Word Count: 1761

Time to Read: 9 minutes

Good evening ladies and gentleman, distinguished guests,   Thanks to Liam and Michael for inviting me to speak to you this evening. Thanks for the lovely introduction.

What I want to do over the next 9 or 10 minutes is provide some background and context for the project that I worked on with the team at SCCUL, and then explain exactly what we are doing, and thirdly and finally talk about what we would like you to do.

A big part of my business is delivering training. This is not a sales pitch but I deliver group and one to one training and mentoring on business topics of relevance to startups. As a trainer, one is always conscious on the day of the training that people enjoy the session and benefit from it. The primary objective is to help participants to learn, to transfer knowledge so that they can develop new skills, and be able to interpret new ideas as they might apply in their business.

To judge customer satisfaction, trainers use feedback sheets distributed at the end of the session. [Sure everyone has filled those out]. There are often described as 'happy sheets' as they provide surface level feedback. But as a trainer, I always look at them with a bit of 'trepidation' just in case there is something bad in there as you want reassurance that everything was ok. I have a Train the Trainer qualification, and have read several books like the

'Honey and Mumford Learning Style' in order to assimilate ideas and thereby deliver training with: structure; up to date content; and incorporating group discussion; and practical activities which sometimes include follow up deliverables.

But training organisations and in-house training units are looking at delivering programmes that deliver more long term benefits, not just happy sheets. They are looking to answer the question: 'Did that promoter go on to a success? And could some of that success be directly attributed to the programme of training they undertook several months earlier. As a trainer, it is a fantastic feeling when one is told this by participants. Job satisfaction is not always about the money but recognition of a contribution can be equally important.

That is the first part of the context. The second part of the context before I go on to explain the SCCUL project, is that late last year, I won a tender to undertake a 'Mid Term Review' or programme evaluation for a startup enterprise development programme in Ennis. It was a specific type of project that I hadn't done before but I was really interested in doing it and had enough related experience to know how it should be approached. The Board of the programme wanted to know if the programme had been successful; had achieved its objectives; had been of value to participants and ultimately if there was a case for further funding.

When researching models for Training Evaluation, I found the Kirkpatrick Model. Using the Kirkpatrick Four-Level Training Evaluation Model, the benefit to participants will be assessed based on:

1. **Reaction** – The degree to which the learners liked the learning process … this level is critical as people like to be asked for their input and to be included. The training organiser has to decide whether they want to have it anonymous or not, but it is important to be seen to be respecting people's opinion.

2. **Learning** - The extent to which the learners perceive that they have gained valuable knowledge and skills – this can be done on the day of the training or after a period to allow reflection.

3. **Behavior** – The changes in 'job performance' resulted from the learning process - reflection on progress made in their business journey by participants as perceived by themselves and by others that they closely interact with.

4. **Results** – Measurement of tangible results of the SCCUL Mentoring programme.

The final one, 'Results', is really a key metric that say a Board or funder is interested in but unless you can evaluate at level 2 and 3, then one cannot draw any definite link between the programme activity and the ultimate outcomes. This is the difference between causation and simple correlation (the latter being 'it would have happened anyways').

So getting back specifically to SCCUL, I had just finished that project (it went very well) when I attended a SCCUL event. At the top table, the discussion was about how the Mentor Programme was excellent and that it had saved jobs; that a set number of jobs had been created; plus other benefits had accrued. The point was being made that each of the mentors had contributed to this success. I fully agreed with the sentiments but was wondering about the methodology for calculating the figures given. I was also wondering if 'job creation' was one of the objectives of SCCUL. I was wondering if it was the correct measure for monitoring and evaluating success. But 'increased employment' seems to be how Government summarise the value of all enterprise programmes and therefore it gets all the media headlines.

So I sent an innocent email to Liam. I made a few of these points. In fairness, the SCCUL Mentor Committee took it brilliantly. They called me on it – asking me what would I suggest. I gave a brief proposal and then worked with Michael on the project which we will describe now.

The first thing suggested was a one page Feedback Sheet for mentees to be completed at the end of each mentor session. This is to be completed anonymously. It can be completed entirely online, or it can be downloaded or sent to mentees by email. Blank copies will be available in the centre. This is to make it as easy as possible to remember to complete the feedback on the day of the session. These will be collated and analysed on a bi-monthly basis. I don't intend to

go into every question and there are only 5 on the Feedback Form which should take 2-3 minutes to complete. I do want to mention Q.4.

This is a particular format of question, called the Net Promoter Score[1] which is neatly explained on Wikipedia if you want to check it out. It will allow SCCUL to track satisfaction levels each period using a standard figure.

But that is only the start. The Feedback Sheet is level 1 in the Kirkpatrick model. What we really want to do is evaluate at level 2, 3 and 4. An 'End of Year Review' was suggested. This involves two surveys; a questionnaire for Mentors; and a questionnaire for Mentees to collate in-depth feedback on the programme from their perspective.

Dealing with the Mentor Form, one of the things I am really interested in finding out is, 'Why do you do it?' This is so that the Committee can make it as beneficial as possible for you. We are also looking at ways the programme can be enhanced. SCCUL circulated a survey before and got a great response. We have decided to make this anonymous but you can provide your name on completion if you wish.

The second part of the Annual Review is a Survey or Census of Mentees. Now, I am referring to it as an annual review but the first review will cover all assignments since the outset of the programme so it will effectively cover two years from January 2013 to when we send out the questionnaire in a few weeks.

Each mentee who has started an assignment or a set of 3 meetings will be asked to contribute to the survey. The plan is to post it to everyone with a cover letter. It will be available for online completion – it is an embedded Google form for anyone who is interested. It can also be downloaded or sent by email for completion offline. The form was tested with a Mentee. It was shortened following the feedback but a word of warning it is still fairly long so it will take about 20 minutes to complete. So your support in encouraging mentees to take the time and effort to complete and return the form will be needed and appreciated. It will be only once a year and we intend to take the feedback on board.

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[1] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Net_Promoter

We may also need your help to explain that the form can not be anonymous but that everything in the form will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will not be shared except in a collated fashion. The form will ask for sensitive business metrics. This is required for accurate level 4 evaluation. It would be fantastic if the final report could accurately say that x small businesses in Galway who had a combined annual turnover of Y had created or saved z jobs and attributed some of that to involvement with SCCUL.

The Programme is also hoping to identify particular success stories that can be used to promote the programme's process and philosophy. It would be great if Mentors and Mentees were willing to share their experience of how engagements really made a difference to their business.

I am reaching the end so thanks for sticking with me. I think that the SCCUL mentoring programme is great. It is FREE to mentees. It is also fully accessible in that that all one has to do is complete an application form with some details so that a mentor who matches your requirements can be assigned. I am looking forward to the results of this 'End of Year' or first evaluation so that we can tangibilise the results.

To conclude, Michael and the Centre Team will be in contact with you in the coming weeks. The three forms are complete but if you are interested please feel free to take a look. The forms[2] are open to constructive feedback and can easily be tweaked before circulation. But they can't be made longer!

At the outset, about 10 minutes ago, I said that I wanted to provide some background and context for the SCCUL mentoring programme feedback project, and then explain what exactly is involved, and thirdly to talk about what role you could play. As I finish up, I would like to leave you with a two part question to ponder:

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[2] The two End of Year forms are available online @ www.scculmentors.ie/annualreview

What does a successful outcome to a mentoring assignment look like and how should the programme management evaluate and measure that success?

Answers on a postcard to Liam.

Thank you very much.

Ends

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A member of the SCCUL Mentor Panel for 2 years,Donncha has over 15 business and management experience. After graduating with a B.Comm and a Masters in Marketing from NUIG, Donncha worked with IBEC in the Mid West office and then moved to LIT as Campus Incubation Centre Manager, a role held for 4 years to 2010.

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