



Best Practice: Entrepreneurs-in-Residence Program

Best practice implemented at VentureLab – Université de Liège

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The best practice Captured in a Business Model Canvas

 <h2 style="display: inline;">Best Practice: Entrepreneurs-in-Residence</h2>				
<p>Key resources /activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Network of committed coaches (formalized in a contract) ▪ Selection committee responsible for screening of the candidates ▪ Premises of VentureLab for meetings with coach 	<p>Critical success factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ VentureLab as a separate legal entity ▪ Bernard Surlemont as visionary leader with a network of experienced entrepreneurs ▪ Ensured commitment by coaches due to contract-based activities ▪ Independent funding promotes agility 	<p>Value proposition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Coaching from a seasoned entrepreneur (professional and personal advice) ▪ Matched to profile of the student entrepreneur ▪ Access to network of the entrepreneur ▪ Formalized coaching trajectory ▪ Most desired support mechanism in definition stage 	<p>Customer management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promo talks in entrepreneurship courses ▪ Referral from student statute database ▪ Study fairs ▪ School fairs ▪ Yearly event: “Free from School” for recent graduates 	<p>Target group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students with business plan ▪ Student that have just started a venture ▪ Recent graduates ▪ Coachability of student is important ▪ Most preferred by in Definition stage
<p>Costs Contract with Entrepreneurs-in-Residence: 75€/hour, for 3 (or less) days/week</p>			<p>Revenues 50% Public money (subsidies from local, regional, (inter)national level) 50% Sponsorships from local companies</p>	
				
<p>Case selected from Venturelab – Université de Liège</p> 				

The Value Proposition

Practical description

VentureLab is a project initiated by Bernard Surlemont aiming to support students in their entrepreneurial endeavors. Students are in a stage in their life that is ideal to consider becoming an entrepreneur and develop experience in this area. They have ample time to set up new initiatives, no family and financial obligations and therefore find themselves in a luxury position where they can fail relatively inconsequentially. By providing them with a network, the skills, the experience and the self-confidence to become entrepreneurs, VentureLab aims to foster entrepreneurship among students. The cornerstone of the offering by VentureLab are the Entrepreneurs-in-Residence, who act as mentors and guide the students towards a successful venture creation by leveraging their own experience in building a business and managing people. All entrepreneurs-in-residence also have international experience and can thus facilitate the internationalization process of the entrepreneurial students.

Being coached by a seasoned entrepreneur brings a number of benefits to the entrepreneurial student. First, they receive both professional and personal advice, helping the entrepreneurial students to find a balance between their professional activities, studies and personal life. Secondly, as the student entrepreneurs are matched to an entrepreneur with relevant expertise, the entrepreneur-in-residence can provide hands-on support, business acumen and a valuable network in the industry. All student entrepreneurs participate in a standardized trajectory that integrates the learnings and insights of previous student entrepreneurs and focuses very much on customer validation and getting customer traction.

This is also confirmed by this quote from François Gérard: "The first positive experience is the meeting of many other young entrepreneurs. The exchange of experiences and advice allows you to take a step back from your project and observe it from a different angle, to have a different approach to the problem. The most interesting aspect for me was the accompaniment by a coach, Hubert Brogniez. Many of the wise advice quickly bear fruit and allow us to move in a structured, step-by-step way towards creating an economic activity. I really found within VentureLab the support I needed, which allowed me to acquire essential tools to achieve my ultimate goal of starting a business." (François Gérard, VentureLab, 2020).

The Target Group

The target group of the initiative is students that reside in the region who are either enrolled in higher education or have recently graduated and are on the initial stages establishing their own enterprise. To qualify for this type of support, the student should first obtain the special statute of student entrepreneur. The application process consists of the submission of a short application letter containing the following elements:

- The societal problem addressed by the venture
- The envisioned market segment
- The originality of the venture
- The level of development

- The ethical value of the project
- A short plan of the milestones to be achieved over the next 12 months
- The type of support desired
- If applicable, the contact of the partners with whom the student is collaborating in the project
- If applicable, confidentiality issues that are deemed relevant to the committee.

When deemed eligible, the student is invited to present the project and defend his/her case. The committee judges the following criteria of the applicant:

- Level of development of the project
- The need for a special statute
- The appropriateness of the timing of the project
- The level of commitment and motivation of the student
- The student's ability to get involved in the project
- Ethical aspects of the project.

In 2019, 2500 hours of coaching were provided to the various start-ups supported by VentureLab. 11 new start-ups were created in 2019 that received coaching from the entrepreneurs-in-residence.

Empirical evidence collected from a sample of 200 entrepreneurial students indicate that coaching or mentoring is among the most desired types of support, especially in the early stages of the venture. Figure 1 clearly shows that over 60% of the students value receiving mentoring from an experience entrepreneur during the definition and validation stage. Later, when the venture develops into a scalable and mature business model, the need for coaching/mentoring decreases.

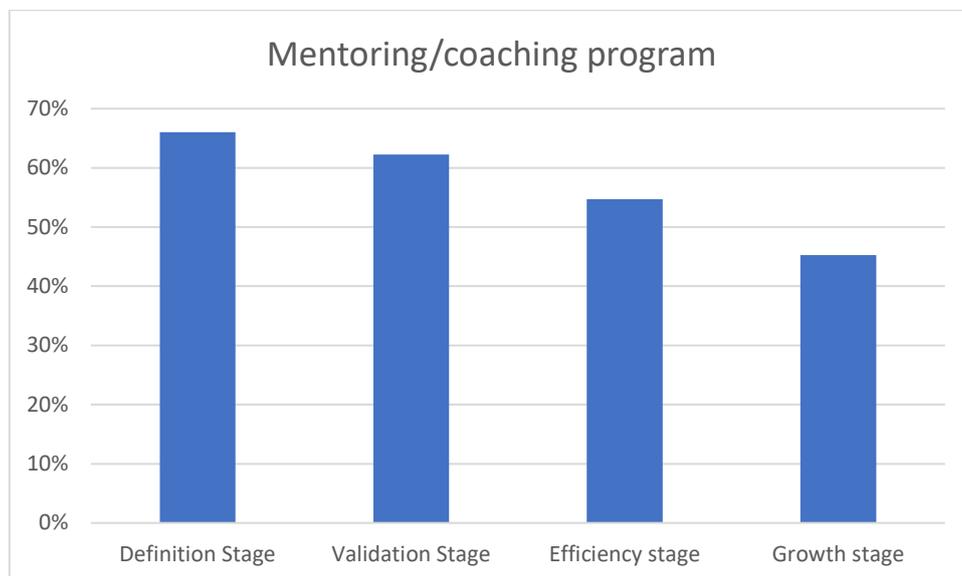


Figure 1: Desire for mentoring/coaching over the different development stages

Figure 2 presents an overview of how much each support measure is valued by entrepreneurial students in the definition stage. This graph confirms that received coaching or mentoring from a seasoned entrepreneur is the most desired type of entrepreneurship support, as over 60% of the respondents have assigned a first, second or third place to this type of support. Similar numbers of

found for the validation stage (see Figure 3). Yet, in this stage office space and testing/prototyping facilities are even perceived as more valuable, leaving a third place for coaching and mentoring support.

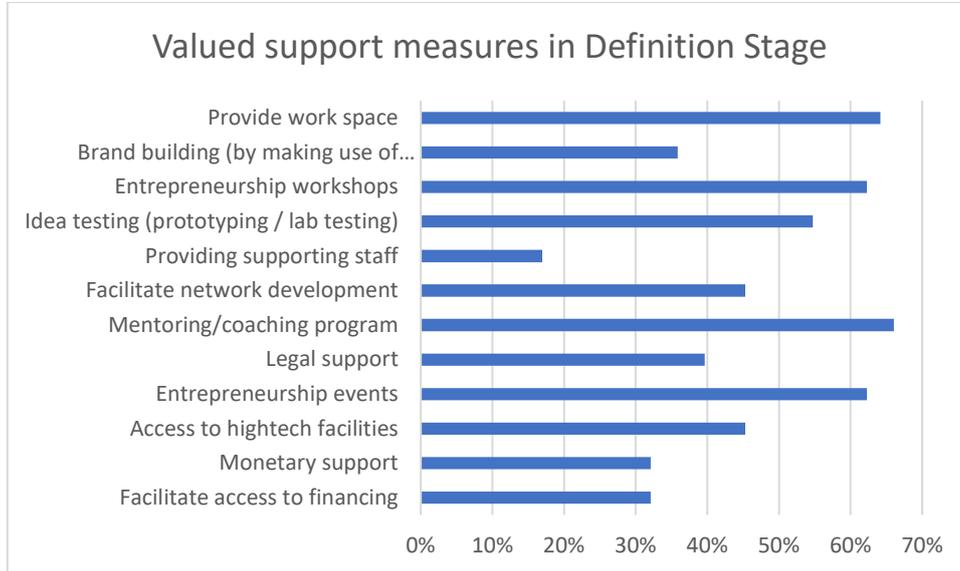


Figure 2: Desire for different support measures in the definition stage

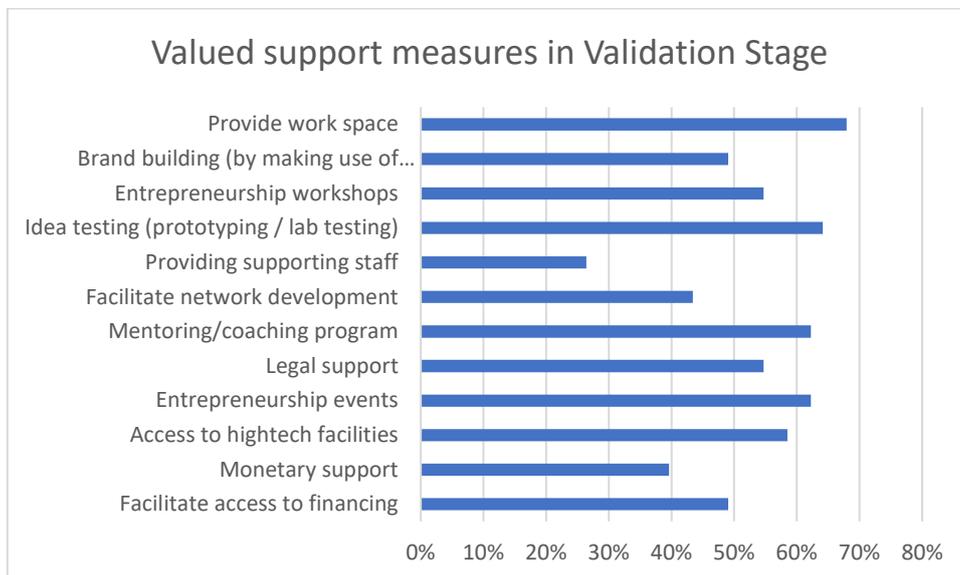


Figure 3: Desire for different support measures in the Validation stage

How to Reach the Target Group

The primary channel used by VentureLab to inform and create awareness among potential participants of the existence of the mentoring program is the website. Furthermore, the program is promoted at various entrepreneurship related courses (ex. University of Liege), during open days at different schools, job fairs taking place in the region as well as a large yearly even called “Free from School” aimed directly at recent graduates who have yet to start their career.

Organizing for Delivery of the Value Proposition

To run the Entrepreneurs-in-Residence program, different resources are required. The most crucial resource obviously are the entrepreneurs. VentureLab seeks truly seasoned entrepreneurs for their coaching trajectory and has defined the following criteria: they must have at least 10 years of experience prior to joining, have been responsible for managing at least 20 people and finally, part of their working experience should be in an international setting. The initiative could not have existed without the involvement and support of founding father Bernard Surlemont who brought together people from the industry and academia to set up an extensive and diverse network of entrepreneurs as well as partners of VentureLab such as the university of Liege, subsidy providers, sponsors and educational institutions of the region.

The entrepreneurs-in-residence are employed with an active contract, for three days per week or less depending on their availability, which clearly establishes their responsibilities and duties and thus secures their time and effort.

Besides the coaches themselves, a selection committee is established to handle the application procedure. This committee consists of academic personnel in the role of a coordinator and is complemented with a few of the entrepreneurs.

Finally, the building of VentureLab also constitutes an important resource, as it serves as a meeting place where student and coach can meet but also interact with the other student entrepreneurs and coaches.

According to VentureLab the critical successfactors of this initiative are the following:

- VentureLab is constituted as a separate legal entity, allowing for more flexibility and agility as VentureLab is not limited by the burdensome bureaucratic processes typical to a university.
- Bernard Surlemont who acts as a visionary leader with a network of experienced entrepreneurs
- Ensured commitment by coaches due to contract-based activities

The financial Side

The primary costs of the Entrepreneurs-in-residence scheme are the entrepreneurs themselves. These individuals are contracted for 3 days per week (or less) and their compensation amounts to 75€ per hour. Venturelab chose to compensate the entrepreneurs-in-residence for the following reasons. First, the remuneration contribute to the commitment of the coaches. Being rewarded for their efforts as coach, it is clear that this task is not a side job or a hobby for when they have some time left. Secondly, the contract also signals the high value Venturelab attaches to their coaches and provides recognition to the entrepreneurs-in-residence for their indispensable and crucial support.

Besides these contractual personnel costs, the physical facilities of VentureLab also constitute a cost. VentureLab offers their facilities as the place where the entrepreneurial activities and mentorship can

take place. Lastly there are some administrative operations and thus costs associated with this initiative.

In order to cover these expenses VentureLab receives subsidies from local and European funds and schemes as well as private sponsorships from local and international partners. Currently, the balance between public funding and private sponsoring is about 50-50%.

More information

The website: <http://www.venturelab.be/en/entrepreneurs-in-residence/>

Contact person: a.s.a.bobelyn@tue.nl

References

Témoignage de François Gérard, chercheur et jeune entrepreneur accompagné par le VentureLab. (n.d.). VentureLab. Retrieved September 13, 2020, from <http://www.venturelab.be/venturelab-blog/temoignage-de-francois-gerard-chercheur-jeune-entrepreneur-accompagne-venturelab/>