Is it all in the mindset? Team coaching, psychological capital and the collaborative development of an entrepreneurial mindset

Prof. Carol Jarvis
carol4.jarvis@uwe.ac.uk
Dr. Hugo Gaggiotti
hugo.gaggiotti@uwe.ac.uk
Dr. Selen Kars-Unluoglu
selen.kars@uwe.ac.uk
The University of the West of England, Bristol Business School (United Kingdom)

Abstract:
The changing nature of work attaches greater significance, by organisations, entrepreneurs and students alike, to the development of entrepreneurial capacities, with growing interest in entrepreneurial mindset and psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience), shown to increase job performance and satisfaction. Through a collaborative, mixed methods research design, this chapter seeks to understand key capacities underpinning an entrepreneurial mindset and the role of the learning environment for its development. The research setting was a Team Academy programme developed in partnership between a university and a specialist community Trust located in an area of low participation in higher education. Through co-creation workshops, focussed discussion groups and observations which utilised a range of creative methods, the project team, together with learners and staff of programme and external stakeholders from the wider entrepreneurship ecosystem, identified 12 capacities underpinning an entrepreneurial mindset: risk-taking, grit, positivity, adaptability, creativity, drive, resilience, confidence, passion, motivation, networker, willingness to learn from failure. Inquiry-led, team-based, student-centred pedagogies have been identified as a primary accelerator in development of such an entrepreneurial mindset. The chapter provides rich insights into a 360° understanding of an entrepreneurial mindset by juxtaposing experiences of entrepreneurs, student entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship educators and researchers and considering the implications for learner development.

Keywords:
micro-culture, psychological capital, team-coaching, team-learning, entrepreneurial mindset

Introduction

This chapter explores the interaction between learning environment – including space, micro culture, team coaching and team learning – and the development of learners' entrepreneurial mindset and psychological capital.

The changing nature of work and of employment patterns, attaches greater significance, by organisations, entrepreneurs and students alike, to the development of entrepreneurial capacities, with growing interest in entrepreneurial mindset and psychological capital. Psychological capital includes measures of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). The notion of 'entrepreneurial mindset' is less clearly defined but is generally felt to build on Dweck's (2012) 'growth mindset' to encompass additional measures such as social networks, risk-taking and creative problem-solving.

Baluku et al. (2016) suggest that whilst both are important, psychological capital is a better predictor of entrepreneurial success than the amount of start-up capital available. Despite this, a recent study of 1,500 students from Fika (2019) found 88% of students felt they would leave university emotionally unequipped for "the real world of work" and more than half (57%) felt universities were not doing enough to equip them with these skills. The Team Academy approach seeks to address this, placing a commitment to the development and well-being of the individual, team, community and ecosystem at the heart of its philosophy.

This chapter reports on our research into the development of psychological capital and entrepreneurial mindset amongst team entrepreneurs on a UK Team Academy programme. Our research approach was designed in the spirit of Team Academy, encouraging co-creation and active participation from team entrepreneurs (TEs) and their team coaches. In this chapter we pay particular attention to the influence of team working, team learning and the entrepreneurial 'ecosystem' on the development of psychological capital. In doing so we provide critical insights into a 'scholarship of practice' (Ramsey, 2014) and the influence of the 'micro-cultures' in which these programmes are embedded (Tosey et al., 2015).

Conceptual framework

As working patterns and the nature of work become increasingly complex and unpredictable, interest in concepts such as entrepreneurial mindset and psychological capital (PsyCap) has increased. Luthans et al. (2007: 3) define PsyCap as:

> 'an individual's positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success.'

As PsyCap is argued to be more 'state-like', rather than 'trait-like' (Luthans & Youssef, 2007) it is deemed to be more open to development.

The notion of 'entrepreneurial mindset' is less clearly defined but is generally felt to build on Dweck's (2012) 'growth mindset' to encompass additional measures such as social networks, risk-taking and creative problem-solving (see for example Davies et al.'s (2015) outline of the Entrepreneurial Mindset Profile and Sidhu et al. (2016) on the Berkeley Innovation Index). Thus, whilst the term is widely used in practice, research in the field is still in its infancy, with limited criticality.

As a pedagogy in entrepreneurship education, critical practice has been dominated by experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), which emphasises prior knowledge of entrepreneurship and different levels of cognitive engagement, whilst Brechin (2000: 26) defines critical practice as 'open minded, reflective appraisal that takes account of different perspectives, experiences and assumptions.' She describes two guiding principles in critical practice relevant to entrepreneurship education: respecting others as equals, with interpersonal relationships as the starting point; and taking an open approach to working in uncertain environments. A reflexive cycle is created where critical action and critical thinking intertwine in critical practice. And understandings and actions are changed by actors' experiences with others, as they too influence and change others.

Tosey et al. (2015) explore how this manifests in a Finnish university programme where the Tiimiakatemia/Team Academy model was pioneered. They emphasise the importance of considering the 'micro-culture' when seeking to adopt a programme and pedagogy 'since a micro-culture is a complex, emergent phenomenon that is not necessarily controllable or transferable.' (p.175). They identify four attributes contributing to the learning environment: social embeddedness; real-worldness; identity formation; and normative. Their Finnish case study, notes the dominance of team/collective learning (social embeddedness), the increased level of 'risk' and the role of coaching and team learning in providing 'psychological safety' (real-worldness). They claim: 'A distinctive language, team orientation, dialogue and entrepreneurial behaviour symbolise membership of this community" (p.189 - identity formation) where "…education methods also function as ideological practices. However, little evidence of criticality with regard to the explicit curriculum…' (normative).

When combined with TA's commitment to development and well-being, critical practice can approach 'praxis' (Freire, 1972), where one engages as a committed thinker and actor with the intention to act truly. Ramsey (2014) develops this, arguing for a scholarship of practice that emphasises paying attention to: relations between ideas and action; inquiry 'as an ongoing, sceptical and evaluative testing of actions taken or considered' (p.18); and the quality of relationships, suggesting 'new (learned) action will be at the core of a practice-centred learning' (p.18) and the ideas, theories and concepts we teach are viewed as generative.

In this chapter we explore how a scholarship of practice is enacted in a programme adopting Team Academy approaches and its influence on the development of psychological capital and entrepreneurial mindset.

The research site

Our research took place with TEs and team coaches on the BA Sports Business and Entrepreneurship programme, a 3 year undergraduate degree developed in partnership between the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE) and the Bristol City Robins Foundation (BCRF), a community-based educational trust established by Bristol City Football Club. It runs from a dedicated space in Bristol City's Ashton Gate Stadium, which is located in an area of low participation in higher education. The first cohort of TEs joined the programme in September 2017. Our research took place in the first year that the programme had all three year groups (October 2019-November 2020). There were 34 TEs on the programme, and all but a handful participated in our research.

As with other chapters in this book series, the programme adopts the Team Academy approach to learning entrepreneurship through doing (completing, reflecting on and evidencing learning from live projects). The educational philosophy is described in detail elsewhere in this book and Partanen (2012) details the approach, tools, techniques and underpinning pedagogy, which has emerged and developed through practice, rather than from theory. TEs at BCRF are coached in team companies of up to 15 TEs, with each team enjoying two, three-hour training sessions per week.

Tosey et al. (2015) note the importance of the micro-culture and from this respect the BCRF site has a number of distinguishing features. For example, BCRF has a strong community focus (social embeddedness) and this imbues the programme and its culture. The stadium is a working environment (real-worldness), home to Bristol Sport, Bristol Bears and Bristol City Football Club which adds another dimension to exposure to risk and the development of external networks and ways of working. The TEs at BCRF are adopting many of the ideological practices, team learning, dialogue, participation in learning journeys and entrepreneurial behaviours (identity formation). Tosey et al. (2015) identify in The Finnish birthplace of Tiimiakatemia, perhaps affiliate more closely with their local community than with the broader Team Academy community. Well-being of the individual, team, community and ecosystem is at the heart of the programme's philosophy, as is an emphasis on critical self-reflection (normative).

In search of a congruent method

Our research adopted a mixed methods approach (revised due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic instigating a pause to face-to-face learning activities). Qualitative elements of the research programme aimed for congruence with the programme's underpinning philosophy; they were largely collaborative, team based and, where TEs were involved, were treated as learning opportunities for the TEs, as well as the research team. Two co-creation workshops with 20-25 TEs and external

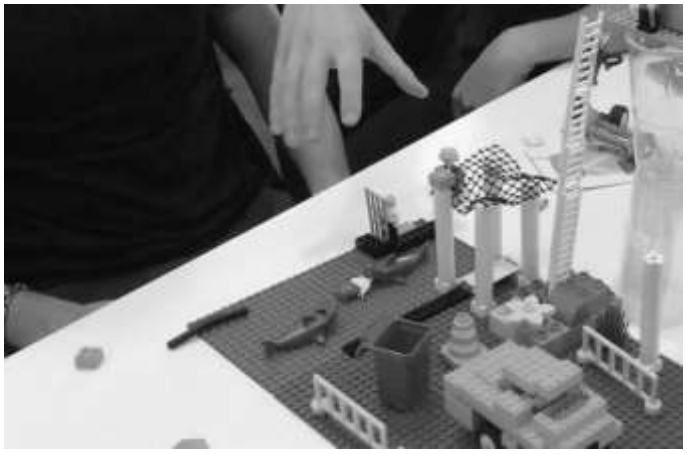
entrepreneurs/entrepreneur advisors explored how TEs make sense of and interpret notions of entrepreneurship, team entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial mindset. The third co-creation workshop (cancelled due to the pandemic) was replaced by a video competition inviting TEs to 'pitch' their entrepreneurial attributes to a potential investor and a 360° feedback session based on entrepreneurial attributes identified in the co-creation workshops, providing depth of insight into how these attributes were interpreted and acted on. A PsyCap questionnaire administered one year apart was designed to provide background insight into any shift in attributes as the TEs progressed through the programme and allowed for comparison with a control group of students. Three focussed discussion meetings with the programme staff team of five people provided a different perspective on the emerging themes and important insights into staff skills and experience required to facilitate enquiry-led learning. This chapter pays particular attention to the learning from our research with the TEs and, within this to the co-creation workshops and their replacement activities, where much use was made of visual methods of generating and interpreting data.

Writers on visual research methodology are concerned with methods of generating and interpreting life visual experiences (Warren, 2002). Knowles & Sweetman (2004) suggested that a visual recording could be understood as an evidence of the social. In our work we considered the visual inseparable from everything experienced by participants at BCRF and, for us researchers, a means to an end in understanding how entrepreneurship was imagined by TEs, in the process, as Boje & Baskin described (2011: 415), of 'creating meaning, drawing elements from an overabundant reality, constantly in flux, and reading the world they create as a result of the relationships and apparatus/discourses of those practices in which they are seamlessly embedded'.

Visual experiences

To capture the social, processual and dynamic nature of learning and creating meaning (Boje & Baskin, 2011) we embodied a methodology that prioritised visual experiences: LEGO® Serious Play™ model building, story-writing, asset mapping, storytelling and video-making. Collecting data from the movement of hands as well as of mouths, attending the overlapping of the conversations and the bodies of the students as well as the spontaneous humour-jokes they made when interacting allowed the researchers as well as the participants to engage in a process of deep reflection and reflexivity. Faces, gestures, the use of hands in conjunction with oral narratives, alerted us to the richness of reflection of the participants. The multi-channel aspect of the audio-visual medium offered us a unique possibility for contrasting perspectives and, through this process, enabled rich forms of reflexivity for both researchers and participants (Gaggiotti & Gaggiotti, 2021).

Figure 1. **Bodies and words**



Observing TEs building objects whilst discussing and arguing among themselves and us, yielded insights impossible to capture through questionnaires and/or interviews. Photographing and filming provided rich insights into and a different perspective on how we as a micro-culture learn. When analysing, visual stories proved more rich, ambivalent, less word dominated, hence "reflected" better the multidimensional nature of configuring a mindset about an idea or concept.

We produced our live visual experiences in the TEs own physical space: the stadium, the facilities, the meeting rooms. This was important in redefining the traditional power relations between the researcher (i.e., university lecturers) and the researched (i.e., university students). Students were comfortable in their own territory and the researchers were alert as they were attending the space as well as what was happening in that space. Here we discuss how we visualised (live, synchronous) and audio-visualised (based on recordings) two research events: a LEGO® Serious Play™ exercise (first co-creation workshop) and a mapping exercise (second workshop). We reflected on our live visual experiences, returning to the audio-visual material we co-produced.

Co-creation workshops

The first co-creation workshop (November 2019) opened with a LEGO® Serious Play™ exercise where TEs worked in small teams to build models that represent entrepreneurial values. The sequence of images below are illustrative of the LEGO models produced - most of which conceptualised the 'entrepreneur as lone hero' - and how students worked with and interpreted the task.

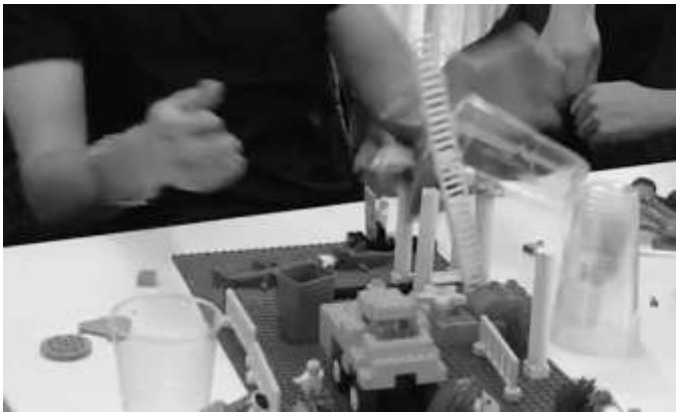
Figure 2. **Objects "showing" the nature of an entrepreneur.**

This represents the top, the money. This is a person trying to climb the ladder. [laughs]

Figure 3. **Paying attention to the details**

Precision is needed to explain complex thoughts ...

Figure 4. **Capturing collapses, changes and unexpected experiences of entrepreneurship**



At some point the model collapsed; this was used as the perfect occasion to explain the fragility and instability; the noise of the LEGO pieces collapsing, the exclamation and surprise from participants help all to reflect on the unexpected circumstances and events that

could transform the entrepreneurial assumptions. "We tried to support it, but we couldn't..."

Interestingly, participants used objects that were not LEGO™ pieces to build their models, using objects sourced from their environment to enhance them. For example, they used plastic glasses grabbed from the water dispenser to build a pedestal for the entrepreneur to stand on, borrowed postcards from a previous activity to add a background image (e.g. a road) or enhance their message with motivational phrases (e.g. "you make me believe in magic") and used other objects (e.g. a bigger, shinier trophy) which weren't available amongst the LEGO™ pieces. The parallel with entrepreneurs bootstrapping resources was noticeable and arguably the evidence of an entrepreneurial mindset in action even when attempting a non-contentious task like "take this suitcase of LEGO™ pieces and build a LEGO™ model of..."

The movement of participants' fingers signposting translation and transfiguration when explaining the location of objects and the selection of materials (LEGO figurines, pieces, blocks) was consistent with the ongoing nature of the process of evaluating and re-evaluating previous ideas.

Reflecting on the research experience

In reflecting on and analysing the LEGO models, as one of the research team wrote in her field notes:

"The theme was obvious, repeated itself again and again and we did not even need to hear the debriefing to reach a saturation point for data collection – the sole successful entrepreneur (literally) climbing the ladder of success (often with a sword or a treasure chest) after having survived many dangers in the outside word ranging from sharks, to lions, to other entrepreneurs trying to catch him (always him!) out. ... there was only one way to succeed but many ways to fail."

By contrast in the focussed group discussions later in the day, where the TEs were exploring their own entrepreneurial experiences, development and learning, and their perceptions of core entrepreneurial attributes, she noted:

"Even though they mentioned that self-accountability and being responsible for their own learning were quite important they also recognised that they could not have learned everything by themselves and other teammates were key in their learning or in their inspiration and drive for learning."

Or as one TE put it:

"even all sort of single heroes and that, they have people they work with or work with, in terms of their network ... And then they've got employees. So, now that and their different personalities sort of require different needs"

The struggle that emerged from the focus group discussions was less about reaching the top, and more about adapt*ing* to new ways of learn*ing* and work*ing*; embrac*ing* the tensions between, for example, compet*ing* and collaborat*ing*, enquiry and advocacy, action and reflection, individual and team.

It was through engaging with this struggle and embracing – rather than seeking to resolve - these tensions that the TEs began to develop their entrepreneurial mindsets and PsyCap. Although numbers were small (only 11 TEs repeated it), findings from the PsyCap questionnaire showed development on all four measures of self-efficacy, hope, resilience, and optimism. The small sample size impacted on ability to establish statistical significance. However, Effect Size Estimates (Cohen's D) indicated that the largest effect was for Optimism, but all effects demonstrated a medium effect size and are larger indications of change than those of the control group, with the exception of self-efficacy. We also note that the first wave of data collection (October 2019) was in a pre-COVID environment, whereas wave 2 data collection (November/December 2020) was during the COVID pandemic. It would seem fair to suggest that a global pandemic is likely to impact individual levels of hope, optimism, resilience and efficacy, as these all focus in some part on an individual's mindset about their abilities to control and cope.

The focussed discussion groups surfaced some of the ways in which the programme and the nature of the space the TEs inhabit supported this:

> *"So, I think being, being an entrepreneur, surrounding yourself by other entrepreneurs and people with, that have high aspirations, is very important. But if, if I was, if I was on a different course with other people with a different mindset, I think I would struggle, because I think it would alter my mindset in a way ... To not be as aspirational."*

> *"But the main things that I've sort of developed is confidence.... basically, because I've never been part of a, a real team, like a consistent team previously, being part of a team where you're meeting two or three times a week and you're... you've got sort of expectations for the team, I've just developed sort of the way I communicate with people. ... developed sort of understanding of different personalities and characteristics."*

This also extended to the inter-relationship between project and academic work, which was seen to accelerate learning and enhance transferability of learning:

> *"I think it's a good course to come to, because I didn't have, like, the resources, knowledge and stuff to actually go out there and do it, this has given you platform to show me structure of how to do things. And actually, the assignments we had are targeted for giving us that knowledge, to actually understand it. So, they're not just pointless assignments, like these assignments teach you mindset and teach you entrepreneur, like, activities. Without the assignments, I don't think I'd have the knowledge I would today..."*

The mapping exercise undertaken in the second co-creation workshop (February 2020) deepened these insights, providing the TEs with an opportunity to connect the development of their entrepreneurial mindset with programme elements. We generated 48 attributes associated with an entrepreneurial mindset, most from the attributes mentioned by the TEs in the focussed discussion groups with several added from established external measures. Each TE had three dots to assign to the attributes they felt were most important. The 12 that attracted most 'votes' were selected: Drive; Risk-taking; Motivation; Willingness to learn from failure; Adaptability; Resilience; Passion; Grit/Persistence; Positivity; Creativity; Confidence; and Networker. These formed the basis for the mapping exercise, as captured in the image set below.

Figure 5 (compound of 4 pictures). **The mapping exercise**

In encouraging TEs to engage with the 'messiness' of their learning experience, to make new connections between their learning, the entrepreneurial attributes, and the programme's learning environment/space the 'mapping exercise' surfaced new insights. Three attributes – resourcefulness, a

desire to 'fix' something, and 'mental wealth' (labelled as looking after oneself and performing emotional first aid as/when needed) - were added and placed in the centre of the map, with a consensus that without mental wealth, none of the other attributes could flourish:

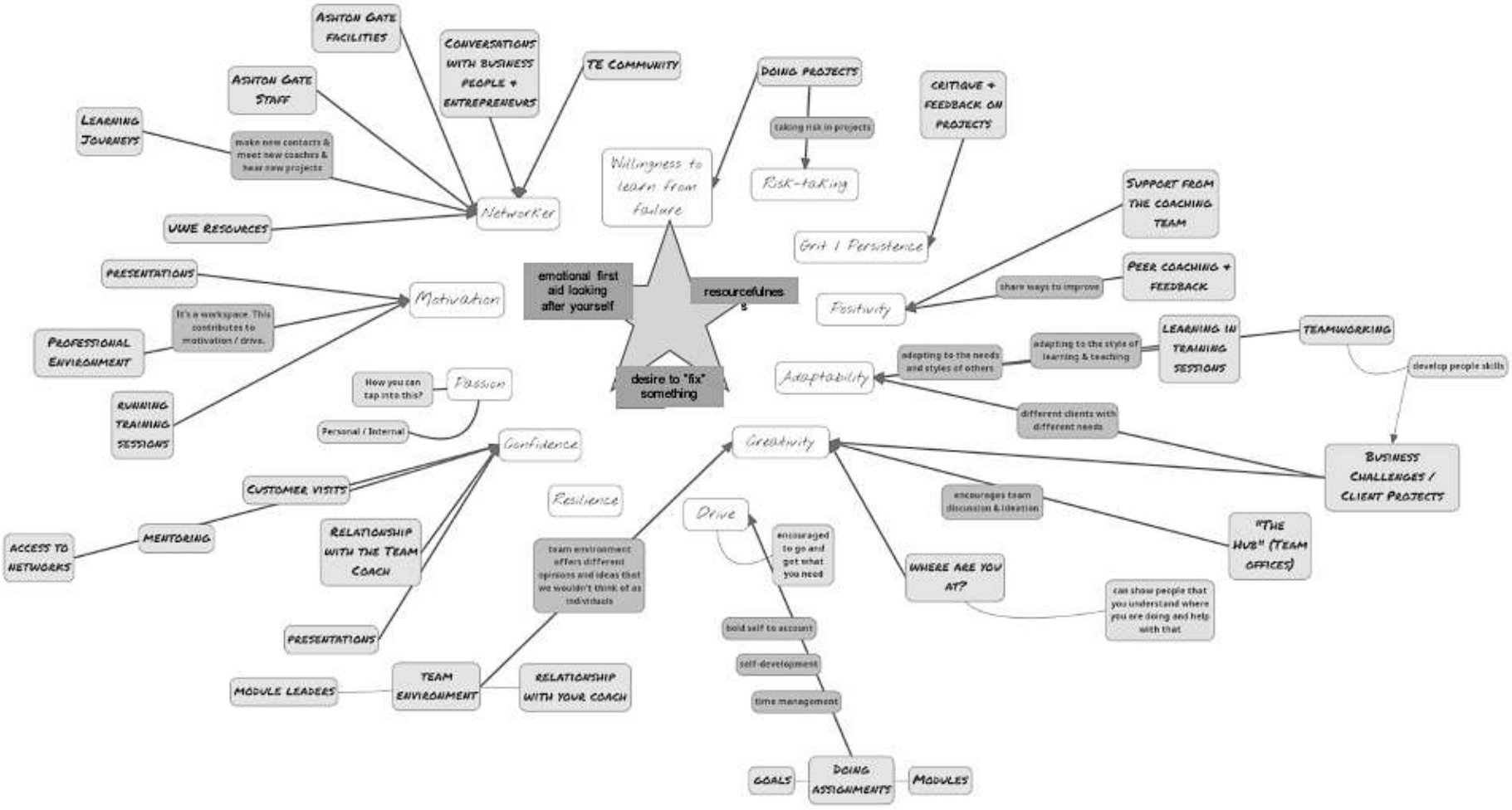
> "*If you're not in a good space mentally, it's really hard to do any of these things, which can stop you progressing in any sort of form. Keeping yourself mentally there, like, keeping your wellbeing good, can lead to all these things."*

The desire to fix' things was seen as closely connected to mental wealth. Thus, whilst none of the four dimensions of psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007) were selected by the TEs in their 12 entrepreneurial attributes, it was implicitly seen as central to developing an entrepreneurial mindset.

With these observations, the dialogue became more generative (Isaacs, 1999). The conversation moved from an emphasis on the individual and on the more structural aspects of the programme, to the collective and the more relational; the role of relationships with fellow team members, team coaches, and social and professional networks in developing entrepreneurial attributes and sustaining mental wealth.

Figure 6 below captures the connections and inter-relationships uncovered through the mapping exercise.

Figure 6. **Connections and inter-relationships (the mapping exercise)**



In the second workshop, the TEs also self-assessed their development against the 12 entrepreneurial attributes selected, comparing their scores when they started the programme with their scores now. They felt they had shifted most in their 'willingness to learn from failure', closely followed by 'networker', 'risk-taking', and 'confidence'.

In keeping with our aim of conducting research in the spirit of 'Team Academy' the final year TE team took the attributes (minus 'networker') and designed them into a 360° feedback session (December 2020). Along with two team coaches, they scored each other against the attributes when they started on the programme and on where they saw themselves now. Separately, the TEs were scored on a number of dimensions of engagement and performance by a team coach. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there was a relationship between the level of engagement and the development of entrepreneurial attributes. As team coaches observed in the staff discussion groups, coming to terms with the Team Academy methodology can be challenging; it's an uncomfortable and unfamiliar approach to learning that requires commitment and participation to reap the rewards:

> *"why is there no lesson and why are they not teaching us anything and then once, you say, the penny-drop moment kicks in and they can sort of realise, actually, we're responsible for creating our own course of action, and sometimes they come in and often there isn't a plan or you know a structure in place but they develop the skills maturity to then come in and actually think, well, what are we doing today, what are we going to achieve, can… you know, how can this benefit our long-term plan, our exit strategies? And that then feeds into almost sort of an entrepreneurial mindset I guess in a way because as an entrepreneur you're not… you know there isn't somebody telling you what you're doing or telling you what you've got to do"* [TC02]

The numbers are too small to draw robust conclusions. However, as the examples in Figures 7 and 8 highlight, those who had the highest level of engagement tended to score more highly on their entrepreneurial attributes and their self-assessment was closer to the assessment of their peers and coaches, whilst those who were less engaged tended to score themselves more highly than their peers and coaches did. Whether as an entrepreneur or in the workplace, the capacity to reflect critically and accurately on your strengths and areas for development is a valuable and valued skill.

Figure 7. **Example 360° from highly engaged TE**

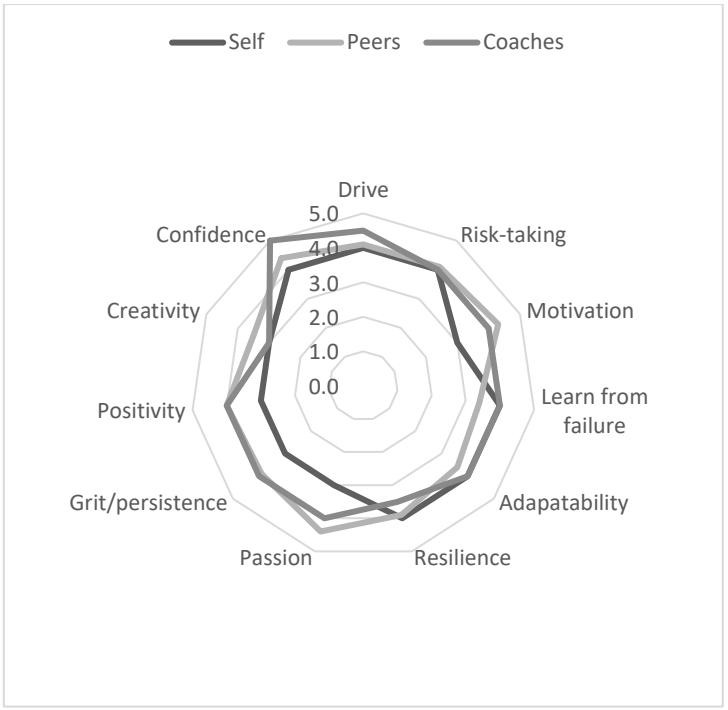
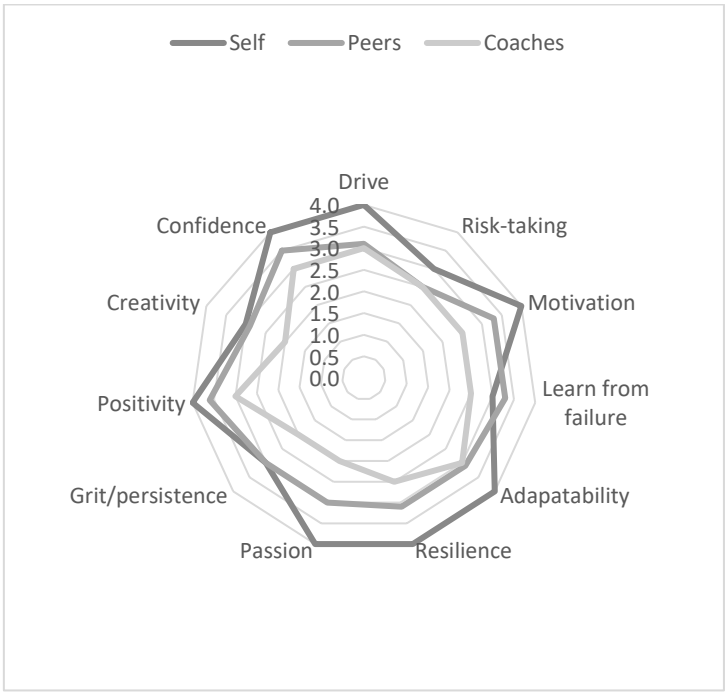


Figure 8. **Example 360° from less engaged TE**



Concluding thoughts: It is all in the mindset but the mindset is not all

The project demonstrated the importance of adopting congruent research methods that chime with the TA philosophy and approach – those that did got much higher engagement, generated deeper learning for researchers and TES and favoured a programme micro-culture (Tosey et al., 2015). As one

of the co-researchers noted, *"it was so striking that during the activities not a single student ever got their phone out or disengaged from the task for even a moment"*

Indeed, the method we choose was not divorced from the field, it emerged from our interaction with the field. Thus, the TEs have been appreciated, the method was used as a space, not just as a set of techniques for data gathering and data analysis. In this way, the research process became a research output itself, an indissoluble part of the experience of concentrating psychological capital.

The approach demonstrated the importance of helping different narratives to emerge. This happened in the first workshop from the LEGO exercise and during the group discussions. Multiple and non-singular narratives favoured the reflection of the differences between, individual and group/team programmes. We realised that working individually we were not only drawn to the conception of the heroic, lone entrepreneur but we tended to focus on the uses of words as instruments with limited scope and bemoaning the relative absence of teaching. In contrast, the experience of building together, talking about an artefact (a model, a map, etc) with others, helped to focus on the processual nature of the programme and the benefit of its lack of structure. For example, back in their group working environment, TEs language becomes more inclusive and their focus shifts to the relational and community. Here they pay attention to the team process and dynamics, to the texture of the 'space', to the process and methodology. Their reflections were typically deeper and more creative.

Methodology, relationships and environment acted as a safety net, contributing to psychological safety, that enhances learning (Tosey et al., 2015) through encouraging experimentation and embracing, rather than seeking to resolve tensions and paradoxes and fertile ground for the development of PsyCap.

As well as the tensions between individual and team/group/collective we observed the TEs embracing and navigating 4 types of tensions: (1) enquiry and advocacy (fostered in particular through dialogue/training sessions); (2) competing and collaborating; (3) action and reflection and (4) the "academic" and the "practical".

Further research

In respect to the PsyCap dimensions, whilst the numbers are too small to draw robust conclusions, we note that despite the impact of a global pandemic, which has left its mark on mental, as well as physical, health, the TEs showed development (a medium effect size) on all four dimensions of psychological capital – self-efficacy; hope; optimism; and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). There is scope for future research with a larger sample to explore this further.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the 360° exercise appeared to suggest engagement as a reliable indicator of growth and development of entrepreneurial attributes – and also of level of self-awareness. It would also be fruitful to explore this further.

The concepts of 'entrepreneurial mindset' and 'psychological capital' encourage us to focus on the cognitive. We suggest that in adopting a research approach that chimes with the spirit of Team

Academy, embracing the physical and embodied in relationship with the cognitive, we contribute to the argument for the further development of a scholarship of practice. Here is where we claim that it could be all in the mindset, but not only in the mindset. In developing psychological capital through the Team Academy approach, a lot is in the embodiment, the places, the micro-cultural practices where the experiences are contextualised.

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