



Outside the institutional box:

Understanding the digital informal learning contexts activated by female entrepreneurs in Canada for competency development

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Why undertake this study?

- ▶ Previous research suggests:
 - ▶ entrepreneurship is one way that women seek to overcome the 'motherhood penalty'
 - ▶ female entrepreneurs tend to activate informal learning opportunities
 - ▶ mothers use digital technology to overcome a sense of isolation associated with the demands of parenting
- ▶ In Canada, governmental and non-governmental organizations fund initiatives that provide support and learning resources to female entrepreneurs; however, information on the learning needs and preferences of this population is scarce.



Research questions and objectives

Research Questions	Research Objectives
What are participants telling us about their digital learning experiences that will help us understand their development of a learning ecology?	To describe the digital aspects of participants' learning experiences using an ecological framework.
What factors benefit or hinder the potential of informal learning for capacity development?	To analyze the possibilities for digital informal learning within the learning ecologies of participants.
How do participants develop a learning ecology for capacity development?	To identify the ways that participants are activating digital informal learning experiences for capacity development.



Application of an ecological framework

- ▶ An ecological framework provides a structure for investigating the integration of contexts, resources, and relationships that an individual activates while learning
- ▶ Accounts for intrinsic factors (motivation, preferences) and experiential factors (activities, events)
- ▶ Accounts for change over time



Methodology and status of research

- ▶ Mixed methods
- ▶ Exploratory to explanatory: quantitative survey followed by 4 case studies
- ▶ Convenience, snowball sampling strategy
- ▶ November 2018 through April 2019: quantitative survey administered to 47 participants
- ▶ Case study interviews: in-progress



Survey: What was measured?

- ▶ *Frequency of activation of digital learning contexts (activities, resources, relationship experiences) to learn business skills and for other purposes
- ▶ *Frequency of activation of contexts for entrepreneurial competency development (based on Female Entrepreneurial Competency framework)
- ▶ Usefulness of digital learning experiences (18 measures of capacity development)
- ▶ Demographic questions
- ▶ One open-ended question
- ▶ Delivered as a 1:1 structured interview via Zoom videoconference

*Focus of today's presentation



Analysis of survey data

- ▶ *SPSS analysis (descriptive statistics and cross tabulations to identify patterns and typical/critical cases)
- ▶ Thematic analysis of open-ended question and side comments made during the interview using a constant-comparative approach

*focus of today's presentation



Results: Digital learning activities

Digital activities that were activated by more than half of participants for the purpose of learning business skills:

- ▶ Conversations on social networking sites (n=38)
- ▶ Conversations on private messaging platforms (n=35)
- ▶ Video conversations with others (n=26)



Results: Digital learning resources

Digital resources that were activated by more than half of participants for the purpose of learning business skills:

- ▶ ****Reading content posted by others on a social networking site (n=46)**
- ▶ Watching informational videos (n=41)
- ▶ Reading blog posts or online magazine articles (n=37)
- ▶ Reading email newsletters from industry experts (n=37)
- ▶ Listening to podcasts (n=27)

**most activated context



Results: Digital relationship experiences

Digital relationship experiences that were activated by more than half of participants for the purpose of learning business skills:

- ▶ Connecting with another business colleague (not a mentor) using digital technology (n=38)
- ▶ Connecting with other professionals in a free-access online community (n=29)
- ▶ Connecting with a mentor using digital technology (n=27)



Results: Personal Competency Development

► **Communication skills**

- informational videos (n=15)
- podcasts (n=15)
- conversations with colleagues (not mentor) (n=16)

► **Business relationship skills**

- social media : conversations (n=36)
- conversations with colleagues (not mentor) (n=34)
- social media: scrolling (n=33)

► **Perseverance**

- social media: scrolling (n=16)
- conversations with colleagues (not mentor) (n=16)
- conversations with mentor (n=16)

► **Confidence**

- informational videos (n=21)
- social media: scrolling (n=19)
- conversations with colleagues (not mentor) (n=19)



Results: Management Competency Development

► Financial skills

- social media : conversations (n=15)
- blog posts/online magazine articles (n=10)
- social media: scrolling (n=9)

► Ability to create systems

- social media : scrolling (n=22)
- social media: conversations (n=21)
- blog posts/online magazine articles (n=20)

► Strategic planning abilities

- social media: conversations (n=22)
- conversations with colleagues (not mentor) (n=21)
- conversations with mentor (n=21)



Results: Entrepreneurial Competency Development

- ▶ **Ability to come up with new ideas and innovations**
 - ▶ social media: scrolling (n=31)
 - ▶ social media : conversations (n=29)
 - ▶ informational videos (n=29)
- ▶ **Ability to take advantage of new opportunities**
 - ▶ conversations with colleagues (not mentor) (n=29)
 - ▶ social media: scrolling (n=28)
 - ▶ social media: scrolling (n=26)
- ▶ **Ability to cope with risk**
 - ▶ <10 in all contexts



Results: Human Resources Competency Development

- ▶ **Ability to train employees**

- ▶ <10 in all contexts

- ▶ **Ability to manage others who work for you**

- ▶ <10 in all contexts

- ▶ **Hiring skills**

- ▶ <10 in all contexts

- ▶ **Leadership skills**

- ▶ social media: conversations (n=22)
- ▶ informational videos (n=18)
- ▶ conversations with mentor (n=14)



Early conclusions

- ▶ Digital learning experiences are mostly informal and rarely formal or non-formal
- ▶ Overall, the degree to which participants activated digital learning contexts is low
- ▶ Different digital contexts are activated for different learning purposes