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**SWP 44/89 ENTREPRENEURSHIP COURSES:
TEACHING MATERIAL**

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1. What are Entrepreneurship Courses?

Entrepreneurship is a difficult word to define, Kilby (1971) compared it to the proverbial Heffalump of Winnie the Pooh fame and described it as "a large and important animal which has been hunted by many individuals...who claim to have caught sight of him...but disagree on his particulars". It is hardly surprising that entrepreneurship courses present similar problems of definition.

For the purposes of this paper, an entrepreneur is defined as an individual who conceives and brings into existence a commercial venture. Entrepreneurship courses are therefore defined as training programmes that help establish commercial ventures. However, this definition is not sufficiently precise. Generally new commercial ventures fall into two categories:

1. Life Style Businesses - one's established to further the founder's personal goals, intricately bound-up in the owner's personality and family.
2. Entrepreneurial Businesses - one's established to provide profit and achieve growth.

Many entrepreneurship courses are aimed at helping people set up life-style businesses. However, it is the entrepreneurial business that will have a real impact upon wealth creation and economic growth. The distinguishing factor here is the breadth and depth of emphasis upon "entrepreneurial development" - the development of the personal skills, qualities and motivations necessary to enhance entrepreneurial qualities. In other words it is the emphasis upon motivation and behavioural training.

2. Training Requirements

To help launch an entrepreneurial business successfully means four fundamental needs must be met. The need for:

1. A business idea - the perception of a market opportunity that fits the skills and interests of the entrepreneur.

2. Entrepreneurial development - developing the self confidence and initiative and harnessing the motivation of the entrepreneur.
3. Management skills development - developing the functional management skills of the entrepreneur.
4. Resources - the need for information and finances to help establish the business.

The importance of these different elements will vary between different target training groups. However, the four categories have important implications for the training requirements, teaching techniques and materials that can then be used effectively. Table 1 sets out the training requirements that stem from these needs.

Table 1 here

Opportunity Guidance: Little seems to be known, about the process entrepreneurs go through to decide on the business opportunity they will pursue. Vesper (1979) in a study of 100 successful entrepreneurs concluded that most came from experience in work, education or through hobbies. The generation of business ideas is an undeveloped area on entrepreneurship courses. Where it is taught it generally comprises of information on market opportunities and business projects linked with the analysis of the entrepreneurs' skills and interests. coupled with guidance counselling involving some of the approaches to creative thinking that have been developed (see for example McPherson, 1984). However, many people maintain that entrepreneurs must have their own ideas to be committed to them and ideas generated on courses have a short existence. In view of these difficulties it is probably not surprising that most entrepreneurship courses place great emphasis on selecting participants with identified business ideas.

Motivational and behavioural training

This is probably the most controversial area of entrepreneurship training. It is not so much whether training can affect motivation or behaviour. This is now widely accepted and used by a range of organisations (see Kenney, Donnelly and Reid, 1985). It is how to approach the training requirement that is disputed.

Table 1

Entrepreneurship courses: Training Requirements

<u>NEED</u>	<u>TRAINING REQUIREMENT</u>
1. A Business Idea	: Opportunity guidance
2. Entrepreneurial development	: Motivational & behaviour training
3. Management skills development	: Technical & management training
4. Resources	: Information and a feasibility analysis or business plan

Many approaches involve behavioural and psychological inputs based upon the pioneering work of McClelland (1961). These involve self analysis and psychometric tests designed to enhance self awareness and positive thinking. Coupled with counselling they can help develop self confidence. However, group dynamics also seem to be an important element in achieving motivation training (Kenney, Donnelly and Reid 1986), as does close involvement with a counsellor or other individual (Chowdhury, 1981). Loucks (1988) in his study of successful entrepreneurship courses concluded that "the longest running entrepreneur development programmes with a substantial record of success include achievement motivation training as a significant feature". Nevertheless it is worth remembering that the drive, energy, commitment and enthusiasm of an individual teacher can often achieve better results than a more soundly based methodology, implemented in a lack-lustre way. Indeed, Harper (1984) in his study of successful entrepreneurship courses observed that many courses did not use these devices, instead relying upon "inspirational lectures and in particular presentations by experienced entrepreneurs" to achieve successful results.

Technical and Management training

There is a solid research evidence that the focus for management skills development in the smaller firm must be based upon marketing, accounting and people management. This was first highlighted by the Bolton Report (1971) and reinforced by a range of subsequent studies (Curran, 1988). However, as you would expect, surveys show that people management is a skill area that needs to be developed more as a business grows (Confederation of British Industry, 1986).

Training requirements revolve around the need for various management tools and techniques in launching a new business. The depth of coverage depends upon the lengths of course and characteristics of trainees. In practice these are normally taught using the techniques of feasibility analysis and business planning. One of the keys to effective training seems to be the ability to teach sufficient of the skill to get the business started and to teach it at the time the entrepreneur needs it. The more

the trainee can identify with, or see the need for, training materials, the more effective it will be.

Information and a Business Plan

The resources required to launch a business include finance, premises, people as well as the resources needed to deal with customers and government bureaucracy.

Consequently, entrepreneurs need a whole range of information on law, taxation, premises, book-keeping, office procedures, sources of finance as well as market research information.

The Business Plan is also an essential tool in obtaining finance. However it is more than that for most entrepreneur courses. Harper's (1984) study found most programmes included the preparation of business proposals. In the UK, all Training Agency start-up programmes use the preparation of a Business Plan as a training focus. The reason for this is that it has strong behaviour and motivational training benefits. Also, it can be used as a focus to apply management skills to the business proposal of the entrepreneur - a form of "live" case study. Finally, it can also be used to enhance presentation skills if entrepreneurs are required to present their proposal to their colleagues or bankers.

3. Teaching Techniques

There are a whole range of teaching techniques, but not all lend themselves to the different training requirements of entrepreneurship courses. Table 2 matches appropriate teaching techniques to specific training requirements and the entrepreneurs' needs. Each technique has its advantages and disadvantages.

For example, the ubiquitous lecture is suitable for giving information on the technical aspects of management training (e.g. accounting) to quite large audiences. However, it suffers from a lack of participation and variable quality of delivery which can result in the loss of interest by the audience. Indeed, since the target audience tends to have unpleasant memories of formal schooling (Keisner, 1985), it is arguable that lecturing is a particularly unsympathetic teaching technique for

entrepreneurs. What is more, it normally has to be reinforced by exercises that allow techniques to be practiced.

Table 2 here

Of course, how these different teaching techniques are combined within an entrepreneurship course depends not only upon the entrepreneurs' needs, and hence their training requirements, but also upon the necessity to obtain a varied and balanced mix of techniques within a course. What is more, as can be seen from the list of techniques, some can be used for multiple training requirements.

In fact, if you study the list you will see a strong bias towards trainee centred techniques: participative, group activities with counselling support. These approaches have generally been found to be the most appropriate for both behavioural and management skills training with this target group.

For behavioural training focus on the individual is essential (Chowdhury, 1981). This can take the form of psychological exercises, group work including case studies, counselling, role playing and games, experiential learning and the whole range of action learning techniques. However, role modelling can also be used. The key is to gain the commitment of the entrepreneur to a set of clearly defined and achievable objectives centred on launching and growing their business. This can only be done by ensuring the entrepreneur has a realistic confidence in their ability to meet these objectives. Once set, the entrepreneur then needs help to monitor their progress towards achieving these objectives.

For management skills training, trainee centred approaches are also more effective for this target group. This is partly because of their natural antipathy to "formal schooling" and teacher-centred techniques. It is also because only trainee-centred approaches can deliver training that can be tailored to be relevant to the individual trainee's needs, at the time they need it.

Indeed, it has been argued that traditional teacher-centred techniques for delivering information and technical and management training to this target audience are neither effective nor cost efficient and that it will increasingly be displaced by

Table 2

Entrepreneurship Courses : Teaching Techniques

<u>NEED</u>	<u>TRAINING REQUIREMENT</u>	<u>TEACHING TECHNIQUES</u>
1. A Business Idea	Opportunity Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Counselling ■ Seminars ■ Group activities ■ Discussions ■ Computer assisted training ■ Networking
2. Entrepreneurial development	Motivational & behavioural training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Psychological exercises ■ Counselling ■ Discussions ■ Cases ■ Role Playing ■ Group activities ■ Role modelling ■ Experiential learning ■ Games ■ Action learning
3. Management skills development	Technical & management training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lectures ■ Exercises ■ Seminars ■ Workshops ■ Cases ■ Distance learning ■ Action learning ■ Demonstrations/ Guided practice (inc. video) ■ Games
4. Resources	Information & a business plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lectures ■ Computer learning ■ Distance learning ■ Information packs ■ Networks ■ Business planning exercises

distance learning techniques (Gray & Burns, 1988). Properly designed, these are trainee-centred, constantly applying techniques to the trainee's own situation. What is more they can also demonstrate relevance by applying skills to similar businesses and supply the role models to influence behaviour. However, on their own they lack the important dynamic of group and counsellor interaction.

This bias toward trainee-centred techniques is hardly surprising given that entrepreneurship courses aim to turn out independent, self reliant individuals. Many experienced trainers, recognising this, even use the techniques to deliver much of the management training and information elements of the courses. Indeed this can be an efficient way of achieving both management and behavioural training. However, trainee-centred techniques tend to be far more resource intensive than the more traditional teacher-centred techniques.

4. Teaching Material

The preceding analysis argues strongly that the most important source of teaching material on entrepreneurship courses should come from the entrepreneurs themselves. In other words the course should be centred on the businesses that they are seeking to establish. It should be action based, with the entrepreneur constantly being pressed to apply skills to their own situation, to review this application with others, refine it and commit to it. What is more, it is generally recognised that the material will only be successful if it satisfies the entrepreneur's own perceived needs in providing solutions to current practical problems (Hodgson, 1985). Timing is crucial.

The Business Plan

This focus is reinforced by requiring the trainees to produce business plans. To do so they must learn the relevant management skills, collect relevant information and apply it to their business situation. Loucks (1988) concluded:

"The single most indispensable element of a successful entrepreneurship development programme....is an intensive, comprehensive business planning activity wherein prospective entrepreneurs are subjected to the discipline of collecting,

analysing, presenting, defending and promoting all aspects of what is necessary to start and operate their business". Developing it will build the entrepreneurs confidence as they improve their understanding of the industry they are entering and how they will operate within it. Whilst the plan is a piece of teaching material that the trainees produce themselves, it can be built up through structured exercises. These exercises ask the trainees probing questions about their businesses and are organised in such a way as to build into a business plan. Table 3 shows areas the exercises might cover.

Table 3 here

This approach has been adopted by Barrow (1988). The first exercise he uses is one designed to develop a mission statement and set of objectives for the business. It also starts the trainee thinking about the tasks they will have to undertake to establish it. This is reproduced in Table 4.

Table 4 here

The approach is used extensively in distance learning material to get trainees to apply the skills they are developing. Worksheets are frequently used to structure complicated exercises. Table 5 shows a structured exercise for calculating the breakeven of the business. It is taken from The Small Business Programme, a comprehensive distance learning programme to be launched in the United Kingdom in January 1990 (Burns, 1989)

Table 5 here

The Business Plan should be a tangible documentary product of any entrepreneurship course. It is something that the trainee can use to obtain finance for their business, and as a model for preparing plans in the future. Exercises can help build it up but a model plan is also essential. Trainees are often keen to see plans of similar businesses, but this can present problems of confidentiality. However, it is still important to realise that the most important item of teaching material on any entrepreneurship course is developed by the trainee themselves. And that can place considerable strain on the trainer.

Table 3

Business Plan Exercises

- Business description
- Product/Service description
- Mission statement
- Objectives
- Staffing requirements
- Self analysis
- Market segmentation
- Customer analysis
- Features and benefits of product/service
- Competitor analysis
- Industry analysis
- Market research
- Pricing
- Advertising & promotion
- Place & distribution
- Sales forecasting
- Operations planning
- Cash flow
- Profitability
- Breakeven
- Balance sheets
- Financing requirements
- Business Controls

Table 4

Business Plan Exercises

Worksheet 1 : Business Purpose and Aims

1. Explain how you arrived at your business idea.
2. What makes you believe it will succeed?
3. Write a mission statement linking your product or service to the customer needs it is aimed at.
4. What are your principle objectives?
 - (a) Short term
 - (b) Long Term
5. List your tasks and action plans as you see them at present.
6. How much money do you think will be needed to get your business started? Provide a short "shopping list" of major expenses.

from: Barrow, C. The Business Plan Workbook, Kogan Page, London, 1988.

Table 5

BREAKEVEN WORKSHEET

1 Calculate your contribution:

Sales	£	(A)
less Variable costs;		
materials	£	
variable wages	£	
Other variable costs;	£	
	£	
	£	
	£	
	£	
less Total variable costs	£	
CONTRIBUTION	£	(B)

2 Calculate your contribution margin:

$$\frac{\text{Contribution (B) } £}{\text{Sales (A) } £} \times 100 = \text{CONTRIBUTION MARGIN } __\% (C)$$

3 Calculate your fixed costs:

Salaries	£
Fixed wage costs	£
Rent	£
Rates	£
Electricity	£
Gas	£
Water rates	£
Telephone	£
Postage	£
Insurance	£
Repairs	£
Advertising	£
Bank interest and charges	£
IIP or lease charges	£
Depreciation	£
Other fixed costs;	£
	£
	£
	£
	£
	£
	£
TOTAL FIXED COSTS	£ (D)

4 Calculate your breakeven point:

$$\frac{\text{total fixed costs (D) } £}{\text{contribution margin (C) } \%} \times 100 = \text{BREAKEVEN SALES } £ (E)$$

5 Calculate your estimated profit:

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Sales (A)} \\ &\text{less Breakeven sales (£) (E)} \\ &= \text{Sales above breakeven point } £ \\ &\times \text{Contribution margin (C)} \end{aligned}$$

Books/Workbooks

Given the widely noted tendency of entrepreneurs to preserve their personal independence it is to be expected that books/workbooks have a valuable part to play in management training supplementing or even displacing the traditional lecture. However, to be effective, this media must be practical and relevant. What is more, given the preceding argument for action-based, trainee-centred learning this media is probably best used as a structured distance learning package in which management skills are constantly applied to the trainees situation, offering examples and using checklists, worksheets and other user-friendly approaches to structured learning. The traditional text book is unlikely to be effective.

Two examples from The Small Business Programme are given in Tables 6 and 7. Table 6 shows in simple, diagramatic form how delays in payment of a debt can build up. Table 7 shows how delaying tactics can further lengthen that payment period (Saunders, 1989). These non-traditional approaches have proved to be effective with the target training group. (Gray and Burns, 1988).

Table 6 & 7 here

Similarly checklists can act as effective stimuli to get the trainee to apply management skills and analysis to their business. Table 8 shows a checklist which forms part of a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis in The Small Business Programme (Burns, 1989).

Table 8 here

Distance Learning offers a number of advantages. It can be:

- i) **Flexible** : it allows the trainees to study when, where and at the pace they want. They may also be selective with the material.
- ii) **Innovative** : particularly if video and audio media are used, it can be non-traditional and help overcome the barrier many entrepreneurs have to training.

Table 6

	<i>Action</i>	<i>Penalty</i>
Step 1	Send invoice to customer in Bolton	Wait 2 working days
Step 2	Envelope opened in Bolton postroom, invoice sent by internal mail to Accounts Payable Dept at London HQ (the people who are responsible for arranging your cheque)	Wait 4 working days
Step 3	Invoice in ledger clerk's in-tray waiting to be entered in Ledger and VAT records (The ledger clerk is the one responsible for paying you.)	Wait 2 working days
Step 4	Invoice entered in books and sent by internal mail to Purchasing Dept to be married to purchase order	Wait 1 working day
Step 5	Invoice in purchasing clerk's in-tray (The purchasing clerk is the person who ordered the goods.)	Wait 4 working days
Step 6	Invoice sent to Bolton Stores to be married with Goods Inwards note (a record of receipt of the goods you sent)	Wait 2 working days
Step 7	Invoice in storekeeper's in-tray	Wait 4 working days
Step 8	Invoice sent to your customer for approval	Wait 1 working day
Step 9	Invoice in customer's in-tray	Wait 4 working days
Step 10	Customer sends approved invoice back to Accounts Payable Dept, London HQ	Wait 2 working days
Step 11	Invoice in ledger clerk's in-tray awaiting entry on to computerised cheque-drawing list (prepared only once each month)	Wait 4 working days
Step 12	Invoice entered on cheque listing	Wait 18 working days
Steps 13, 14, and 15	Cheque drawn, signed, and sent to you	Wait 2 working days each step

* (previous delays caused your cheque to miss this month's run)

Table 7

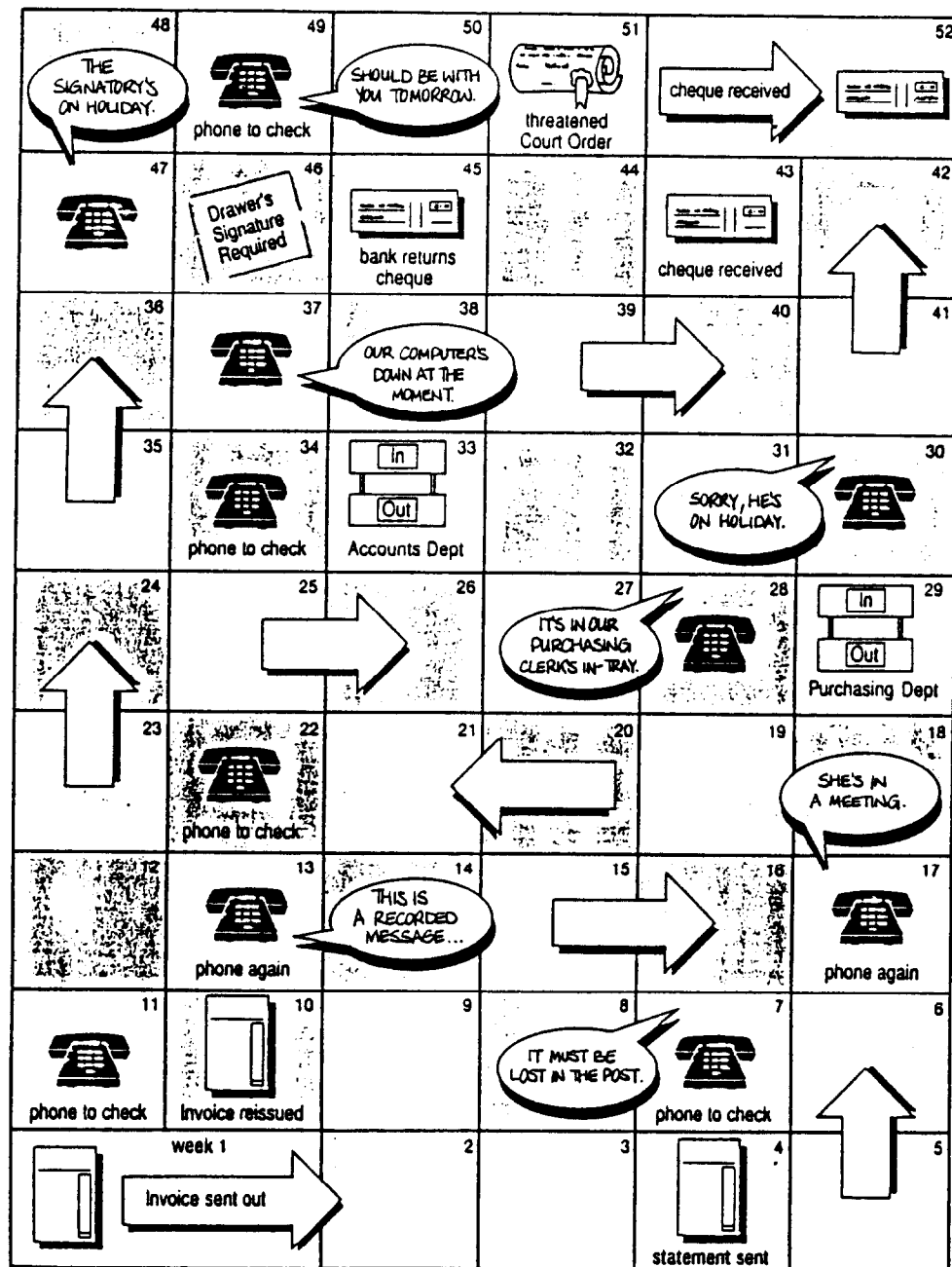


Table 8

Checklist 6

Competitors: Opportunities and Threats

Evaluate the opportunities and threats you face from your competitors by answering the following questions.

	YES	NO
1 Do you know your major competitors?	☐	☐
2 Do you have information on their size, profitability and operating methods?	☐	☐
3 Can you identify which competitors are successful?	☐	☐
4 Can you discern any patterns in the successful/unsuccessful firms?	☐	☐
5 Does your product or service compare well to the competition on:		
* price?	☐	☐
* performance?	☐	☐
* quality?	☐	☐
* finish?	☐	☐
* reliability?	☐	☐
* maintenance?	☐	☐
* delivery?	☐	☐
* service?	☐	☐
* number of purchase outlets?	☐	☐
6 Relative to your own actions, have competitors shown less flexibility over terms of trade-price, discount, payment dates etc?	☐	☐
7 Do there appear to be broad similarities between competitors in selling costs and delivery performance?	☐	☐
8 Do there appear to be broad similarities over promotion and advertising?	☐	☐
9 Do you have a strong market identity?	☐	☐
10 Is it difficult for a competitor to copy your product or service?	☐	☐
11 Are there any barriers to entry in your market?	☐	☐
12 Is product or service development fairly stable and predictable?	☐	☐
13 Are competitors' new product or service developments unlikely to pose a threat?	☐	☐
14 Are competitors' changes in their marketing mix unlikely to pose a threat?	☐	☐

- iii) Economical : provided there is sufficient take up, distance learning can offer very low unit training costs, and serve as a permanent information source.

Since its inception in 1983, the Open University School of Management has enrolled over 20,000 student managers on courses, of which about 21% are from small firms employing fewer than 100 employees. Research indicates that managers undertaking distance learning programmes do find them attractive (Hodgson, 1986). However, it has its limitations, the major one being in the provision of motivational and behavioural training which means that it will probably always have to be used with other trainee-centred group techniques to be effective for entrepreneurship training.

Information Packs

The entrepreneurs' need for information means that information packs have been an inevitable part of most entrepreneurship courses. In the UK this need is underlined by the high level of sales of small business information guide books. Indeed their popularity and easy availability has meant that trainers no longer have to prepare their own material. As an example, Table 9 gives the contents of one of the most popular of these information guides (Barrow, 1989).

Table 9 here

There is also a need for information on business administration. Sample control forms, invoices, purchase orders etc., ease the task of setting up a business. Once more, in the UK, books of forms are readily available (Pring, 1985). Distance learning workbooks also tend to include these aids. An example of some of the sales records a business needs to keep is reproduced in Table 10 this is taken from the appropriate part of the text on Selling from The Small Business Programme (McDonald, 1989).

Table 10 here

Trainers frequently also keep boxes of business cards, advertising brochures, newspaper advertisements etc. for the same purpose. These examples show how

Table 9

Information Needs

Areas covered in The Small Business Guide

by: Colin Barrow

- Sources of help and advice - enterprise agencies, Small Firms Service, Rural Development Commission, Enterprise Initiative etc.
- Business Opportunities - new products or businesses, cooperatives, franchising.
- Technology - science parks, financial support, research associations, computers, industrial organisations.
- Market information - markets, companies, industries, libraries and information services, data bases, marketing organisations, exporting and importing information.
- Raising money - banks and other financial institutions, grants and competitions.
- Controlling money - information or book-keeping systems.
- The Law - form of business, business name, protecting ideas, premises, trading laws, employing people, insurance, national insurance, PAYE, VAT, pensions, Data Protection Act.
- Training - courses, distance learning, National Training Index.
- Help for young entrepreneurs.
- Help in setting up business overseas.

Table 10

The image displays three overlapping forms used for sales record keeping. The topmost form is a 'Permanent Sales Record' with fields for Address, Telephone, Contact name, Key buying influences, Product or service, and Other relevant information. Below it is a 'Weekly Sales Call Report' form, which includes sections for Date, Period, Page, Product line, Company name, Address, Telephone, Name of salesperson, Address, Postcode, Area, and a table for recording calls with columns for Person contacted, Title, Result, £ Sold, and Follow-up. The bottom form is partially visible and appears to be another 'Weekly Sales Call Report' or a similar document, showing fields for TOTAL CALLS, TOTAL SALES, and a Signature line.

others have approached the task of advertising and promotion and stimulate the entrepreneurs' own imagination.

Videos

Videos can be used on entrepreneurship courses either in the classroom or as part of a structured distance learning package. They can be used for a number of different purposes and offer significant advantages:

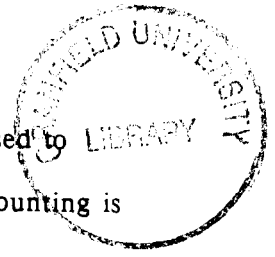
<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Advantages</u>
1. Management skill training:	They are non-traditional, can use animation and humour to make complex teaching points
2. Management skill application:	They can show how skills are applied, problem situations and best practice. This proves relevance and aids understanding
3. Behaviour training:	They can offer role models that trainees can identify with
4. Case-studies:	They can bring mixed media case studies to life particularly because the owner manager is such a vital element in the evaluation of any small business.

Examples of these different uses of video are available. The extracts are taken from various modules in The Small Business Programme.

The major disadvantage of videos is the depth of analysis they are able to achieve. Experience with distance learning material suggests video will never be able to replace written material completely.

Exercises and Case Studies

Most exercises used on an entrepreneurship course should be structured around the trainees' own business and in particular around the production of a business plan.



However, conventional exercises using pre-structured data are frequently used to demonstrate the application of more complex management techniques. Accounting is the area in which conventional exercises are used most. They can be used to demonstrate how cash flow statements, profit and loss accounts, balance sheets and breakeven calculations are produced. The advantages of using pre-structured data in this context are:

- i) The trainer can control the training situation more closely, with the assurance that training points can be made.
- ii) The trainees are provided with a "correct answer" which can then be used as a blueprint for applying the techniques to their own business.

However, exercises used in this way must be seen as being relevant to the trainee and therefore based on situations similar to the ones they face.

Exercises can often be structured in such a way as to also provide information. For example, a book-keeping exercise may be based upon a proprietary book-keeping system. In this way the entrepreneurs can practice their book-keeping skills on a system they may decide to purchase and use.

Many entrepreneurship courses also use structured exercises as part of motivational and behavioural training. Psychometric profile tests can provide the entrepreneur with a valuable insight into their personality and their personal strengths and weaknesses. Some trainers prefer a less structured approach and rely upon the "ring toss" and other psychological techniques for entrepreneurial training. However, in his survey of entrepreneurship courses, Harper (1984) found that only 60% of them used recognised psychological exercises and those that did could not prove any greater success than those that did not.

Structured exercises can also be used to help the planning process. At Cranfield we use "Action Plans" extensively. Entrepreneurs are required periodically to complete pre-printed forms which are reviewed with a member of staff. The pre-printed form helps give a structure to the planning process and the continual reviewing of

these plans has a strong motivational benefit. An example of this form is given in Table 11.

Table 11 here

Case studies can be used in a similar way to exercises. Generally, the use of pre-prepared cases will decline as a course proceeds and the entrepreneurs' business ideas develop thus providing the opportunity to use "live" case studies rather than unfamiliar situations. "Live" cases also offer the opportunity to analyse a situation facing one participant more closely and perhaps provide a solution to a particular set of problems. However, this requires considerable pre-planning and knowledge of participants' businesses and is therefore particularly demanding on the trainer. One example of a "live" case study we have used successfully at Cranfield is in the area of advertising and promotion. Working with an advertising agency, promotional material for one participant's business is developed. This is discussed and reviewed in class before, during and after the advertising agency has done its work. The agency explains the basis for its recommendations and how the material has been developed. This approach proves to be extremely effective and generates great interest, since all participants know the business being worked on. What is more, at least one participant has a valuable business resource as a tangible product of the course.

Business Games and Computer Programmes

Business games, frequently computer based, can prove to be an effective teaching resource and certainly one that absorbs participants. To be useful the game must embody substantive management training points. The best computer-based games allow participants to exit the game and undertake tuition on relevant management skills. They are therefore offering computer based management training facilities in a context which allow entrepreneurs to see its relevance and application. It also motivates them to continue with their "training" through the competitive instincts generated in the framework of the game. These games lend themselves to distance

FIRMSTART ACTION PLAN SUMMARY

Table 11

Name:

Business:

The Firmstart Action Plan is a contract between you and your counsellor. It is intended to list the actions you need to take during the period of the Programme, their outcomes and their priorities. Once established, your counsellor will help you to keep to your plan.

ACTIVITY	OUTCOME	PRIORITY 1 to 5 1 = Urgent 5 = Not Essential	PERIOD over which activity takes place (Tick Month)					
			1	2	3	4	5	6

Agreed By _____ (Participant)

_____ (Counsellor)

learning and will be increasingly used in this way as micro-computers become more and more accepted in small businesses and the price of programmes comes down. Computers also have a valuable role to play in the preparation of the business plan. Pre-structured spread-sheet programmes can be used to help entrepreneurs generate cash-flow, profit and loss and balance sheet projections. Once budgets have been entered onto the programme the entrepreneur finds it relatively easy to alter the parameters of the plan. Entrepreneurs are tempted to explore the "what if" questions that will pose themselves during the course. They are encouraged not to treat the plan as inflexible but to realise that it's dynamic and often must be altered to suit changing circumstances. What is more they have yet another resource to take from the course that will prove useful in developing their business.

Computer based training is a rapidly developing field. At the moment the cost of hardware and software means that it is often undertaken within an educational institution. However, its future lies not in the classroom but in the workplace. It offers all the advantages of distance learning and adds a further dimension to that training because of the ability to interact with the programme. It also offers the prospect of delivering up to date information on all aspects of business to the entrepreneur's office, thus displacing the reference book.

5. Conclusion

Entrepreneurs have identifiable needs that lead to specific training requirements. These training requirements, in turn, can be matched to various teaching techniques available to the trainer. How the techniques are combined depends upon the training requirements and the particular balance of a course. However, there should be a bias towards trainee-centred, participative teaching techniques. Teacher-centred techniques for management skill training will probably increasingly be displaced by distance learning which better suits the requirements of the entrepreneur.

The strong implication of trainee-centred teaching is that the participants' own businesses should be used as the focus for teaching material on any entrepreneurship

course. In particular, the business plan is an invaluable teaching resource. Whilst it is generated by the entrepreneurs themselves, it may be built up using structured exercises. The use of "live" exercises and case studies is generally preferred to those using pre-structured data but this is particularly demanding for trainers. Workbooks can have an important role in helping with the analysis this requires as well as providing the entrepreneur with a permanent information resource to help them establish and control their business. Videos can be used to make skill training more attractive to entrepreneurs as well as demonstrating its relevance. Computer based systems will also increasingly be used to compliment distance learning and deliver information to entrepreneurs.

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