.

- The minimum net profit was Rs. 64/-. The maximum was Rs. 1400/-. The average per group was Rs. 519/-. In a couple of cases two companies 'merged' so it was a larger team. When this is taken into account, the average net profit for each 3-member team was Rs. 425/-.
- A little bit we relaxed the norms that the money had to be made before the Saturday morning class. Some money was made during the class (an auction), and some was made by the end of the day. During the class, we settled on that evening as a deadline for all groups. Some of the money was made by confirmed orders (of service/product) that were to be delivered later.
- There was no time limit on their presentations on Saturday morning. It was an informal presentation, without any slides.

Their learning's included many principles that one might have lectured about in the class.

1. Presence of mind.
2. Crisis management - you must take advance from your clients beforehand.
3. Team work helps a lot.
4. There are a lot of ways to start a new business if we look into it.
5. Planning is very essential for the amount of work, time & money to be invested.
6. Market study is very important before we start any business. Now we know that where we went wrong and what all should be done to get more profit.
7. Quality of the product matters much in the market.
8. We should listen properly to what customer is saying.
9. Social networking helps in gaining trust.
10. Any idea can be innovative if its according to people's need.
11. Gained self-confidence.
12. Customer satisfaction plays a very major role especially in a services company.
13. Learn fast from experiences and observation and implement immediately without fail.
14. We learned that sometimes demand can exceed supply so we have to be prepared for facing the situations.
15. Premium segment product can generate more margins.
16. We should be open to change to adapt according to circumstances.

In the Saturday class, each group's presentation was followed by a commentary by the faculty member correlating some of their experiences to entrepreneurship. The Saturday class, of student presentations and faculty discussion, went on for 2 hours.

Conclusion:

The excitement during the assignment and in the class on Saturday morning was enormous. We have never seen such excitement for any assignment. The students, who normally complain of not having enough time managed to find more time than was actually allotted for this assignment.

They were pushed out of their comfort zones, and described their feelings, while trying to sell their product/service, in vivid detail in the Saturday class, but did the work and felt hugely empowered at the end of it.

They were also much more alert in subsequent entrepreneurship classes where what they were learning made more sense since they had already been through the 'entrepreneurial experience'.

It is very interesting that even though the students had not had much exposure to entrepreneurship (and none of them are commerce students), they were often using appropriate commercial jargon in their discussions. It is true that some of the students have work experience. Nevertheless, our guess is that the appropriate jargon has entered the English language and so the students are able to find the right words when they have to describe a particular commercial situation.

We have not given them marks based on how much money they earned, since those who earned the least may have learned the most. We will find other ways to evaluate them for this course.