GUESSS Cloud
knowledge hub for student entrepreneurship

Insights

Seven Ideas for Designing and Delivering Effective FDPs

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Background

Many mid-career professionals and experienced individuals often turn to faculty development or management development programs—typically week-long, short-term initiatives—to enhance their skills and knowledge. Various institutions offer these programs, which are primarily targeted at adult learners, yet the delivery methods are often more suited to traditional students. However, the effectiveness of these programs often hinges on how well they are designed and delivered to meet the unique needs of adult audiences.

In this brief note, we share seven key insights from our recent experience of conducting such programs at the School of Management, IIT Mandi. Drawing from the successes of our recent programs, we outline practices that significantly enhanced participant engagement and learning outcomes. These insights offer valuable guidance for designing and delivering more effective faculty development programs tailored to adult learners.

1. Knowing Our Audience (KYA)

Just as we teach entrepreneurs to start with their customers' needs, understanding your audience is the foundation of any effective learning program. We applied the same principle by prioritizing a deep understanding of our participants before the program even began. Using the KWL (Know, Want to Know, and Learn) framework (Pathways, 2004), we assessed what participants already knew, what they wanted to learn, and their learning goals. This approach allowed us to tailor the program content precisely to their needs and ensure that we addressed their key concerns.

We began interacting with participants even before the program started, using online and social media channels to understand their expectations and help them get to know each other. This proactive engagement enabled us to shape the program in alignment with their interests and goals, ensuring a more personalized and relevant learning experience. By collecting their top questions and learning objectives at the outset, we were able to design the program flow to meet their expectations, ensuring that the program was both flexible and impactful. This audience-first approach laid the groundwork for a truly engaging and effective learning experience, rooted in empathy and participant-driven design.

At the conclusion of the program, we presented a list showing how each of their questions had been addressed throughout the course, reinforcing the relevance and applicability of the content. This not only demonstrated that their input was valued but also helped solidify the connection between their learning goals and the course material. This audience-first approach laid the groundwork for a truly engaging and effective learning experience, rooted in empathy and participant-driven design.

2. Igniting the Student Within: Cultivating a Learning Mindset

Adult learners bring a wealth of life, professional, and entrepreneurial experiences to the classroom. They often carry titles, achievements, and preconceived notions that can act as barriers to adopting a true learning mindset. This dynamic can create a subtle tension in the learning environment, as participants naturally compare themselves and negotiate their status relative to others.

To overcome this, it was crucial to help participants shed these layers and embrace a common ground: the mindset of a student. At the outset of the program, we directly addressed the "elephant in the room"—the need to transition from a position of authority and expertise to one of openness and curiosity. We encouraged them to let go of preconceived notions and approach the program with the humility and eagerness of a learner. The adult learners also need to fulfill expectations of an external formal authority to comply with instructions (Lieb and Goodlad, 2005).

We emphasized that continuous learning is essential for growth, and that to truly learn, one must adopt a student's mindset. This meant letting go of defenses, preconceived judgments, and the weight of past achievements, and instead focusing on what could be learned with an open mind. By gently reinforcing this mindset shift, we helped participants become more receptive, collaborative, and engaged, ultimately creating a lighter, more cohesive learning atmosphere.

3. Driving Collaborative Learning through Co-Creation

After identifying participants' needs, the next step is to co-create the learning experience with them. The principle of co-creation posits that when individuals actively participate in building something, they become more invested and committed to it. This concept was central to our program's design, turning participants into active contributors rather than passive recipients.

Particularly, adult learners are usually more motivated to learn when they can validate their existing learnings (Merriam 2001). Accordingly, we encouraged participants to share their venture ideas, learning objectives, and professional experiences with the group. For example, in one exercise,
we used participants' real venture ideas and formed smaller groups to develop these ideas further using entrepreneurial frameworks. This made

the learning experience more tangible and engaging, as participants worked on real-life scenarios instead of hypothetical case studies. This hands-on approach fostered deeper commitment and interest, as participants were directly contributing to their own and their peers' learning journeys.

Additionally, we created special sessions where participants could present their life, venture, or teaching experiences to the group. These 20-minute talks gave participants a platform to share their insights and expertise, further embedding the co-creation process into the program. This not only gave them a voice but also gave the participants a sense of ownership in the program and its outcomes (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson 2005).

Through these co-creation strategies, participants felt a stronger sense of ownership and engagement, making the learning experience more impactful and aligned with their real-world challenges and goals.

4. Fostering Transformational Learning: Uncovering Personal Vision and Growth

At this stage in their lives, adult learners have typically moved beyond the structured learning of school and college. They seek deeper questions and self-discovery, driven by a desire to understand who they are and what they want to achieve (Daloz, 2012). This period of life—often between their late twenties to mid-forties—is marked by a heightened focus on personal development and self-awareness.

In our program, we recognized the importance of addressing these deeper, often unanswered questions. We focused on helping participants uncover their own vision, goals, and values, and encouraged them to align their actions with their deeper aspirations. By creating a space for introspection and self-exploration, we empowered them to transform into better individuals, entrepreneurs, teachers, and professionals.

This approach also leveraged the growing self-awareness that adults either possess or are beginning to appreciate. By focusing on personal vision and values, we fostered an environment This approach also leveraged the growing self-awareness that adults either possess or are

beginning to appreciate. By focusing on personal vision and values, we fostered an environment where participants looked inward, prioritized their own growth, and aligned their personal values with their professional goals. This shift in focus from external comparisons to internal reflection created a powerful foundation for personal and professional growth. It also fostered the right intent in the room, making participants more open to learning and collaboration, ultimately achieving the transformative outcomes that short-term programs strive for.

5. Holistic Learning: Enriching Minds and Bodies

To ensure a well-rounded learning experience, we moved beyond the traditional classroom setup. The idea was to incorporate diverse activities that challenge participants intellectually, mentally, and physically, while also exploring their creative sides.

We integrated activities such as morning yoga, trekking, and cultural performances, leveraging the natural beauty of our location and the varied interests of the participants. This approach allowed participants to engage in physical exercise, informal interactions, and fun activities,

creating memorable experiences that went hand-in-hand with intellectual stimulation.

By offering a mix of activities, we created opportunities for participants to showcase skills and talents that might not emerge in a standard, topic-focused environment. These experiences helped participants bond, fostered creativity, and allowed for a more holistic form of learning that went beyond traditional methods.

This holistic approach not only enriched the learning experience but also created a sense of community and personal growth, making the program not just educational but truly transformative.

6. Fostering Group Cohesion: Building a Network of Support and Collaboration

One of the cornerstones of our entrepreneurship capacity development programs is the emphasis on group cohesion and networking. Participants, who are often professionals and entrepreneurs, deeply value the power of networking. We recognized this and made it a priority to create an environment where participants could build meaningful and lasting connections.

From day one, we integrated numerous opportunities for participants to engage with each other through informal introductions, collaborative projects, and gamified activities. By working together on small goals and milestones, participants naturally built mutual trust and respect. It helps

fulfill one of the many motivations of adult learners, i.e., to form new social relations (Lieb and Goodlad, 2005). This approach enhanced the learning experience and laid the foundation for enduring professional relationships.

We also incorporated group-based activities and even organized post-program retreats to strengthen these bonds. The result was a close-knit community where participants continued to collaborate and support each other long after the program concluded. This strong sense of group cohesion not only motivated participants to help each other grow but also created a collaborative and supportive learning environment that extended beyond the classroom.

7. Go with the Flow: Embrace Flexibility

In a program designed for adult learners, it's essential to recognize that the experience is not a typical structured classroom setting. Sessions need not necessarily go as planned as adult learners bring their own vast experience into the classrooms and are vocal with their feedback of the sessions (Beder and Darkenwald 1982). While participants come prepared for a defined schedule, the reality is that rigid adherence to a fixed agenda can stifle the rich, spontaneous contributions they bring. Recognizing this, we adopted a flexible, adaptive approach that allowed the program to evolve organically.

This meant being agile in adjusting content, delivery methods, and even the daily schedule based on participant feedback and engagement levels. For example, we discovered that participants enjoyed evening discussions and networking, so we adjusted our start times and incorporated evening sessions to better align with their preferences and energy levels.

Flexibility also meant prioritizing engagement over rigid content delivery. If rich discussions and participant-led activities took precedence over covering every planned slide, we embraced that, understanding that the depth of engagement and the relevance to participants were more valuable. This approach not only kept the sessions lively and engaging but also ensured that participants felt a sense of ownership over the learning process.
Ultimately, this adaptability created a dynamic, responsive learning atmosphere where participants felt empowered and respected, leading to a richer and more meaningful learning experience. By going with the flow and adapting to the group's evolving needs, we fostered an inclusive environment that truly resonated with adult learners.

Concluding Remarks

Designing a successful faculty development program goes beyond delivering content—it is about creating an environment where adult learners feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow both personally and professionally. By integrating strategies like co-creation, flexibility,

holistic learning, and transformational development, we can ensure that participants not only acquire new knowledge but also undergo meaningful, lasting changes. The insights shared in this article highlight the importance of understanding adult learners' needs and adapting teaching methods to foster engagement, reflection, and growth. As educators, our role is to guide learners on a journey of discovery, enabling them to not only master new concepts but also align their learning with their personal and professional aspirations. This holistic approach will continue to shape our efforts in delivering impactful learning experiences that inspire lasting change.

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The authors compiled these ideas based on insights gained from hosting several Faculty Development Programs (FDPs) on Entrepreneurship and Management at IIT Mandi, specifically designed for faculty, practitioners, and startups. To read a detailed article on these ideas, visit guesssindia.in

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GUESSS Cloud
knowledge hub for student entrepreneurship

GUESSS Cloud is a dedicated knowledge repository addressing key issues relevant to student entrepreneurship in India. It serves as a platform to generate knowledge that inspires entrepreneurial action, equipping students with insights, research, and expert opinions.

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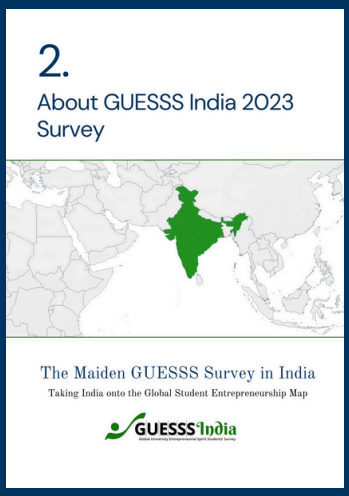

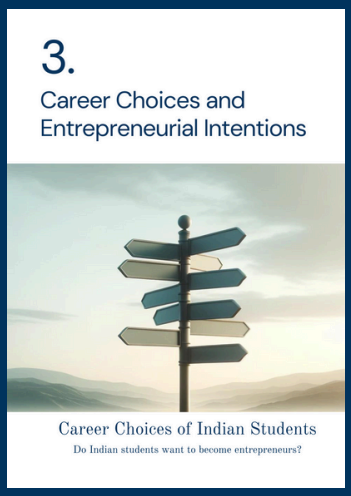

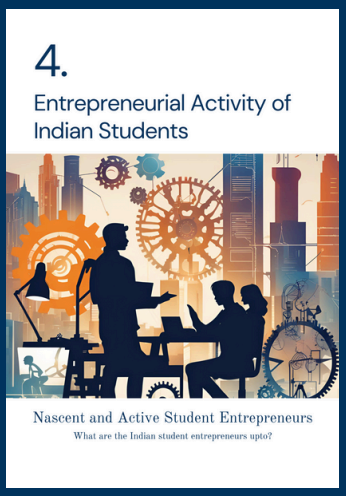

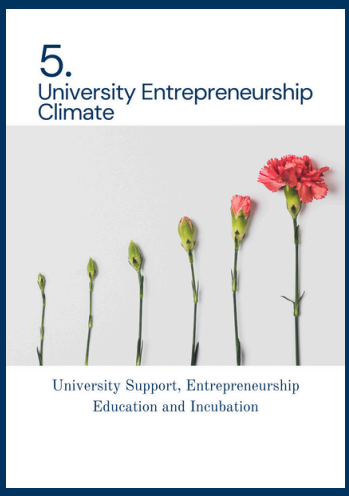

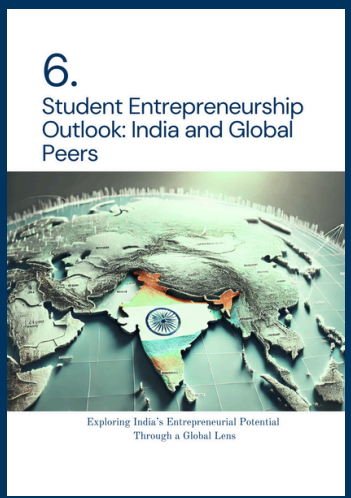

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