

Social entrepreneurship in medical education: Model to establish SinnoLABs (social innovation labs) for health sciences universities

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ABSTRACT

Social entrepreneurship is a cross-cutting competency. It draws on knowledge from various disciplines and personal experiences. Health, social sciences and humanities are usually technically sound but lack specific business knowledge and skills. Entrepreneurial education makes it possible to establish training environments where students join as 'novices', develop skills and undergo experiences that help them build capable profiles and prepare for their professional careers in today's economy. It is important to note that the development of skills for social entrepreneurship is increasingly demanded in all disciplinary fields. Interest from the academic, business and civil society in social innovation and social entrepreneurship is growing rapidly since social value creation and social innovation are considered vital to the social entrepreneurship phenomenon. The innovation process aims to fill the gap between working life and educational framework so that students can develop innovation capabilities they will need during their careers. Taking cognizance of the importance of social innovation and entrepreneurship, the Government of India formulated a policy for Biomedical Innovation and Entrepreneurship in 2022. Our University established a first of its kind Social Innovation Lab (SinnoLAB) under a Collaborative European Union Project. Our University is one of the collaborating partners and the only health sciences university to set up a SinnoLAB in India. We discuss in this article how a SinnoLaB can be set up, its functions, need for such labs in medical institutes, its role in medical education and its beneficiaries and propose that other health sciences institutes can also take up social innovation and entrepreneurship considering the benefits to all stakeholders.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, health sciences institutes, medical education, social entrepreneurship, social incubation lab, social innovation

Introduction

Social entrepreneurship is a cross-cutting competency. It is based on knowledge from various streams and personal experiences.

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Entrepreneurial education primarily deals with business disciplines since antiquity. Health, social sciences and humanities are usually technically sound but lack specific business knowledge and skills. It is advisable to encourage and promote training in social entrepreneurship, regardless of the area of graduation so as to develop competency in graduates in regards to social enterprise.

Currently, all the universities are expected to train their budding graduates to be socially aware and relevant so that they can positively impact society through their skill sets which are creative and innovative.

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Training in entrepreneurial education and a conducive environment for the same ensure students, who join as ‘novices’, develop skills and undergo experiences that help them prepare for their professional careers in today’s economy. Skills for social entrepreneurship are in demand in all disciplinary fields.^[1]

Universal health coverage as envisioned by Sustainable Development Goals can be achieved if “Innovation” in digital health technologies or business models is implemented.^[2] Entrepreneurship training will lead to individuals identifying socio-economic-environmental challenges that can be addressed by creating a non-profit or for-profit enterprise.^[3]

Interest in social innovation amongst all stakeholders is growing rapidly as social value creation and social innovation are considered vital to the social entrepreneurship phenomenon, and the apparent inability of governments to solve all socio-economic-environmental issues on their own has increased interest amongst all stakeholders.^[4] Social entrepreneurs are expected to address societal issues both locally relevant existing public health issues or contingencies or emergency situations.^[5]

The process involves steps, beginning with problem analysis, idea generation and evaluation, project planning, development and implementation. Conducting an idea competition in healthcare institutes can reinforce active learning, creative thinking, multidisciplinary team working, innovation and the generation of new ideas.^[6]

Huang Y *et al.* tested a model of students’ satisfaction with entrepreneurship education in agricultural universities. They opined that institutions can promote the implementation of entrepreneurship education and thus improve students’ entrepreneurial knowledge and skills.^[7] Alhosseini SS *et al.* proposed to encourage entrepreneurship behavior and that medical universities must highlight the benefits of social enterprise. They also proposed that by organizing conferences, workshops and visiting entrepreneurship activities, the university can propagate motivation, training and entrepreneurship skills among graduate students.^[8]

Innovation-driven academic entrepreneurship: Need of the hour

Recognizing the importance of social innovation and entrepreneurship, the Government of India through the Indian Council of Medical Research and Department of Health research formulated a policy for Biomedical innovation and entrepreneurship as innovation-driven academic entrepreneurship has a vital role to play in all policy-making levels at teaching medical colleges and research institutions.

The Government of India has undertaken several important initiatives and innovation-led programmes and centres have also been set up to foster biomedical innovations which continue to motivate faculty at educational institutions towards entrepreneurship-related activities.^[9]

Considering this our University established the first of its kind Social Innovation Lab (SinnoLAB) under a collaborative European Union (EU) project.^[10]

Primary care physicians deal with health care situations and challenges at the ground level. They are aware of most of the problems occurring during execution of health services and solutions for the same might come from them as well. In such scenarios, a sound knowledge of social entrepreneurship, incubation lab, and its utility might be useful for them to incubate their ideas and also propagate them to needful NGOs and CBOs working in the field.

Background of SILICE project

The Social Innovations for Local Indian and Israeli Communities (SILICE) project is a multi-national project, together with India, that is coordinated by Tel-Hai College, Israel and co-funded by Erasmus + program of the EU.

The project develops a platform that promotes social innovation ideas and international cooperation at the regional level between the EU, Israel and India.

It also tries to address transversal issues like gender balance and equity for women. This project develops a creative and supportive environment in partnering institutes through the establishment of SinnoLABs which contribute to the development of social enterprises.

Our University is one of the collaborating partners and the only health sciences university to set up a SinnoLAB in India.^[10]

The relevance of setting up SinnoLAB in medical institutes

The area of social innovation is still considerably unexplored by the health sciences university in India.

By setting up the first of its kind social incubation centre in India, our University has set up a benchmark in the area of social incubation.

The incubation centre shall not only be a platform for in-house social innovators but also for the members from immediate communities urban, rural and tribal alike.

Being an extracurricular activity as of now as per the curriculum of medical education, we agree that generation of interest in students will need a major push. Setting up a SinnoLAB will also generate interest amongst students to find out more about social entrepreneurship.

Organizing idea competitions, hackathons, and sensitization/brainstorming sessions can be used as modalities to generate interest amongst the students. Short posting at such a social innovation lab can be an option for electives as per

competency-based medical education pattern of National Medical Commission.

This model social incubation centre set up guidelines that shall help other health sciences universities/colleges to start social incubation centres in respective areas shall foster social entrepreneurship in their students and staff and shall be a platform for budding social innovators to incubate their ideas and thereby develop a successful enterprise out of it and benefit the society at large.

Other medical institutes can apply for similar EU projects to undergo training and set up labs through funding. The beneficiaries of SinnoLAB are students, faculties and immediate community members where lab is located.

Stakeholders from non-funded institutes can get the stakeholders trained through various trainings programmes and self-fund for setting up labs, collaborate and form a tie-up with the institutes already having such labs in proximity for student and faculty exchange, for getting students sensitized and trained in social innovation also students and staff from non-funded institutes can participate in idea competitions, hackathons, etc., being conducted in institutes where such labs exist.

Model and process for establishment of SinnoLAB at health sciences universities

We recommend based on our experience following steps to establish a SinnoLAB at health sciences university [Figure 1].

- Identify a motivated and multi-diversified team to lead the project.
- If health sciences university has various streams like medical, dental, physiotherapy, nursing and ayurveda along with any technical institute in the vicinity or campus, one member

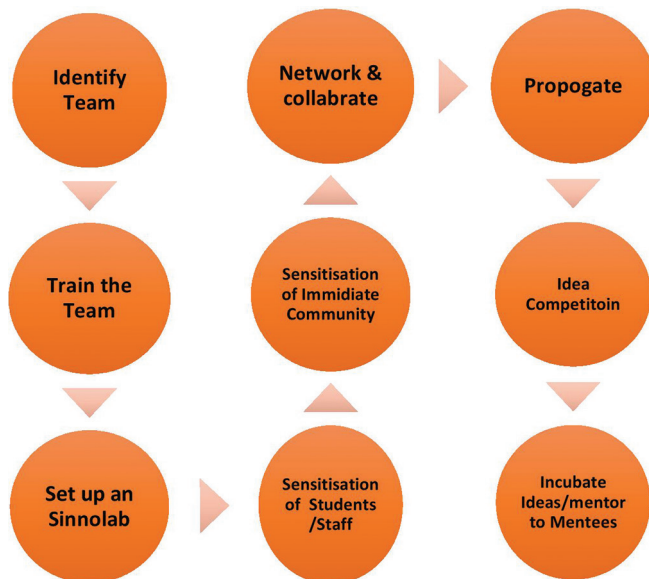


Figure 1: Process flow to establish SinnoLAB

from each team should be part of the Project team along with one senior administrator as a project supervisor.

- Training of the team can be through various elective courses available or through Erasmus project training.
- Once a team is identified and trained, set up a SinnoLAB at the respective institute.
- Following provisions to be made in SinnoLAB: spacious workstations, 3D printer, conference room, presentation facility and brainstorming area.
- Sensitize staff and students.
- Sensitize immediate community members.
- Collaborate and network with CBOs and NGOs.
- Conduct idea competitions.
- Propagate availability of incubation space.
- Incubate ideas and mentoring mentees.
- Handhold for funding and networking for a successful enterprise.

The core functions of SinnoLAB are depicted in Figure 2

- **Incubation space**
Once established a SinnoLAB shall act as an open to all and free incubation space for budding social innovators to incubate their ideas.
- **Mentoring**
The trained staff of SinnoLAB shall act as mentors for mentees’ incubation ideas and handhold and supervise their progress.
- **Networking**
It shall also facilitate mentoring, guidance and knowledge sharing to mentees by various Indian and Israeli institutes who are part of SinnoLAB network or networking with like-minded institutes.
- **Funding Opportunities**
Shall act as a facilitator to link mentees with the available funding agencies as relevant and available.
- **Key stakeholders of SinnoLAB are:**
- **Students of the University**

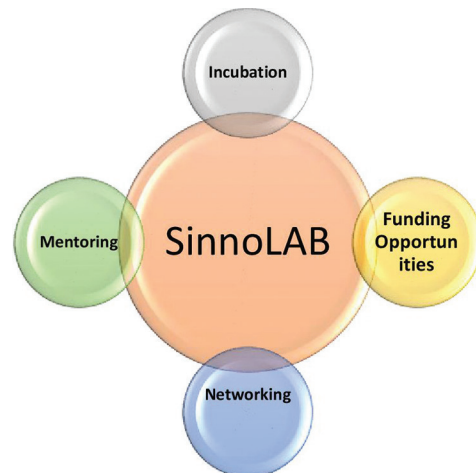


Figure 2: Core functions of SinnoLAB

- The primary beneficiary of the Social Innovation Lab shall be the undergraduate, post-graduate students of the University.
- **Staff**
- The staff members, teaching and non-teaching both, shall also benefit from the
- Social Innovation Lab apart from being key trainers and mentors.
- **Immediate community**
- The immediate community members from urban, peri-urban, rural and tribal areas can benefit from the Social Innovation Lab as they get a platform to incubate their ideas.
- **NGOs and CBOs**
- Non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations can leverage their expertise and community presence and sensitize, mobilize and link the budding innovator from communities to utilize the services available at Social Innovation Lab.

Expected outcome of establishing a SinnoLAB at Health Sciences University/colleges

- Setting up a SinnoLAB using this model has led to access to an incubation centre for students, staff of the university and also the immediate community.
- Budding young innovators and entrepreneurs have got a space to incubate their ideas along with mentoring and networking services.
- This model shall serve as a template for other Health Sciences Universities to pitch for establishing social incubation centres at their respective institutes.
- In the long run, we expect that establishment of such SinnoLABs at various other higher educational institutes (HEIs) shall not only provide an avenue for students and staff of HEIs but also the general public from the respective areas so as to fulfil the dreams of young innovators and benefit society at large through such successful social enterprise.
- A good model and set-up to showcase work done for social causes in the assessment of national accreditations like NAAC, NIRF, etc.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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