Leveraging Technology for Leadership and Entrepreneurial Skills Development Programs: A Study of Bridge for Billions and AsiaTech

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ABSTRACT

When the topic of global entrepreneurship development is analyzed, access to quality leadership and entrepreneurial skills training is vital for individuals in frontier and emerging markets. However, these contexts are characterized by unique challenges, such as limited resources, geographical constraints, and lack of tailored support that often hinder the dissemination of such programs. This is a study that dives deep into the innovative use of technology in implementing and delivering leadership and entrepreneurial skills development initiatives for entrepreneurs in these markets, focusing on the efforts of Bridge For Billions and AsiaTech, which are on a mission to democratize access to quality entrepreneurship support worldwide and build a system within which everyone, everywhere can unleash their entrepreneurial potential to identify sustainable solutions to address societal and business problems.

Keywords: *Leadership, Entrepreneurship, Managerial skills, Sustainability,*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The path of building a new business venture is like a journey filled with twists and turns, where having the right skillset is like having a map to find your way. Just as a map guides travellers, skills guide entrepreneurs through the different stages of creating a successful business opportunity identification, exploitation, new business, established business. This journey is not the same for everyone, and the skills needed can change depending on where you are and what you're doing. Notably, research underscores the malleable nature of these skills, shaped by contextual influences and the ever-advancing tapestry of technology.

McEvoy's (2006) astute characterization crystallizes skills as the tangible application of knowledge garnered from education and experience. Such skills are not static entities but adaptive tools that morph as businesses navigate distinct phases. With this compass in hand, this literature review embarks on an illuminating journey through the annals of research, endeavouring to understand how these skillsets metamorphose, intertwine, and resonate with the essence of business venture creation.

Entrepreneurial and leadership skills programs wield transformative power, particularly within emerging and frontier markets, by equipping individuals with the abilities and mindset necessary to navigate the complex landscape of business creation. These programs serve as

beacons of empowerment, fostering a range of competencies that transcend traditional educational boundaries.

Such programs cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset, nurturing skills like problem-solving, creativity, and adaptability that are indispensable for identifying and capitalizing on market gaps. By instilling confidence and resourcefulness, these programs empower individuals to transform obstacles into stepping stones, effectively navigating uncertainties inherent to emerging economies.

As we dive into this review, we'll get to know two examples: Bridge for Billions and AsiaTech Education. They are like guides on this journey, showing us how skills and technology can work together to overcome obstacles and bring ideas to life. Bridge for Billions makes it possible for people to learn how to start businesses, even if they're far away. They use technology to connect mentors and learners. On the other hand, AsiaTech Education mixes learning and technology to help people develop skills that match what companies need nd benefit the society at large.

In essence, entrepreneurial and leadership skills programs are pivotal agents of change within emerging markets. By nurturing entrepreneurial acumen and leadership prowess, these programs cultivate a resilient, innovative, and ethically conscious workforce. Empowered individuals become not only creators of their destinies but also drivers of economic growth, innovation, and social progress within their communities. demands a diverse set of skills to navigate successfully. Research has shown that the skills required during different phases of a business venture vary significantly and are influenced by the surrounding context. McEvoy (2006) defines skills as the practical application of knowledge gained from education and experience. This literature review delves into the various categories of skills relevant to business venture creation and examines their association with distinct phases of the entrepreneurial journey. The review explores the significance of entrepreneurial and leadership skills, their acquisition, and their impact on economic growth in different market contexts.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The process of business venture creation is a dynamic and multifaceted journey that opportunity identification, personal skills, management skills, and technical skills. Mamobalo and Myres (2019) conducted an extensive literature review to identify these skill groups and link them to specific phases of the business venture. Their findings highlighted the importance of entrepreneurial and leadership skills. Entrepreneurial skills encompass activities related to opportunity identification, idea development, creativity, and innovation. On the other hand, leadership skills involve visionary thinking, inspiring others, empathy, and ethical decision-making. Chell (2013), Deakins et al. (2016), and Hahn et al. (2019) concur with these findings and underscore the pivotal role of entrepreneurial skills in the initial opportunity identification phase and leadership skills in the established phase of a business venture.

Peschl et al. (2021) emphasize the significance of cultivating entrepreneurial thinking and skills to address the complex challenges prevalent in the global business landscape. Their research focuses on students and stresses the need to move beyond explicit and procedural knowledge. This shift is crucial for thriving in the rapidly changing environment of today. This perspective challenges the traditional notion that entrepreneurship is an innate trait and unchangeable. Instead, a competency-based approach has gained prominence, suggesting that experience and training can facilitate the development and mastery of entrepreneurial capabilities. Peschl et al. (2021) identify a range of essential entrepreneurial skills, including

problem-solving, ambiguity tolerance, resilience in the face of failure, empathy, resourceful creativity, responsiveness to feedback, and collaborative teamwork.

Similarly, Setiawan and Fahmi (2019) investigate the role of Business Incubators as platforms for entrepreneurship education and skill development. Business incubators support startups by providing shared facilities, tailored curricula, expert facilitators and trainers, mentoring methods, and networking opportunities. This environment aids in the acquisition of essential skills and knowledge required for business success. Furthermore, business incubators contribute to the growth of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), the diffusion of research-based innovations, and job creation, particularly in emerging markets. It's essential to distinguish between business incubators and accelerators, as the former focuses on skill development for new ventures, while the latter aims to expedite the growth of existing companies.

Rosca et al. (2020) bring attention to the concepts of diversity, inclusion, and sustainability in entrepreneurship. Their research sheds light on how women engage in entrepreneurial activities in diverse cultural and socio-economic contexts. They highlight the power of social entrepreneurship and inclusive innovation in addressing societal inequalities and engaging marginalized individuals. This perspective aligns with the broader understanding that entrepreneurship skills can empower individuals, enabling them to make meaningful contributions and drive positive change within their communities.

Roupnel et al. (2019) shift the focus to leadership skills, emphasizing their importance in addressing the multifaceted challenges organizations encounter. They identify coaching, mentoring, and action learning as vital programs for nurturing leadership skills. Coaching facilitates personal growth and resource utilization, mentoring imparts experiential knowledge, and action learning promotes problem-solving and optimal outcomes.

More in general, entrepreneurial and leadership education has undergone a transformative evolution over the years (Galvao et al., 2020). Initially, pedagogical methods were rooted in traditional approaches, characterized by the mere transmission and replication of knowledge. This led learners to passively absorb information and new concepts. However, during the 2000s, a distinct hands-on learning approach gained prominence. This approach accentuated problem-based learning, case studies, and simulations, thereby fostering an active learning process (Peschl et al., 2021); (Bauman et al., 2021). Within this context, technology assumes a pivotal role in cultivating an enriched educational environment that reaches individuals regardless of their location and schedule, affording them the opportunity to cultivate novel skills (Sousa and Almeida, 2014); (Ratten and Usmanij, 2021).

Permatasari and Anggadwita (2019) contend that digital transformation in entrepreneurship education holds particular significance in emerging markets as a catalyst for instigating entrepreneurial processes across various domains. The authors emphasize the critical role of enhancing technology to deliver educational programs and to expand learners' networks and partnerships, transcending fields and geographical boundaries. Similarly, Coelho and Martins (2022) underscore the importance of digital training in nurturing soft skills, underscoring the notable standing this subject has attained within academic literature. They also outline five principal categories warranting scholars' attention:

1. *Pedagogical Models and Strategies*: These aim to comprehend digital technologies' integration as a secondary outcome derived from other content.

2. *Course Modalities Studies:* Encompassing the utilization of MOOCs, blended learning, and hybrid models, investigating their effectiveness.
3. *Comparison Studies***:** Investigating disparities between online and faceto-face learning approaches.
4. *Game-Based Learning***:** Focusing on the adoption of digital games to acquire novel skills.
5. *Case Studies***:** Delving into specific circumstances and contexts to provide nuanced insights.

In frontier and emerging markets, leveraging technology for skill acquisition offers a transformative avenue to overcome prevailing barriers. Technological learning empowers individuals with versatile skills, reducing dependency on traditional infrastructures. Online platforms provide accessible and flexible education, circumventing physical limitations. Additionally, technology-enabled learning promotes self-paced progress, catering to diverse learning styles. This approach fosters entrepreneurship by equipping individuals with skills to navigate evolving market landscapes. By transcending geographical constraints, digital learning enhances employability and socioeconomic mobility. Ultimately, technological skill development catalyses innovation, enabling frontier and emerging markets to surmount challenges and drive sustainable growth on a global scale (Vorbach et al., 2019).

Building leadership and entrepreneurial capabilities, indeed, not only benefits individuals but also contributes to economic development by improving labour market prospects. This is confirmed by recent reports published by international organizations. For example, the Asian Development Bank's 2022 report underscores the role of entrepreneurship and leadership in driving economic growth, especially in emerging markets. Entrepreneurship fosters innovation, competition, and private sector vibrancy, resulting in economic dynamism. The report also highlights a shift in research focus, with increasing attention directed towards understanding the impact of entrepreneurship in frontier and emerging economies. This change in perspective reflects the recognition of entrepreneurship and leadership as catalysts for societal transformation and economic prosperity.

It is crucial to note, in addition to the positive impact on the economy, how multidisciplinary research points also to the psychological empowerment that comes from developing entrepreneurship and leadership skills. Such empowerment involves cultivating a mindset that instils confidence in one's abilities, establishes meaningful goals, and drives proactive actions towards their achievement. This psychological shift is closely tied to the enhancement of self-efficacy – an individual's belief in their capability to achieve desired outcomes. This empowerment becomes a powerful tool in breaking down barriers and unlocking untapped potential, particularly in emerging environments.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Dannels (2018) defines research design as a plan that is able to provide the structure to integrate the elements emerging from a quantitative study in order to obtain credible, generalizable and free from any bias results. More specifically, research design is a way to determine how the participants of the study are selected, how the independent and dependent variables are selected, how data are collected and then analysed, and how external variables are controlled.

Abutabenjeh and Jaradat (2019) add that research design is critical to any discipline from sciences to social sciences. Indeed, the authors highlight that selecting and implementing the

proper research design methodology is the most important decision to make after having identified a research topic and having formulated the related research questions.

Mello (2022) describes in the details qualitative research design which is connected to the need of being aware that social phenomena are always attributed to multiple causes. In particular, the author explains that qualitative analyses are case based research methods which intends to capture casual complexity, by compering cases in a structured way. However, in this paper, a qualitative research method is applied. Rutberg and Bouikidis (2018) distinguish qualitative from quantitative research, with the latter employing the use, measurement and analysis of numbers and accuracy, and the former focusing on specific case studies. In the context of this paper, Bridge for Billions and AsiaTech Education are the two organizations explored to better understand the topic and data is collected through primary and secondary sources. While among the former we find direct conversations had with representative from the targeted organizations, in the latter we have publicly available information extracted by official websites and reports.

4.0 CASE STUDIES

Bridge For Billions

In the bustling metropolis of New York City, in the year 2013, a revolutionary startup was born with a mission that would reverberate across the globe. Bridge for Billions emerged to reshape the landscape of entrepreneurship support. With its unwavering commitment to breaking down barriers, this dynamic entity has traversed continents to operate across 132 countries, fostering innovation.

At its heart, Bridge for Billions is more than just a startup; it is a movement of people whose goal is unleashing others' potential. Embarking on a noble quest, the company envisions a world where quality entrepreneurship resources are accessible to all, regardless of their geographical location or socio-economic standing. This vision encompasses a profound belief that opportunities should be ubiquitous, capable of nurturing potential and empowering individuals to craft ingenious solutions that transform societies.

In pursuit of this audacious goal, Bridge for Billions has harnessed the power of technology to forge partnerships with both private enterprises such as Chanel, Visa, Novartis and Coca-Cola, and public institutions such as the United Nations and the European Commission. This collaborative approach has given rise to an array of innovative entrepreneurship programs that resonate with purpose-driven endeavours.

Over the span of a decade, Bridge for Billions has left an indelible mark on the lives of 3661 entrepreneurs hailing from diverse backgrounds and inhabiting vastly different economic landscapes, with a particular focus on Latin America and Africa. It has emerged as a counterforce to the challenges that emerge in resource-constrained environments, acting as a bridge across the chasm of opportunity. In a world often marred by inequalities and disparities, Bridge for Billions has been a driving force in ensuring that the entrepreneurial playing field is levelled, and all individuals possess an equal shot at success.

This impact has been realized through a diverse portfolio of programs, each meticulously crafted to address distinct facets of the entrepreneurial journey. Among these initiatives is the Economic Development Program, a vehicle through which nascent ideas are nurtured into fully-fledged businesses that serve as agents of economic progress. Complementing this is the

Corporate Volunteering Program, a unique bridge that connects the expertise of seasoned professionals with the enthusiasm of budding entrepreneurs, fostering a symbiotic exchange of knowledge.

However, the main pillar among these programs is undoubtedly the Entrepreneurship Program, which stands as a testament to Bridge for Billions' unwavering commitment to empowerment. This transformative program, conducted entirely online, harnesses the potential of digital platforms to guide founders through a journey that lasts for 4 months and includes 8 modules. Diving deep into these modules, it is possible to better understand their structure and how technology supports the delivery of the program:

- *Module 1:* Participants develop their value proposition to identify their markets and customers.
- *Module 2:* The Bridge for Billions online platform support founders with the development of a competition map.
- *Module 3:* Similarly to the previous step, the focus in this module is on identifying and mapping a stakeholders map on the platform.
- *Module 4:* During this module, participants learn about different business models through the sessions and materials provided, in order to select the most suitable. E-learning videos and contents are shared to support the acquisition of new notions.
- *Module 5:* Focused on exploring and adopting pricing strategies.
- *Module 6:* Focused on financial projections.
- *Module 7:* Focused on building an Impact Plan, with the support of Bidge for Billions' mentors met during online sessions organized through video conferencing and webinars, to clarify what system the founders are part of and how they're trying to influence it.
- Module 8: Developing a growth plan.

Every week, participants meet their mentors online in 1x1 sessions in order to dive deep into questions and topics. Each and every module is taught for 2 weeks, and in the framework of this period a virtual collaborative space is provided for peers to collaborate and constantly communicate.

Entrepreneurs from emerging and frontier markets find in this program a nurturing environment to mold their concepts, discover their product-market fit, and chart a course towards financial viability. As they embark on this transformative journey, they are guided by mentors and experts who illuminate the path forward. The program is not merely about crafting business plans; it's a holistic experience designed to enhance soft skills, expand networks, and cultivate the resilience that is the hallmark of successful entrepreneurs. A crescendo to this journey is the preparation of a compelling pitch that resonates with potential investors.

AsiaTech Education

In May 2021, the visionary inception of AsiaTech marked a pivotal moment in the tech landscape, as it embarked on its journey as a tech incubator under the umbrella of Prima Alam Technologies in the city of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. At its heart, AsiaTech's mission was bold yet clear: to seamlessly fuse education and technology, paving the way for transformative solutions in the realm of skill development. This innovative thrust, nestled within the contours of technology, held the potential to not only contribute to the ambitions of the 12th Malaysian Plan but also to the broader global mission encapsulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). AsiaTech's early focus on skill development was propelled by an unwavering

commitment to bridge the gap between education and the digital age. By leveraging technology, it sought to revolutionize educational methodologies, creating a dynamic platform to cultivate skills essential for the rapidly evolving workforce.

As the pages of time turned, AsiaTech's mandate expanded, encompassing the fundamental landscape of research. Recognizing research as a powerful vehicle for advancement, AsiaTech endeavoured to harness technology's potential to explore uncharted territories. This strategic pivot opened doors to collaborations with esteemed education institutions, forward-thinking business organizations, and governmental agencies. These partnerships served as the bedrock for an expansive suite of online micro credential programs that were meticulously designed to empower participants with skills honed to meet the demands of a digitally transformed world.

Today, AsiaTech stands as a thriving hub, a lynchpin within a dynamic ecosystem driven by four foundational pillars: Education, Research, Industry, and Innovation. This ecosystem, fortified by strategic partnerships with key players like the Malaysian Research Accelerator for Technology & Innovation (MRANTI), University of Malaya, Sunway University, UNIRAZAK, MyIPO, and MDEC, exemplifies agility and synergy. It stands as a proof of the organization's commitment to not just education and research but also to cultivating a fertile ground and a talent pool for industry collaboration and fostering innovation.

Central to AsiaTech's philosophy is the principle of R&D&C&I – Research and Development, Commercialization, and Innovation. This ethos reverberates across its spectrum of operations from the formulation of cutting-edge educational curricula to the strategic implementation of transformative initiatives. This multifaceted approach is tailored to benefit a diverse audience encompassing students, innovators, researchers, and entrepreneurs that can meet periodically, leveraging videoconference software and participating in webinars about specific topics.

An essential component of AsiaTech's mission is its resolute dedication to achieving Technology Readiness Level 5 for industry commercialization. This audacious goal underpins the organization's vision to foster future talents and drive technology advancement. Central to this aspiration is an interactive platform that seamlessly interconnects education, research, and innovation, facilitating the exchange of ideas and the cultivation of innovative solutions.
Notably, AsiaTech's pioneering efforts extend to the realm of its business school arm, where the concept of a metaverse environment has been realized. This virtual realm – a fusion of reception, thinking matrix, management suite, galleries, student lounges, auditoriums, classrooms, and a grand ballroom – serves to emphasize technology's potential to nurture innovation and contribute to the empowerment of people and societies through a brand new learning experience. This immersive experience embodies AsiaTech's commitment to using technology as an enabler, a cornerstone for the incubation of groundbreaking ideas.

The edutech powerhouse's academic offerings exemplify also its commitment to diversity and excellence. Spanning from a Bachelor of Business Management (Entrepreneurship) to a robust MBA (Leadership) program, and from a Master’s in international management (MIM) to esteemed research-focused degrees such as MPhil and Ph.D., AsiaTech offers a rich tapestry of educational opportunities, all taught throughout the online formula. Additionally, an impressive array of 303 micro-credential online courses offers participants a dynamic pathway toward academic advancement, reflecting AsiaTech's commitment to fostering lifelong learning.

On the same line, AsiaTech recently launched an online Technology Commercialization Associate (TCA) program which reunites a cohort of Malaysian young talented innovators and founders which will embrace a six-month long journey to unlock opportunities and support the commercialization of new products and services. The TCA program runs fully remotely in order to provide participants with the flexibility and agility they need to combine their work schedule, private life and desire of developing new innovations and ventures. It supports participants in gaining the right skills and knowledge to raise. To do so, AsiaTech leverage online platforms that supports collaboration, e-learning material, live sessions events, and an ad hoc app which allows constant communication between the members of the cohort and the program's stakeholders. No matter where the participants are, thanks to adopted technological tools they get access to knowledge anytime and everywhere.

At its essence, AsiaTech's narrative is one of transformation, innovation, and collaboration. It epitomizes the potential of technology to propel education, research, and industry to new horizons. By bridging education and technology, using research as a vehicle, innovation as the solution, and education as the means, AsiaTech strides boldly toward the achievement of Development Goals 4 and 8 – Quality Education and Decent Work and Economic Growth. As AsiaTech continues to shape future talents and accelerate technological readiness, its legacy as a beacon of progress and innovation is indelibly etched on the tapestry of the digital age.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

Through a kaleidoscope of research, Bridge for Billions and AsiaTech Education emerge as visionary protagonists in the narrative about tech-led programs to foster leadership and entrepreneurship, crafting bridges among people and sowing the seeds of innovation.
Bridge for Billions' technology-enabled inclusivity dispels the geographical constraints that once impeded entrepreneurial aspirations. The platform is nurturing mentorship, resourcefulness, and resilience-building environment to help people shaping their dreams through skills development.

Similarly, AsiaTech Education's technologically woven tapestry of education redefines learning paradigms. By providing learners with versatile skills, AsiaTech bridges academia and industry, fortifying a workforce capable of surmounting emerging challenges. These stories are centred on skills and technology converging to empower individuals and societies, and in so doing, reshape economies.

This paper aims to be a blueprint for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to nurture a pool of talents. By recognizing the dynamic nature of skills, these stakeholders can cultivate environments that foster adaptability, critical thinking, and visionary leadership leveraging the power of technologies. It also underscores the essence of not just imparting knowledge but also instilling the skills that empower individuals to seize opportunities, surmount challenges, and drive economies forward.

With technology acting as a catalyst, and guided by research insights, this journey propels us toward a future where the business landscape is enriched by individual's adept in the art of both entrepreneurial and leadership skills. Future research could focus on investigating organizations in country-specific contexts and measure their impact on individuals and society, through the delivery of entrepreneurial and leadership programs.

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