

Developing graduate entrepreneurs: Exploring the experiences of university entrepreneurs in residence

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the coaching experience of entrepreneurs in residence in the UK higher education institutions. 'The entrepreneurs in residence' is a relatively new intervention. The individuals who hold these positions appear to claim that they coach the potential entrepreneurs to facilitate to acquire required skills to become successful entrepreneurs. However, this is a relatively under-researched area both within coaching and enterprise/entrepreneurship education. Therefore, we aim to explore individual experience of entrepreneurs in residence (provider of the service) and the students' (receiver) perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of how entrepreneurs in residence supports students to gain required understanding, skills and knowledge to become successful entrepreneurs in future. We ask: *How entrepreneurs in residence make sense of their intervention / experience in coaching practice?* Therefore, our main aim is to explore entrepreneurs in residences' experience to address the previously highlighted research and practice gap. The student perspectives are used to develop additional understanding of entrepreneurs in residences' sense-making. Considering the subjective and contextual nature of the study, and its interest in human experience and hermeneutics, the study is conducted adopting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the research methodology. This is a working paper, therefore, there is no empirical data collected but the study aims to contribute to develop understanding of the role of entrepreneurs in residence in the UK universities, i.e. their role in developing future entrepreneurs. This study has potential in influencing policy while informing practice and the literature.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, UK Higher Education, Coaching, Entrepreneur in Residence

1. Introduction

We position entrepreneurship as a social activity (Pittaway, 2000; Cope, 2011, Anderson, 2016; Rajasinghe, and Mansour, 2019) that is situated in context (Brannback and Carsrud, 2016). Therefore, employing traditional mode of learning and development initiatives to enhance entrepreneurial abilities is contestable, especially due to the reductionist, controlled and closed nature of them.

To address this, coaching has emerged as a potential intervention, but it is relatively under-researched (Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019). The new Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Education guidance (QAA, 2018) emphasises coaching can be highly effective in entrepreneur development endeavours, particularly to provide personalised support to university students aiming to help them to identify their options and address practical obstacles of becoming entrepreneurs.

Informed by the need, most higher education institutions (HEIs) have initiated projects (Rae et al., 2014), to stimulate entrepreneurial activities these institutions have allocated a significant amount of dedicated resources including employing entrepreneurship faculty (Smith, 2017), establishing entrepreneurship centres (Jones and Mass, 2017) and using entrepreneurs to coach students (Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017). In this allocation of dedicated resources, one of the more recent trends in the university-based entrepreneurship ecosystems is the rise of

entrepreneurs in residence (EIR) with more and more business schools using start-up founders to coach students (Moules, 2015; Lloyd-Reason, 2016). These initiatives do not appear to be evidence-based decisions and the success of such coaching interventions and how those interventions have helped students to develop required skills have not been fully explored. Therefore, this study aims to explore the coaching experience of entrepreneurs in residence in UK Universities, particularly to understand how they help students to develop as entrepreneurs.

2. Literature Review

Focus of this study is on university EIR model, however, a brief review of other models can be helpful to comprehend the role of EIR in different contexts. For example, George et al. (2010) discusses three models of EIR - university-hosted EIR model, finance-based venture capital industry-based model and world view model. Sa and Kretz (2015) discuss EIR model in universities whereas Vozikis et al. (2014) discuss EIR in venture capital firms.

In venture capital firms, EIR work as "subject matter experts involved in the evaluation and communication of investment opportunities" (Vozikis et al., 2014). EIRs also facilitate investment decisions by developing relationship between the venture capitalist and the fund-seeking entrepreneur (Schwarzkopf et al., 2010).

These authors argue that EIRs play a role as transactional cost reducers by contributing to reduce costs related to contracting, selecting and venture monitoring. The financial model of EIR, according to George et al. (2010) is often designed to fulfil one of the three key functions: 1) "to launch a new entrepreneurial venture, often with the backing of the parent firm or organisation; 2) to assist in the evaluation of potential investments where the entrepreneur has particular expertise; 3) to provide functional expertise to assist with an existing investment". EIRs financial model is emerging as a popular concept both in SMEs and large conglomerates, the current job adverts for such positions (for example British Petroleum, 2019) place an emphasis on coaching abilities of EIR candidate. Therefore, despite the model or the perception, there seems an expectation that EIRs should be good coaches of others.

The other model discussed by George et al. (2010) is the 'world view model' of EIR where corporation of SMEs and university academics are encouraged to make sense of their practices to enhance mutual benefits for both teaching and practice-based entrepreneurship learning. Moules (2015) discusses evidence of such cases where EIR linking academics to real-world businesses. This appears as a more practical approach to the context that we are interested due to its combination of both practice and research. However, due to its random engagement with the entrepreneurship practitioners, it is relatively disconnected from practice compared to the model of University-hosted EIR that aims to encourage graduate entrepreneurship (George et al., 2010). Therefore, the below section places more emphasis on University-hosted EIR model.

2.1 University entrepreneurial ecosystem: University-hosted EIRs and graduate entrepreneurship

The diversity within what entrepreneurship and different purposes and focuses leave us to situate entrepreneurship for this study as the use of creative, innovative thinking and skills to initiate a new venture in order to create values (e.g. social, commercial values) (see Schumpeter, 1934; Klapper and Farber, 2016; QAA, 2018; Lackeus, 2019). Due to the demand for creating businesses to address social and commercial issues, there is an increasing appeal for enterprise and entrepreneurship education at higher education (HE) level around the world (Belitski and Heron, 2017; Jones, 2019; Otache, 2019).

The enterprise/entrepreneurship education in HE, according to Lloyd-Reason (2016), focuses on producing graduates with the right mind-set and skill-set to develop novel ideas and to make them eager to explore opportunities and to make

use of them to generate values. To facilitate such initiatives, entrepreneur-practitioners should play a vital role (O'Connor et al., 2018). This notion has attracted entrepreneurs to take up residence in different institutes (O'Connor et al., 2018) such as EIR in Universities (see Matt and Schaeffer, 2018). These EIRs have begun to perform a key role supporting other entrepreneurial individuals in the entrepreneurial ecosystems (Maas and Jones, 2015; Zagelmeyer, 2017). For instance, in university entrepreneurial ecosystems, EIRs are expected to advice and support graduate entrepreneurs with their nascent entrepreneurial ventures (Maas and Jones, 2015).

The term 'graduate entrepreneur' appears to have interpreted differently by different authors, for example, as a student with the mind-set towards self-employment (Nabi and Holden, 2008), and as a student who starts an organisation during or after completing their studies (Van der Sijde et al., 2008). However, for this study, we would like to keep the notion more open and consider the 'graduate entrepreneur' as students who are currently in the UK higher education with an intention or curiosity to start a business or even the ones who currently run a small business.

The concept of EIR is widespread in the UK and USA higher education contexts. The EIR in this context typically is a serial entrepreneur, an expert from a specific industry, a business executive, investor or academics with strong, previous industry experience who can evaluate the formation of start-up companies (George et al., 2010). Some studies have revealed positive outcomes of the intervention (see for example Christina et al., 2015) and key activities of EIR in the context of USA seems to include building up a community of practice (e.g. guest lecture/social functions/student organisations); keep people engaged (e.g. 1-on-1 meetings, workshops); grow the community (e.g. off-campus relationships) (Silvaggi et al., 2015).

In the UK, EIRs advice on starting a business, link academic research into business practice, enhance industry exposure of the students, facilitate business plan development (George et al., 2010). For example, Cambridge Judge Business School expects its EIRs to give a week's worth of time to evaluate students' business ideas (Moules, 2015). The EIRs of The University of Nottingham are expected to mentor both student and alumni businesses. They also organize networking events, support potential students and researchers (The University of Nottingham, 2019). The EIR scheme of University of Leicester (2019) is to provide students, staff and alumni a structured support through the initial business idea development, start-up business planning, facilitate business development evaluations. Furthermore, the Royal Society Entrepreneur in residence scheme in the UK focuses on facilitating awareness of cutting-edge research and innovation by creating opportunity for industry experienced individuals to work with Universities (The Royal Society, 2019). The experience or interest in coaching and mentoring continue to appear as an attribute with the EIR's role within UK higher education and in industry (see George et al., 2010; Sa and Kretz, 2015). However, it is not clear if coaching is actually happening in the context and how EIRs' practices enhances potentials of the graduate entrepreneur. Therefore, exploration of both EIRs' and graduate entrepreneurs' experience to deepen our understanding of how EIRs facilitate entrepreneurial abilities of students is a timely intervention.

2.2. Entrepreneurship education in higher education and coaching

Some literature (Belitski and Heron, 2017; Malecki, 2018; Lackeus and Middleton, 2018) suggests that the business and business start-up coaches are among many other social actors within entrepreneurial ecosystems. OECD/The European Commission (2013) highlights coaching as an effective approach to strengthening the skills required to engage in entrepreneurial activities. There appears a continuous emphasis on coaching to enhance students' entrepreneurial attributes within the UK higher education context (Newman, 2015; QAA, 2012; 2018). This is an andragogy informed shift of the educators' role (Hynes et al., 2009; Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017).

Aluthgama-Baduge's (2017) study finds evidence of enterprise and entrepreneurship educators act as business start-up coaches. However, start-up coaching is interpreted as coaching an individual through new venture creation process - from idea development to business start-up (Aluthgama-Baduge, 2017). In Kahn's (2011, p.194) view, the coaching in business context promotes success at all levels and effect "the actions of those being coached".

In business context, there are different purposes of coaching, for example, enhancing business performance (Kahn, 2011; Dobrea and Maiorescu, 2015), develop capabilities of senior leaders and executives of existing businesses to ensure growth (Crompton et al., 2012; Dobrea and Maiorescu, 2015; Joseph, 2016), facilitating someone to generate business ideas (Taylor and Crabb, 2017), and acting as a sounding board to improve team interactions by facilitating understanding (Kauffman and Coutu, 2009). These various interpretations demand us to discuss this paper's position of coaching and the below section is dedicated for this purpose.

2.3. Our position of coaching

Coaching has been establishing its presence as a development tool in many fields, leadership development is one such popular area of research and practice (Ely et al., 2010; Gray et al., 2016; Korotov, 2017). However, coaching's ability to facilitate entrepreneurship learning and development is largely unexplored (Rajasinghe and Mansour, 2019). Despite the lack of research and understanding about how coaching facilitates learning and development of entrepreneurs in practice, the use of coaching for the purpose seems to have gained popularity. The authors of this paper are particularly interested in a popular intervention within UK higher education system called "entrepreneurs in residence" (EIR). The EIR claim that they coach the students who are aspiring to become entrepreneurs. Perhaps they are mentoring, counselling, advising, consulting or coaching. We as researchers within the field were curious about this but the funders of the initiative do not appear to worry about the process and what EIR do to make students more entrepreneurial but the outcomes. This may have influenced the lack of attention to the issue. Therefore, exploring experiences of EIR, and the students and their interpretations of the developmental relationship help us to deeper the understanding of the practice. This leads us to argue coaching as a social activity (Garvey, 2011). Thus, the confusion around what coaching means is due to its diversity and Bachkirova (2017, p.31) sees it as "process of joint meaning-making" between the coach and client". We endorse Bachkirova and Garvey's view on coaching and argue that what coaching means can differ according to the context, the use and the expectations (see Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Maltbia et al., 2014). The acceptance of the diversity and confusions within coaching demands us to develop our position of it for this study. Informed by the contextual practice, and literature (Kilburg, 1996; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; De Haan et al., 2013) we argue coaching as a 'one-to-one conversational relationship between a client (student) and a coach (entrepreneurs in residence) that enhances entrepreneurial abilities of the client.

Despite the growing popularity of entrepreneurship education research within university entrepreneurial ecosystems (O'Connor and Reed, 2018), the above discussion evidences the limited attention given to develop a deeper understanding of EIR's role in developing potential entrepreneurs within the context of UK HEIs. As previously mentioned, EIR claim that they coach students who seek support from them. EIRs being experts within their field, there is possibility of claiming that their practices may link well with the concept of mentoring rather than coaching. However, the term 'coaching' is widely used within the context despite the contradictory arguments and issues. This study aims to resolve one of these issues - how EIR initiative helps student to develop their entrepreneurial abilities, which is timely for both research, practice and policy. Our exploration of both students' and EIRs' interpretation of their experiences can facilitate us to deeper the understanding of

the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1997). For this purpose, we employ Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis as our research methodology.

3. Methodology

Our interest is to explore subjective experience of individual EIR to develop a deeper understanding of how they facilitate entrepreneurial skill development of graduates. Therefore, we acknowledge the significance of subjective understanding of the world and explore individual experience of both EIR and students' experience and how they make sense of their individual experience. Considering our research question and our interest in phenomenology (experience), hermeneutics (sense-making) and ideography (individual subjects), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has been chosen as an appropriate research methodology.

IPA is a recognized health psychological research methodology which is now widely employed in many different fields (Wagstaff et al., 2014). IPA's primary focus is on lived experience of individual social actors (Larkin et al., 2011). It sets guidelines to explore individual sense making of a particular experience (e.g. setting up a business) in a given context (Smith et al., 2009; Wagstaff and Williams, 2014). IPA is informed by three philosophical underpinnings, namely phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al. 2009; Callary et al. 2015). Our interest in human experience and the meaning that individuals impart into their experience is closely linked to philosophical stances of IPA due to its interest in 'being in the world' and the 'lived experience' (Larkin et al., 2011).

Phenomenology is a complicated concept rooted in Heidegger and Husserl's early work (Smith et al., 2009). We do not intend to explore phenomenology in-depth but to justify IPA's position of it. IPA believes in both descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenology, nevertheless its interest on phenomenology is due to concept of subjective experience of human beings. Smith et al. (2009) emphasise the importance of phenomenology by stating that, without phenomenology, there is nothing to be understood. The authors also acknowledge the importance of hermeneutics so that the phenomenon is seen and understood.

Therefore, we attempt to explore the experience of individual social actors within the phenomenon of our interest to delve deeper into the perceived realities within the lived experience of the participants. Thus, we discard the objective realities external to the participants (Flick, 2014), and argue that the meaning and social properties are a result of human interpretations (Robson, 2011). Having such position helps us not to focus on developing universal truths (Flick, 2014; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015) and justifies our attempt to develop deeper understanding by exploring individual experiences and how they give meaning to their experiences. It is argued that the nature of existence must be understood by being and involvement in the world (Grbich, 2007) and human beings are inseparable part of the reality (Palmer et al., 2010).

The acceptance of socially constructed nature of our understanding helps justifying our interest on individuals which is in line with idiographic commitments of IPA. Robson (2011) concurs with this by saying that the "focus of social constructionism is on individuals rather than the group, where the interest is how individuals make sense of their world" (p.24).

3.1 Sampling and Data Collection

To answer our research question, and to generate rich qualitative data relevant to the phenomenon of our interest, five EIR from few different universities and five students who have consumed the service from them are selected purposively (Gray, 2014). The sample is recruited placing more emphasis on phenomenon representation over population representation (Smith et al., 2009; Marshall et al., 2013) which adheres to IPA, the research interest and our ontological and epistemological positions. We attempt to ensure the homogeneity of the sample but understand that the full homogeneity is speculative (Clarke, 2009; Roberts, 2013).

The research interest is to develop deeper understanding of individual experience rather than developing generalizable knowledge, which demands a small sample (Smith et al., 2009; Gray, 2014). This is to ensure that the individual detailed analysis of participants' interpretation of their experiences is accomplished (Wagstaff and Williams, 2014; Gray, 2017). Therefore, we employ a small, homogeneous as possible sample for this study.

Semi-structured interviews are used to collect data to ensure richness, and the depth required to answer the research question (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The explorative naturalistic nature of this study and our interest in contextual and subjective understanding makes semi-structured interviews fit well with the purpose (Grbich, 2007). The chosen method also facilitates participants to have sufficient space to delve deeper and interpret their experiences (Callary et al., 2015). This is widely accepted both in qualitative research and IPA literature which is substantiated by Smith et al. (2009, p.4) saying that "data collection is usually (but not necessarily) in the form of semi-structured interviews".

3.2 Data Analysis

Respecting the idiographic commitments within IPA, the data from EIR is analysed by the first author of this paper and each student data is analysed by the second author. Each interview is transcribed verbatim and subjected to a line-by-line analysis following the data analysis guidance laid out by Smith et al., (2009). IPA literature offers flexibility for the scholars to invent and adapt the guidelines (see). However, Smith (2011) assures that following such guidelines ensures quality and rigour of IPA studies. Once each group is analysed, both individual cases and cross analysis, the super-ordinate themes of each group are compared and contrasted to develop higher level themes (i.e. master themes) of the study that answers the research question. Numeration is not given priority in generating themes (see Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, we pay a close attention to quality and rigour of the study by employing Yardley's (2000) quality criteria for qualitative research.

4. Findings and Discussion

This is a working paper which is at the conceptual stage, so we have not conducted our data collection and analysis yet. However, we aim to present our findings in an "engaging, coherent and accessible" manner (Gray, 2014, p.632). To accommodate the demands of homogeneity and idiographic commitments, the EIR's perspectives are written up before moving to the student perspectives. Furthermore, it is recognised that we could ensure stronger commitments to ideography by prioritizing participants over the themes (see Smith et al., 2009). However, we choose to present the themes "in turn and present evidence from each participant to support each theme" (Smith et al., 2009, p.109). Our way of presenting findings appears popular within IPA scholars and reflecting on our previous experience of conducting IPA studies, we are more comfortable with organising themes to answer the question rather than giving priority to the participant at this stage of the study. The themes are discussed following the same order that we present our findings. This helps readers to follow the developed narrative accounts of EIR and student experiences.

5. Limitations

The study was carried out to develop a deeper understanding of how EIR make sense of their experience in helping potential entrepreneurs to acquire required skills. Therefore, the finding cannot be generalised and this is in line with our ontological and epistemological assumptions and with IPA. However, in positivist eyes, this may appear as an issue due the contextual and subjective nature of findings. Semi-structured interviews are the only data collection tool that is used in this study. Therefore, method related limitations such as self-reported bias, language and culture related issues may exist. These are part of natural lived world and we

acknowledge that the interpretations are limited, shaped and informed by language and culture (see Smith et al., 2009).

Researchers' (our) involvement in sense-making (double hermeneutics) may appear contradictory at least for the scholars and practitioners who seek to develop value free knowledge. However, to our understanding and according to IPA philosophical underpinnings, this is how social actors develop their understanding by interpreting others' interpretations. The interpretations of the participants are audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The analysis is based on these transcriptions (written text) which results non-verbal expressions to go unnoticed. Due to our experience and exposure within coaching and entrepreneurship both in research and teaching, there can be tendency to explore positives and pre-defined themes without placing participants' interpretations at the centre of the study. This is called 'dirty reduction' of data (Smith et al., 2009). Our continuous reflection and reflexivity help us to overcome such issues and to ensure quality and validity of this qualitative study.

6. Conclusion

This working paper aims to explore and enhance our understanding of how EIRs facilitate students to develop their entrepreneurial skills. As previously argued, our understanding about this both in practice and in literature is minimal. Informed by our ontological and epistemological positions and the research interest, the study is conducted by adopting IPA, a recognised methodology in health psychology, however, relatively novel within this field. Overall, ten participants are recruited for the study and data is analysed following the guidance laid out in IPA literature. The paper does not present any findings at this stage. However, we expect that the study helps to address the gaps identified both in practice and research, and contributes to further the current understanding of EIR and helps universities to use the initiative more effectively. Therefore, the study has potentials in contributing to research, practice and policy (Etzkowitz, 2003; Etzkowitz and Zhou, 2018).

7. References

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