

Entrepreneurship Training in the Apparel and Fashion Design Sector through Distance Mode:

A Strategy for Facing the Challenge of Growing Unemployment in India

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Community Development

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Globally, the micro and small enterprises (MSEs) are considered the engine of economic growth and, MSEs constitute over 90% of total enterprises in most of the economies. MSEs have the highest rates of employment growth that too at low capital cost. Research studies on small firms and entrepreneurship (Thurick, 1994; Reynolds et al. 2001, 2002; Gorman et al. 1997; Bruyat and Julien, 2000, Heinonen, J. et al; Sunter, 1994) and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (Reynolds et al., 2001) emphasize that the small firms are the real driving force behind economic growth and creation of millions of jobs. An entrepreneur through an enterprise generates conditions for:

- a. increasing opportunities for employment (comprising various competitive skill sets);
- b. additional wealth creation;
- c. introduction and dissemination of new methods and technology; and
- d. overall economic growth.

(http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/documents/NKC_Entrepreneurship.pdf). The definition of entrepreneur as a person who earns money using the available resources so as to cater to his or her financial needs while also creating opportunities for other people to get employed highlights the relation of entrepreneurship with that of economic development and the reduction of unemployment. (<http://www.brighthub.com/office/entrepreneurs/articles/40916.aspx>)

Keeping in view the importance of the MSEs for the economic growth and employment generation, it is proposed to discuss the strategy for entrepreneurial training in fashion and apparel design.

IMPORTANCE OF FASHION APPAREL DESIGN AS ENTREPRENEURIAL AVENUE

The textile industry is one of the important sectors in Indian economy in terms of output, foreign exchange earnings and employment. National Skill Development Program (NSDP) and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) emphasise the importance of textiles sector with high employment potential in Indian economy. The garment production units alone provide 40% of jobs in the small scale sector, besides offering ample opportunities for entrepreneurs to sprout and flourish.

Small businesses in creative areas like fashion are considered as the depository of the traditional skills and creativity necessary to penetrate or/and extend markets and can provide stable employment and income generation to the diverse communities and to those with different levels of education (UNIDO Report).

However, if governments and nations are to harness this potentially economically vibrant sector, it is important to understand the needs of the entrepreneurial education. This necessitates the educationalists to be cognizant of entrepreneurship requirements of the fashion and apparel design sector. Galloway et al., 2005 opines that educators, including the universities, have an obligation to meet students' expectations with regard to preparation for the economy in which they will operate. The industrial sector has to cope with the flexibility and responsiveness and it is incumbent on the educational system to demonstrate the same traits (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs).

FASHION AND APPAREL ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

Reynolds et al. (2002), opines that education (Scott and Twomey, 1988) is a key element (prerequisite) that enhances economic growth through entrepreneurship and creation of graduate entrepreneurs. Most of the entrepreneurial education in India is concerned with raising awareness of entrepreneurship which revolves around the roles and functions of the entrepreneurs in the economy

and society. A paradigm shift is required where we concentrate on the entrepreneurial education tailored to different disciplines.

Fashion and apparel design entrepreneurial education needs to be planned in relation to the education of the enterprise, for the enterprise and through the enterprise (entrepreneurial classes suggested by Jamieson, 1984).

Entrepreneurial education of the enterprise: Fashion and apparel design is a specialized sector which requires the aspiring entrepreneurs to be introduced to the fashion entrepreneurship and fashion entrepreneurial traits such as:

- Ability to develop a style that is distinctive, consistent and new
- Ability to manage the process of communication on which fashion depends
- Ability to manage strategic and marketing issues

Entrepreneurial education for the enterprise: This includes imparting knowledge and skills required to start and grow the enterprise. It includes entrepreneurship education through a program of action learning that deals with real-world problems and adopts many of the entrepreneurship education principles (Kirby, 2002).

Entrepreneurial education through the enterprise: This includes education using the new venture creation process. This would help the students acquire the business understanding and skills required to run a particular enterprise.

Success of entrepreneurship in fashion and apparel design involves combining design, business and manufacturing knowledge. Academic education should offer students a chance to see the latest developments in their selected field, thus giving a clear view to implement them in the future business.

PROPOSED STRATEGY FOR FASHION AND APPAREL DESIGN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION THROUGH DISTANCE MODE

For strengthening MSEs, the Government of India has formulated the NSDP and stipulated a target of skilling 500 million people by 2022. Distance Educational Institutes can be a promising medium for imparting entrepreneurial education to a wide array of students. It is emphasized in national knowledge commission report on entrepreneurship (http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/documents/NKC_Entrepreneurship.pdf) that growing the pool of skilled people which is a key priority entirely depends upon access to quality education. The key challenges relate to ensuring access, inclusiveness and excellence. Greater practical exposure, critical analysis, entrepreneurship curriculum, incubation and mentoring, industry-research linkages can help in fostering entrepreneurship. Essentially, the planning of the curriculum and the teaching methods for entrepreneurial education needs to be analysed. We need to develop a strategy which would address the requirements of the entrepreneurs entering the field.

WHAT TO TEACH?

The entrepreneurship in fashion and apparel design should focus on opportunities emerging through creativity, preparing the graduates to work as freelancers or self-employed or creating small enterprise. The curriculum to be developed should be based on the collective knowledge of the educationalists, government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) running entrepreneurship programs, successful entrepreneurs in the field and business partners. Different areas that need to be covered are:

Fashion and apparel design content: The framework of the entrepreneurial curriculum in this should include the concepts of fashion and apparel industry with focus on design development process, fashion forecasting, production etc.

Entrepreneurship content: The entrepreneurial traits required for the enterprise such as creativity, innovation, identifying opportunities in a climate of change, practice of entrepreneurship and characteristics of entrepreneurs needs to be a part of the curriculum. Spotting innovative opportunities and making them happen at the calculative risk should be the focus. This would prepare the students for the enterprise.

Business content: The curriculum should prepare the students to the business content based on the type of entrepreneurial avenue. It should broadly include topics such as marketing, trend research, market research, branding, finance and human resources, design and product cycle etc. This will help the students develop the skills base to encourage more enterprising behaviour and gain integrated and holistic business management perspective.

Legal aspects: The legal aspects such as the intellectual property rights, employment legislation, insurance, labour acts etc., would help the students face different challenges in the process of creating and sustaining the enterprise.

Communication skills: Generating sales is the foremost problem which is totally based on the ability to convince the potential customers. A fashion and apparel entrepreneur should be in a position to convince the customer that his/her business products would satisfy their requirements. This requires entrepreneur to possess proper communication skills.

HOW TO TEACH?

The delivery of the content through traditional lecture-driven teaching methodologies is not relevant to entrepreneurship courses, as they may inhibit the development of entrepreneurial skills and characteristics (Kirby D.A, 2004). Entrepreneurial education revolves around innovation and effectiveness which has its roots in action oriented and student-inclusive teaching forms rather than the traditional teaching forms. There is a need to shift to more interactive learning approaches where the teacher becomes more of a moderator than a lecturer. The effective methods of teaching entrepreneurial based programs are given below:

- Group and team techniques of creating new business ideas
- Use of case studies
- Business planning workshops
- Guest speakers mainly entrepreneurs in the field
- Business simulation

(http://www.emuni.si/Files/knjiznica/78_EC-Entrepreneurship-in-Higher-Education-2008.pdf)

Some of the key points to be noted are as follows:

- Business plan activities should be based on real business ideas
- Case studies should be live
- Experience-based teaching methods prove to be a fruitful tool

How can these principles be applied in education through distance mode? The answer lies in the partnerships.

The Educational Institutions should focus on developing partnerships with other educational institutions, different funding wings of the Government (such as Textiles, Labour, Human Resource Development (HRD), etc.), manufacturers' associations, NGOs, labour organisations, successful entrepreneurs of the field etc., for the curriculum development and the content delivery. Research by Hytti and O'Gorman, 2004 found that the trainers lacked the skills and information required about entrepreneurship to provide students with the necessary skills and knowledge for entrepreneurial education. The educators selected from various partner institutions need to be trained on how to address students. The participation of real entrepreneurs in teaching can help in bringing the practical experiences to the students. In the context of teaching entrepreneurship, it is interesting to note that a high visibility of entrepreneurial commitment of the institutions could be achieved through the presence of dedicated spaces such as 'hatcheries' or incubators for students start-up plans. We would concentrate on the fashion incubators to support the students and the method of making these accessible for students. A model including these concepts is given in the annexure 1.

Incubators for fashion and apparel entrepreneurial training

Incubators are becoming the entrepreneurial schools of tomorrow as cited by Albert P. et al. 2003 and are recognized in both developed and developing countries as important instruments for promoting entrepreneurship development (Adegbite.O, 2001). Innovative start-ups by the students could be encouraged through the dedicated and supportive internal incubators or by easy access to external incubators. It is proposed that the universities have their own incubation centers aimed to help the aspiring entrepreneurs in the start-up of the business or direct them to the external incubation centers.

Incubators for fashion and apparel training should function with the aim of rendering the creative potential of fashion and apparel design entrepreneurs into commercially viable businesses. It is generally seen that the entrepreneurs face significant obstacles to start a business, e.g. high-fixed and entry costs, lack of access to equity capital, insufficient technical and market information, and weak management skills. The incubators function with the assistance provided from professionals of clothing industry including manufacturers, sales reps, buyers, factors, sewing contractors, suppliers, pattern makers and designers; and they should entail the following:

- Introducing creative entrepreneurs to business skills as well as to financial sources and legal assistance
- Provision of physical infrastructure
- Provision of technical support from the professionals in the field
- Provision of common marketing activities and network support for creative entrepreneurs and their activities

The proposed model for the incubation centers used for distance learning institutions has two stages:

- Pre-incubators where the entrepreneurs with strong business idea would be exposed to the basic entrepreneurial traits and educational concepts that include the following:
 - fashion related
 - business
 - entrepreneurial
 - legal concepts etc.
- Incubators where the idea would be developed into a proposition for implementation.

The four areas of which create value to the incubation process as suggested by Campbell et al. (1985) includes:

- diagnosis of business needs
- selection and monitored application of business services
- provision of financing
- access to the incubator network.

Similarly, Hackett and Dilts (2004) postulate that the following key factors contribute to incubatees' success through incubators:

- providing dynamic, proactive feedback to incubates
- assisting incubatees with business planning
- encouraging incubatees to develop control systems during the early stages of incubatee development.

The model proposed is based on different models of the incubation centers reviewed by the author.

Pre-incubators – These are considered as the platform for the development of the product idea and diagnose the business needs. These are entrepreneurship centres offering a range of fashion and apparel design courses to the incubatees. This could be a part of the university campus, the learning centres, NGOs etc., where the incubatee is provided with dynamic feedback of the business idea proposed and assistance provided for planning the business idea. This should include teaching the entrepreneurs with a feasible business idea and involved in a learning process that would help them to acquire the tools and skills required to implement their ideas for a successful start-up. The content focus should include basic entrepreneurial traits and related educational concepts. The teaching focus should be aimed at imparting the learning experience through learner centered approach with relevant teaching tools.

Incubators – An accepted definition of incubators as per the US National Business Incubation Association can be given as incubators provide hands on management assistance, access to financing and orchestrated exposure to critical business or technical support services. They also offer entrepreneurial firms shared office services, access to equipment, flexible leases and expandable space – all under one roof. Incubators, particularly in universities, can act as a laboratory for commercialising the ideas of academics and provide a training ground for entrepreneurs. The function of internal incubators cannot work in isolation. It needs to be connected to different partners of the distance educational institutions which can foster the entrepreneurial education. At a general level, the concept of fashion and apparel design incubation centres refer to the practice of providing low-cost, property-based facilities, shared services, capital equipment, business and technical services as well as access to finance, including venture capital and business networks to nurture the development of new firms.

A model that could be used by the distance education universities for imparting entrepreneurial education through pre-incubators and the incubation centres using blended (ICT and print media) is given in the annexure 2.

The proposed strategy and plan of action given below is based on the open system approach which is a technique for understanding, predicting and controlling the interaction and interdependence of the major parts of the system in a given situation, to achieve specified objectives. The interrelation of different stakeholders and entrepreneurial development is given with reference to four areas of value incubation process as suggested by Campbell et al. (1985).

Table: 1 Objectives and strategy for entrepreneurial education

Objectives	Strategies/Policies	Inputs and Infrastructure		Expected Outputs
		Institutions	Support infrastructure	
<p>Promoting fashion and apparel entrepreneurial avenues</p> <p>Providing comprehensive information in developing and sustaining entrepreneurial avenue in the area of fashion and apparel design</p> <p>Providing support services by involving the local institutions, NGOs, business organizations, government enterprises etc.</p> <p>Providing efficient business support network</p>	<p>Government strategies to be given priority in promoting the avenues (National Entrepreneurship Network, Bharatiya Yuva Shakti Trust, Mutual Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme, Network Enterprises Fund, Sectorial Skill Development Initiative etc.)</p>	<p>Main Stake holder Distance education University</p> <p>Partner Stake holders Certified Learning Centres NGOs Local Institutions</p> <p>Business partners Government agencies Funding agencies</p>	<p>Pedagogical support – educational requirements in establishing fashion and apparel entrepreneurial avenue and providing resources in terms of print and online media. Guidelines for establishing the incubation centre including the developing business idea, access to market, finance, networks etc.</p> <p>Support in education and training, skills required in developing business idea, developing entrepreneurial traits</p> <p>Marketing through fairs, networks, exhibitions, access to capital, funds, awards</p>	<p>Entrepreneur with strong base of entrepreneurial education required for starting and sustaining the business – a means of contributing to employment generation and the economic development of the nation</p>

Table 2: Proposed Plan of Action

Action	Description	Output	Stakeholders Involved
<p>Planning the curriculum and the content development</p>	<p>Constitution of Board of Studies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to formulate the learning objectives to formulate the curriculum based on the objectives to develop the content required for entrepreneurial education of the 	<p>Standard curriculum and learning material.</p>	<p>University, educational experts from other Universities, successful entrepreneurs, government agencies</p>

	<p>enterprise, for the enterprise and through the enterprise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to formulate the guidelines for identification and certification of the authorised training centres • to formulate the guidelines for establishing the support network 		
Identification and certification of the authorized training centers – (University learning center / NGO / Local institution for imparting entrepreneurial education)	To identify and authorise the training centre based on the guidelines formulated by the university.	A learning centre fully equipped working towards accomplishing the objectives	University, Government agencies, Business partners
Implement and evaluate the learning objectives	<p>Implementing the curriculum (pre-incubators)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • print media • online resources (char rooms, discussion forums, video resources etc.) • group and team techniques • case studies • workshops • training • developing the business idea <p>Evaluation of the learning objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • paper and pen test • continuous evaluation of the practical aspects • evaluation of the business idea <p>Incubation centres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • continuous evaluation of developing the business idea into a revenue generating product <p>The flow chart of the task analysis is given in the annexure 3.</p>	A fashion and apparel entrepreneur trained to start and sustain the enterprise.	University, University learning centre / NGO / Local institution, Successful entrepreneurs, Business partners

CONCLUSION

As yet, there is no common agreement over what constitutes entrepreneurship education in the area of fashion and apparel design. The paper presented is an attempt made to propose the overall picture of the entrepreneurial education in fashion and apparel design with focus towards the following aspects:

- Content
- Teaching
- Partnership for the development and delivery of the concepts
- Incubation centers as the challenging means of developing the entrepreneurs

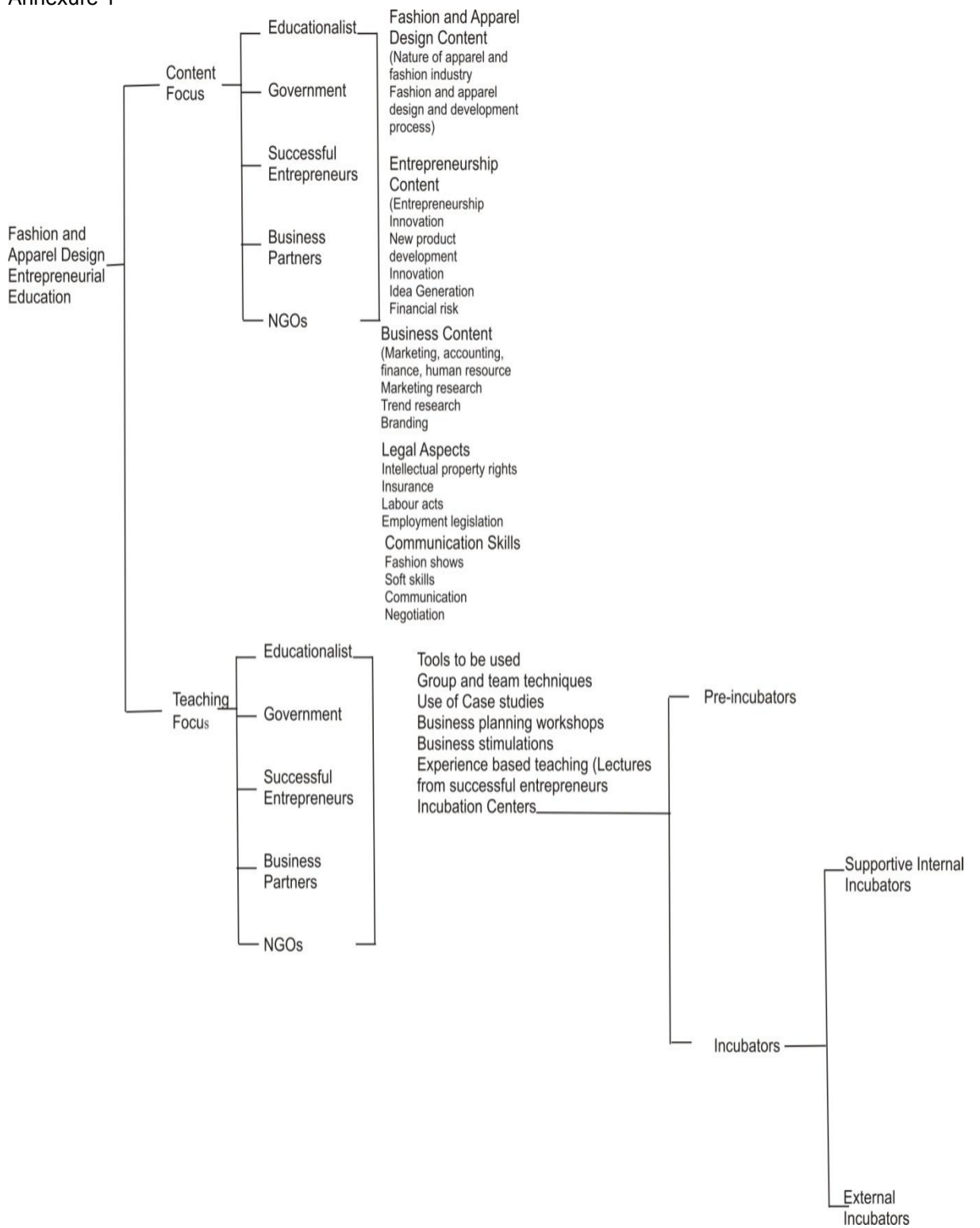
The pre-incubators and the incubators should be designed to help the budding entrepreneurs to be exposed to concepts that would help them in strengthening their business idea and test the implications of the concepts in new situations and gain concrete experience.

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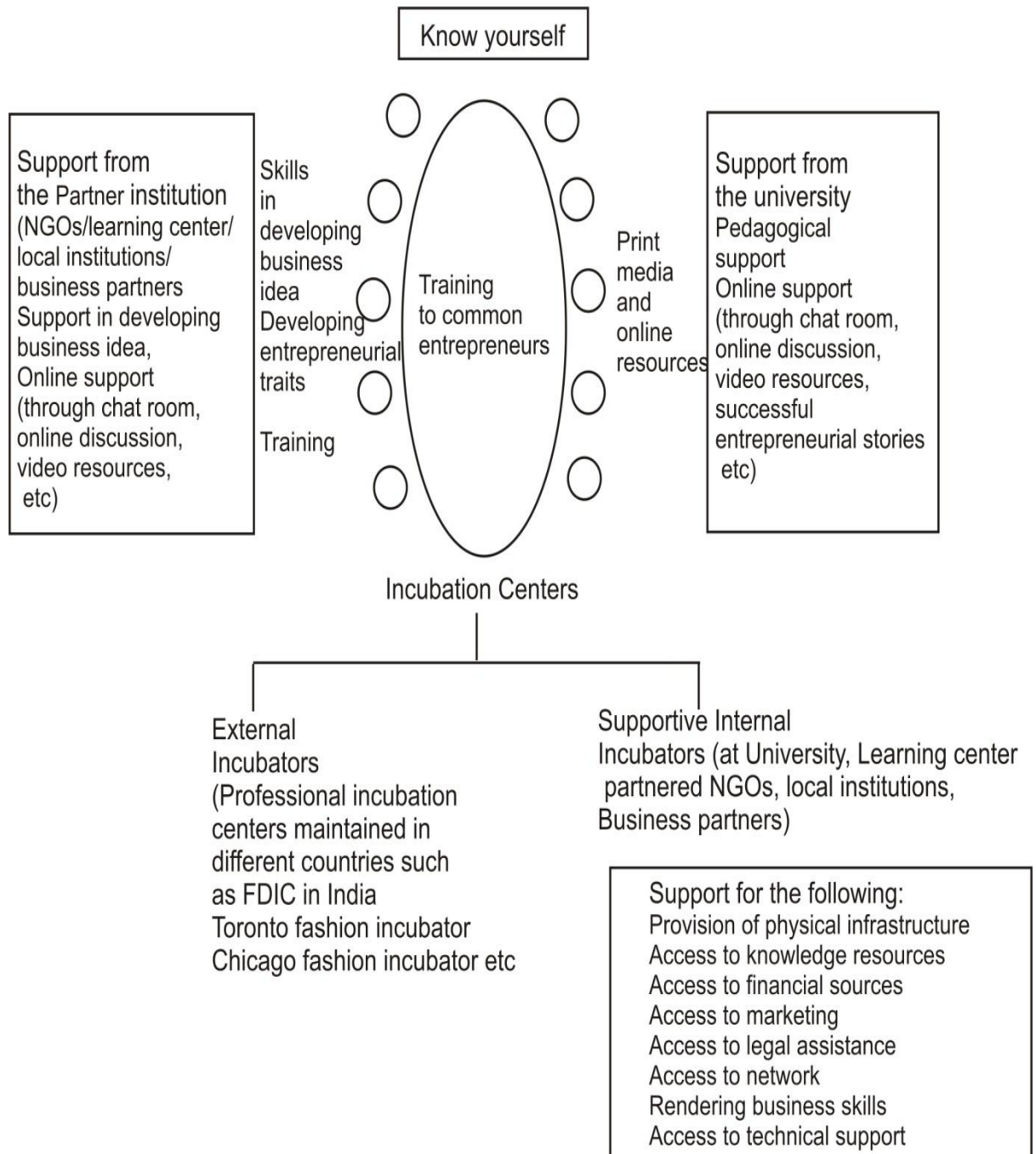
Annexure 1



Annexure 2

Budding Entrepreneur

Pre-incubator (At learning center/NGO/Univeristy)



Annexure 3

