

Argidius-ANDE Talent Challenge (AATC)

Final Evaluation - Executive Summary

Background

Argidius Foundation and the Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) launched a talent challenge to find solution to helping small and growing businesses (SGBs) attract, retain and develop middle- and senior-level managers. The Argidius-ANDE Talent Challenge (AATC) identified five promising solutions to this challenge. The following is the summary of the assessment of these five solutions. The evaluation used multiple methods and had extensive criteria. The most important elements for evaluation were perspectives of the SGBs using the services, the performance of the partner, sustainability of the intervention, and the quality of the solution to address the talent pain points of SGBs.

Partner Performance

Amani Institute's Leadership & Management for Impact (ALMI) Program trains mid and senior level SGB managers in Kenya. The program's curriculum focuses on leading self, leading others, and leading the organization, and uses applied learning through a business innovation project. Attendees participate in a cohort-style program over the course of five months, with 2-day in person modules once a month and coaching over the duration of the program. Amani designed the program and delivered 7 cohorts in Kenya with the participation of 100+ participants from 40+ companies (all who were paying customers).

C-suite interviewees that sent staff to the cohorts noticed a difference in the attitude and performance of the staff they sent to Amani. They observed that the staff were “stepping up”, taking more ownership, demonstrating greater confidence, more proactive, and more engaged in problem solving. Those businesses spoke of tangible and intangible changes in their staff and reported early results that will help the business grow and expressed a good return on investment and value for money. Participants in the program spoke of having new skills, tools and confidence.

Amani intends to grow and deepen its offering in Kenya and bring the program to India and Brazil where they have a local presence. Amani will continually need to recruit participants, improve its marketing and sales, and determine a model for other geographies so that it can be sustained and scaled.

Creative Metier sought to develop the local market for executive coaching. Their grant was used to run a pilot program proving the need and viability of executive coaching as a tool for SGBs to grow their businesses. They worked with a select group of coaches and SGBs who received training and preparation--coaches learned about the SGB market while coachees learned how to prepare themselves and optimize coaching. The SGBs then received 6 free

coaching sessions. Coaches were paid to deliver these sessions through the grant.

Creative Metier completed their program as intended in the grant proposal. Their case study revealed that the businesses that participated in the coaching were resilient through a tough economic period in Kenya. Coachees were grateful for being able to participate in the coaching—for many, it helped them identify challenges in themselves and in their organizations, solve blockages, and spot opportunities to grow their businesses.

The coaches enjoyed the opportunity to coach SGBs and were grateful for the supervision provided by Creative Metier. However, this was a free program and there was no evidence as to what the true cost of coaching for this market would be or whether the market was willing to pay.

Creative Metier took a long time to evolve a concept for a scalable and sustainable model for rolling out SGB coaching in Kenya and the region. The proposal that came through was a complex model with ecosystem building, strengthening coaches, and strengthening SGBs. The rollout would require significant capital with potentially unrealistic returns on investment. It also could duplicate infrastructure that already exists and/or that might not be necessary to deliver effective coaching. Although the model was perceived as the wrong one, there is value in Creative Metier providing a service to others interested in strong coaching methodologies orientated to SGBs, and providing coaching training and supervision.

Open Capital Advisors' (OCA) Extending the Talent Practice to East Africa project had two components. The first was an online talent diagnostic survey for organizations covering an assessment of compensation, organizational role and structure, performance management, career paths, learning and development, values and culture, and engagement. The diagnostic results were supplemented with “freemium” tools to help SGBs address their shortcomings in the performance areas. The second component was subsidized talent engagements to prove the viability of talent engagements as a valuable service offering.

SGBs that completed the diagnostic found it useful. Some use it as an annual employee engagement survey, and others used it as a tool for changing their human capital and culture strategies. The uptake on the diagnostic however was disappointing. The hope had been that hundreds of companies would be using the diagnostic, but a number of obstacles were identified. These included validating issues that SGBs already know about and are not prepared to address, or identification of blind spots.

OCA, from early on, shifted its focus away from pure talent engagements and instead included talent components in their core strategy, go to market, and investment-readiness offerings. They struggled to sell stand-alone talent engagements (even when they were heavily subsidized or free). Those that used OCA for engagements were pleased with the quality of the work.

OCA pitched strengthening their diagnostic and their talent practice for the future. They also pitched scaling their Arcadia business, which embeds OCA's analysts into SGBs on short-term implementation assignments. They also proposed creating a research-driven community of peers where HR professionals across sectors can share their talent best practices and challenges.

Despite the disappointing performance of the diagnostic and uptake of talent engagements, OCA demonstrated that they are a strong commercial organization with unique insight to the SGB market. They have a commitment to learn how to best solve SGBs problems using their core assets as consultants, recruiters of top young African talent, and conveners.

Shortlist is disrupting traditional recruitment through a technology-enabled candidate screening and assessment tool to shortlist candidates based on ability, motivation, and fit. The service includes supporting companies to write better job descriptions and refining shortlists of candidates for hire. The company started in India and focused their proposal on expansion into the Kenyan market.

Clients of Shortlist have been happy with the service. Clients feel that Shortlist has been customer-service oriented, helped them to pinpoint the skills and attributes needed for candidates, helped them to refine the job description, and delivered high-quality candidates whom they have hired. SGBs felt that the investment in Shortlist was a good one and a great time saver. Those using a more extensive full-service offering feel that they have a partner in their recruitment needs. Candidates are excited about Shortlist as well.

Shortlist performed well on many dimensions: a strong team, good execution meeting or exceeding their targets, sustainability as a commercial organization, and scale based on their technology. However, they focus on junior/entry level role recruitment. They also tend to work with larger SGBs. They also indicated that they would consider bringing their offer to large companies, prioritizing their financial growth over servicing their core segment.

Village Capital's Talent Initiative focused on building a human capital practice for SGBs worldwide. The program was comprised of four elements: a talent curriculum focused on building a team to reach scale, a talent library, innovations in job fairs, and a job board. The grant included funding for a Talent Manager.

The talent curriculum is now embedded into their "VIRAL" tool (which considers how team and human capital determine stages of investment readiness, and what team elements are needed to advance). As a tool it advocates for prioritization of human capital as the business grows as well as to align human capital to strategy—framing human capital as a business critical decision. VIRAL is highly rated as a tool by entrepreneurs that have participated in VilCap programs.

The VilCap Playbook has not had much adoption and there is a general consensus amongst

entrepreneurs that a handbook is not valuable unless it is applied through a program or a facilitated process. The job fair concept that Village Capital rolled out was highly rated, although Village Capital felt it was too much work and out of the scope of their traditional remit. The job board was terminated early on as it was felt that it was not a competitive or viable intervention.

Village Capital's program was a patchwork of components—some of them interesting and some of them less so in terms of their design, execution and outcome potential. Their pitch for the future focused on bringing their talent learning to business development service providers, ecosystem mapping, and just in time content for SGBs.