SUSTAINING ENTREPRENEURS’ MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING NETWORK ENGAGEMENT: THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS (SUMMARY)

Aisling M. O’Neill
Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland, amoneill@wit.ie

Bill J. O’Gorman
Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalknowledge.babson.edu/fer/vol37/iss6/5

This Summary is brought to you for free and open access by the Entrepreneurship at Babson at Digital Knowledge at Babson. It has been accepted for inclusion in Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research by an authorized editor of Digital Knowledge at Babson. For more information, please contact digitalknowledge@babson.edu.
SUSTAINING ENTREPRENEURS’ MOTIVATION FOR LEARNING NETWORK ENGAGEMENT: THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

Aisling M. O’Neill, Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland
Bill J. O’Gorman, Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland

Principal Topic
This research addresses what motivates entrepreneurs to engage and sustain engagement with learning networks over time. Learning networks are characterised by small groups of entrepreneurs coming together to learn from/with each other to develop their businesses (Alasoini, 2008). They are an effective means of entrepreneurial development due to the dominance of peer learning; entrepreneurs perceive increased validity from knowledge gleaned from their entrepreneurial peers (Kutzhanova, Lyons and Lichtenstein, 2009). Bessant and Tsekouras (2001) highlighted the need for the dynamic nature of learning network development to be captured.

Method
A longitudinal, mixed-method research design was employed with six learning networks examined. There were two male, two female and two mixed gender networks studied, facilitating gender analysis. Using a variety of qualitative/quantitative approaches, the data gleaned provides a holistic perspective of network dynamics. Data collected includes:

350 hours of direct participant observation data;
104 initial interviews with participants
32 in-depth interviews with participants at two time points and 19 exit interviews;
46 personality inventories completed by participants;
170 questionnaires collected at 6-monthly intervals;
223 monthly evaluation forms completed by participants.

Results and Implications
Entrepreneurs will be motivated to engage with networks where they can engage with like-minded people for information sharing, learning and problem-solving (77% motivated to meet other entrepreneurs). Clarity of network purpose among participants increases motivation to engage with the learning network (lack of clarity meant a third of those recruited did not engage). Defined network structures and processes enhance commitment to networks and motivation for sustained engagement. Participants’ personality characteristics play a role in the attraction they feel toward a network and their motivation to engage with the network; participants sustaining motivation with the networks displayed high levels of agreeableness (88%), intellect (68%), conscientiousness (66%), extraversion (56%) & emotional stability (46%). A network environment where there is a high degree of accountability, peer-to-peer engagement, support, sharing and trust increases the likelihood of entrepreneurs remaining engaged in the network; the environment fostered was significant in determining sustained motivation, one of the female networks had high levels of all environmental factors with the outcome that they were still meeting six years from formation.

CONTACT: Aisling O’Neill, amoneill@wit.ie, +353876334053, 1.07 Walton Building, WIT Main Campus, Cork Road, Waterford, Ireland X91 K0EK.