

InovAtiva Brasil

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Organisation: Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Services

Country: Brazil

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Economic affairs

Type: Digital, Partnerships, Public Service

Launched in: 2013

Overall development time: 3 year(s)

Link to the innovation's website

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Description

Inovativa Brasil is a virtual accelerator program that provides business skills, mentoring and connections to large companies and investors. The program uses on-line platform to reach any startups all over Brazil. Our technology eliminates geographical barriers to provide courses, connect volunteer mentors located in anyplace of the world to support Brazilian startups and introduce them to potential business clients and investors.

The first innovation is to use Online platform to provide courses, interactions , discussion groups and other features. Courses are taught by business executives, contents are free of charge. Today we have more than 250 videos and 20.000 people registered. The second innovation is the mentor network. There are 450 volunteer mentors who are senior business executives, investors, consultants and successful entrepreneurs. We use technology to match-making startups needs and mentors capabilities; mentoring sessions use traditional videoconference tools like Skype or Google Hangout. The third innovation is to introduce the best startups of the program to large companies and investors. It is the first program in the world that integrates in the same program: business skills training, mentoring sessions and connections to large companies and investors. 600 startups are accelerated every year.

Why the innovation was developed

- Brazilian government has invested a lot in R&D in the last decade and focusing investments in less developed regions. These researches has turning into technologies and startups. Unfortunately high-tech entrepreneurs are creating great technologies but failing to introduce products and services to the market. One of the main reasons is lack of business skills and weak connections to business environment. As a final result, the country is wasting a strong source of economic development and great technologies have been wasted.
 - The challenge was to provide world-class entrepreneurship training and mentoring sessions to startups that were located anywhere in Brazil, a large country. The few courses and mentors for high-tech startups were available only in large cities at the southeast region but startups were spread all over Brazil and without any support.
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Objectives

Support economic growth

Main beneficiaries

Businesses

Results

Efficiency

- Most part of the startups has serious problems defining their business strategy because their entrepreneurs are technical people (engineers, scientists, etc.). They know nothing or little about business. Inovativa Brasil connect experienced business executive to support startups that are starting their operations. It increase the success level of the ventures reduce failure cases.
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Effectiveness

- Startups that participate in our program has access to world level business skills training courses. The courses are real world cases and provide step by step knowledge to improve operation efficiency.
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Service quality

Accessibility:

- Using on-line platform to provide practical courses and virtual mentoring sessions, geographic barriers are eliminated. Any Brazilian startup can access mentors in Brazil and USA using our program, at their own time, for free. Physical presence is not necessary anymore, the most important is the knowledge flow and social networking the mentors open for their startups.

Reliability:

- Our partners provide reliability for the program. When we partner with the best companies in the world, join experienced investors and business executives and provide world-class content the program proves its value
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User satisfaction

- Every activity of the program is monitored and evaluated each edition. We measure satisfaction level of our startups of each activity and content. Another part of this process is to understand what did not work and why, giving opportunity to deliver a better activity in the next edition. Moreover, we ask participants to give suggestions about what we could do to help them, allowing multiple hands design of the program. There are always new ideas in place each edition based on our participants opinion.

Development

Design

The idea was developed when as Director of Innovation at the Ministry of Industry, Foreign Trade and Service and I analyzed how a company is accelerated by venture capital funds. Then I had the idea to replicate the same kind of experience of VC invested companies to thousands of startups. However, the only viable solution to make it happen was through information technologies, that could disseminate knowledge and interaction using internet connection. It allowed to reach any company, anywhere, anytime. For a country the size of Brazil, it was the only option. Design time: 4 month(s)

Testing

- Because of the complexity and novelty of the idea, we decided to make a pilot project to test whether would be demand for the program and how it would work. The Ministry had a very low budget and hired Endeavor, an entrepreneurship NGO, to plan and execute the idea with support of the consulting firm McKinsey, that agreed to be part of the initiative as social responsibility.
- At the initial phase, we developed a simple website with courses recorded by McKinsey consultants and Endeavor entrepreneurs providing mentoring sessions. It was a huge success, with 1.750 startups applying their projects and only 50 candidates were selected for mentoring. The satisfaction level of participants was extremely high and many investments and business partnership were achieved.

Testing time: 8 month(s)

Implementation

Tools used:

- The first challenge was to develop an online platform to provide training and interaction among members. Massive on line open courses (MOOC) was chosen because of the thousands of potential participants. Next, we hired a researcher from MIT Media Lab to develop a technology roadmap for an on-line platform using the best technology in the world and developed the product.
- The second challenge was to develop a mentoring network with hundreds or thousands of mentors. Brazil did not have tradition and there were not any program that used mentoring sessions through Internet.
- . Next step was to identify large scale mentoring programs around the world. Everwise, a Silicon Valley startup, was chosen and hired to train Ministry's staff to design, implement and evaluate a mentoring program for the program, including technologies to match-making the startups with mentors.
- Finally, we convinced more than 100 large companies and investors to analyze business opportunities with the startups.

Resources used:

- Civil servants of the Ministry are the management team and responsible for mentoring network. We hire non-profit institutions to execute the program according to our requirements.
- The first institution was Endeavor and the present one is Fundação Certi, hired for 3 years execution. The program uses execution institutions because they offer agility in procurement and human resources hiring compared to public institutions.
- We also use an agreement with Unesco to hire specialists from Brazil and abroad to provide us intelligence and world best practices for our program.
- The budget is very limited but we are able to attract partners to our program and also many volunteers that believe in our mission. We were also successful to fund raise resources from international bids like Newton Fund from United Kingdom.

Implementation time: 9 month(s)

Diffusion

- Business associations support us because they are interested that good startups are connected with large companies that search for innovation. Small business support agency (SEBRAE) also has been inspired by our program for its startups strategy. Facebook is a partner that invests US\$ 80.000 in each of 28 selected startups per year and offers international mentoring for entrepreneurs. The next step will be a Inovativa Brasil designed for social impact investment business.

Diffusion time: 18 month(s)

Challenges and solutions

- Challenge 1: low budget and high-risk project. We made a pilot project, validated the demand for this kind of initiative and followed a scale-up plan.
 - Challenge 2: public procurement difficult to hire world best companies and people. We had to design an institutional engineering to make world level procurement. We used different instruments from government, but also from Unesco for international procurements, partnerships with private companies and also international bid competition.
 - Challenge 3: aligning large-scale reach, innovative approaches and with high-quality services. We measure everything we do. When some innovative ideas works but the execution fails, we do not give up. We correct what went wrong and insist in launching again. It is important the leaders commitment to back-up potential fails and maintain team's motivation to move on, assuming the responsibility
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Partnerships

Multiple partners

Academics and Research Bodies, Civil Society, Other Public Sector, Private sector

National Confederation of Industries (CNI), Small Business Support Agency (SEBRAE), Brazilian Venture Capital and Private Equity Association (ABVCAP), Anjos do Brasil (Angel investors Association), Brazilian National Development Bank (BNDES), 3 best business accelerator in Brazil (Aceleratech, Baita and Techmall), Facebook, Endeavor, Brazilian Association of Information Technology Companies (BRASSCOM), Brazilian Agency for Industrial Development (ABDI), McKinsey & Co, Brazilian Export Agency (APEX), National Association of Incubators and Science Parks (ANPROTEC), UK Trade & Investments (UKTI).

Partnerships for Mentoring are important to attract mentors to our network. Partnerships for content are important to provide business skills courses. Partnership to financing or investments are used to fund innovation projects for our startups. Partnerships for match-making are important to connect our startups to large companies and investors. When all this kind of partnerships are put together we can deliver a whole new concept for public policy, attract partners that fight for our program and we can reach a large number of participants with low budget.

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- An important lesson is the power of mentoring. There are a lot of people out there who wants to help but at their own time and with some respected institutions assuring the program is serious. We were able to attract many CEO of large companies to be mentors of our program.
 - It is important to join forces with other institutions that could be interested in the result of the project, trying not to overlap actions and connecting everybody in the same "solution package".
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Conditions for success

- Innovation is always risky and there must have a leadership backing the initiative up against political interference, moving team forward to try new approaches and taking responsibility for any failure.
 - Another important advice is to start small, testing and making mistakes as fast as possible and a plan for scaling the project up. This approach is important because if the project does not work, public money is not wasted. If it works, you have a lot of experience and information to make it grow quickly and with minor errors.
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