

AG Novel Story Line (for further discussions)

E.S.C.A.P.E (European Social, Cultural, Artistic, and Personal, Experiences) is a young youth-led enterprise to promote social and cultural awareness among the youth in the Borough of Tower Hamlets and Hackney, London, UK. ESACPE was set up in 2013 by a recent business graduate, Brandon Hamilton (23) and his school days friend Zara Scott (22).

Zara also persuaded Brandon to have her friend Marissa Meyer (22) her university classmate and flatmate to join the organisation as receptionist and general clerical support worker. Marissa's boyfriend Aaron Conti (26) an accountant also joined ESCAPE as their finance manager.

ESCAPE is focused on developing creativity and entrepreneurship among the NEETS in East London providing support and guidance to building business in the Creative Arts and Media (CAM) sectors.

ESCAPE team member experiences:

Brandon, a social activist and creator of mini social enterprise projects during his university days with friends and lecturers within the university business incubator section.

Zara, a graphic designer who is an expert with Internet design and new technologies.

Marissa, a creative media graduate with a passion for short films.

Aaron, an accountant who is passionate about social justices and has been developing community and neighbourhood projects since his teenage years.

In the short period since its inception ESCAPE has helped a number of young people to train in the social enterprise sector or develop ideas for their local communities which support other disadvantaged youth and vulnerable people. This was done through ESCAPE – NewVentureLabs – programme where youth join to take part in various activities from formal training in business concepts to hands-on experience in setting up events and programmes for the local communities during special days and occasions such as Halloween, Valentines, Christmas and other such functions. The events held for formal training borrow the ideas developed in reality TV shows such as The Apprentice and Dragons Den which have become popular globally with many countries designing their own versions. At ESCAPE's NewVentureLabs youth have to come and pitch their projects / concepts / products to the ESCAPE team and any outside judges invited to such events.

On their social media pages; Facebook and Twitter, ESCAPE has had a strong following with 10,000 likes on Facebook and a following of 5000 on Twitter. They are not yet listed on LinkedIn despite many requests and suggestions from Aaron Conti who, as an avid user of that website, has over a 1000 connections. The ESCAPE website www.escape.eu also sees a high volume of traffic since Zara managed to upgrade it with live news and features of events taking place in London, UK and across the EU28. More and more youth are asking about various European Union

projects and want to either participate or develop Youth in Action programmes for their local communities.

Main Issue: With 150 active members and supporters of ESCAPE's services and programmes within the first year of their operation, the organisation now needs to expand and raise its profile. However, there are a number of youth organisations across London that provide similar services. Also, the Local Authorities, under their children, families and youth sections help young people to aim higher and achieve more in life. Therefore, ESCAPE is now at odds as to which route to take to expand and grow the organisation.

Brandon, who has worked with lecturers and new methods of expanding for example crowd funding is keen to start a crowd funding project. Such a project could expose them to thousands, perhaps millions across not only in London and UK but also globally.

Zara, Brandon's childhood close friend is excited at the prospects of expanding ESCAPE and especially so as her skills in social media marketing and graphics could be put to good use, strengthening the image of ESCAPE. Marissa too is passionate and on board as she will get to video film ESCAPE journey of success over the past year showing off her skills in creative media; a documentary she hopes to develop further for the various festivals across the international arena ranging from the Sheffield Doc festival to Visions du Reel (Nyon, France), Sunny Side (La Rochelle, France) to perhaps culminating with a chance to enter the world renowned Raindance festival (London, UK). This could be the route for Marissa for her lifelong ambition of becoming a film director and producer.

Aaron Conti, great with numbers and with a focus on getting the branding of ESCAPE perfect is keen to follow an alternative route. Aaron feels and believes that social enterprises have a significant role "to nourish communities and build economic independence". He wants to establish a model to follow and on which to grow further the ESCAPE brand, especially so as to ward off some of the steepest competition and also to attract more youth to ESCAPE.

While Brandon's crowd funding idea and his Strategy Diamond based on the ideas of Hambrick and Fredrickson is likely to generate some funding for ESCAPE to grow, Aaron feels that this might be a short-term strategy. Rushing into expansion because demand seems to have increased is not something Aaron would like to do as he feels the long-term vision might be lost in this short-term trend of crowd funding. Brandon as the founder of ESCAPE is eager to expand quickly thinking that if they did not expand now, the opportunity might be lost forever.

ESCAPE has tried locally with their Local Authorities (LAs) in Tower Hamlets and Hackney to apply for some grants but these have not materialised. Besides these LAs also have their own agenda to fulfil so as not to lose Central Government funding

from Westminster that goes to their local boroughs for some vital services based on the targets they have to reach in helping youth to come off the Job Centre files. Thus these two LAs have been slow in injecting any funds into ESCAPE despite the successes this organisation has had over the past one and a half year.

Local Banks, despite a great Business Plan developed with the help of local business consultants and friends working at the Chamber of Commerce and other such business units, have not been favourable to give ESCAPE any loans or seed capital for expansion. Crowd Funding, Brandon feels is the way forward if ESCAPE wants to expand and maintain the momentum of its successes over the past one and a half year. Brandon seems to have done some research and shares that according to Nesta, £1.5 billion was raised through crowd-funding for businesses in UK in 2011. There are also benefits of using technology to further their aims and expand ESCAPE and as Brandon points out according to Nesta these are mainly:

1. Digital technology presents a big opportunity for charities to increase their impact. However, it is an underutilised tool in the sector.
2. Digital technology enhances new skills; getting Trustee buy-in; bringing in the right support and partners; and planning the funding.
3. Digital technology creates new and complementary funding sources dedicated to charities' expansions and visions of helping in the local communities.

Aaron is in agreement about expanding ESCAPE and leveraging the initial momentum but feels there ought to be synergy between Strategy and Business Model. He is a strong proponent of the Business Model Canvas (Alex Osterwalder et. al) and wants to first use this tool on one page to describe, design, challenge, invent and pivot ESCAPE in the right direction. With Strategy and Business Model aligned, Aaron feels the way forward could be via social franchising, borrowing on the successes of business franchising concepts but delivering three key elements:

1. the act of transferring a successful social enterprise delivery model into another context (whether a locality or another organisation);
2. enabling other parties to use this model, with a detailed operations manual (“business / social enterprise in a box”); and
3. a belief in local people being best placed and trusted to deliver a local service.

By designing a Value-based proposition, Aaron feels their “customers”, the youth will have no choice but the only choice to ESCAPE.

The heated debate continues!