

International Entrepreneurship Educator's Programme

Entrepreneurial Learning - Pedagogical Note Series

15. Use of Panels

1. What is the 'Use of panels'?

A panel is a means of fronting a debate or forming the basis for a process of questioning or collecting opinion/experience on certain issues, problems or opportunities. The panel may be composed of 'externals' or may be used as an internal 'review' group for a particular issue. It is often also used as an alternative to inviting presentations from external speakers.

2. How is the exercise constructed?

This mainly is a function of the task in hand. In general, however, panels are often misused in that they become a vehicle for a series of speeches by panel members in response to a number of questions asked by the chair or harvested from the audience. This becomes boring. Panels can be used in different ways.

The 'Expert Panel' is used to provide comment on a particular issue concerning which the panel have relevant experience. Here the BBC Question Time format is optimum where the panel very briefly addresses questions from the audience collected either beforehand or spontaneously. Engagement of the audience in the debate is important. The chairperson's role in stimulating audience participation, provoking cross-panel debate, keeping comments short, summarising and ensuring that the debate is to the point is critical. The panel should be carefully chosen to bring different perspectives to the theme. For example in debating issues concerning the entrepreneurial university a panel might have a Vice Chancellor, an articulate student perhaps representing a student body, an entrepreneur with some experience of interacting with a university, a representative of a regional development authority or local government and someone from the Department of Education.

An Expert Panel can also be used with small groups to evaluate or comment upon the ideas, proposals and plans of participants, sympathetically or, as in the case of the TV series 'The Apprentice', aggressively.

Participant Panels can be formed to role-play stakeholders or simply to comment upon the work of other participants, individual or groups, for example to advise on marketing plans.

A Representative Panel, for example, a small group of entrepreneurs from a particular sector, or a group sharing a common environment or experience (for example all having taken up external equity) can be used to explore the experience via a process of questioning by participants (often after briefing from programme input).

3. Relevance to Entrepreneurial Learning

The emphasis is upon exposure to tacit learning, enabling assessment of 'how things are seen and done' in the world of practice. If chaired properly it can also provide a strong measure of learning by interaction. It can also provide a vehicle for testing out concepts in practice.

4. Outcomes

Ideas are stimulated by exposure to experience. The animation arising from this approach is a stimulation to the affective and conative aspects of learning. Contacts are made and barriers to external relationship development are broken down.