UPSHIFT: Social Impact Workshop

As the Lab's flagship initiative, UPSHIFT combines some of the leading approaches to youth and adolescent development, social innovation, and entrepreneurship, to empower marginalized youth and adolescents to become social innovators and entrepreneurs. Using cutting edge experiential learning techniques, UPSHIFT teaches youth and adolescents how to understand community challenges and design and build impactful solutions in the form of products or services.

Methodology

Participants in the UPSHIFT methodology learn and concretely exercise 21st century approaches in key transferable workforce readiness skill categories including: problem solving and critical thinking, communication, professional conduct and networking, and management of organizational processes.

The specific practices and techniques in which young people are capacitated via the UPSHIFT methodology were selected as accessible, easy-to-use approaches to challenges commonly faced in the workplace across sectors. While the terminology ("ethnography" "root cause identification" "Human Centred Design" etc.) is specialized, they consist of practical approaches and frameworks young people can call upon to understand markets and needs, define and understand problems, create, build, and test solutions, and build create processes and organizations to deliver those solutions.

The UPSHIFT methodology commences with introductory training and mobilization activities delivering to adolescents and youth capacities in ethnographic methods for problem identification and problem definition, which are transferable professional problem solving skills relevant across skill-sector occupational fields, and which are emerging methods for market analysis preferred by the private sector, such as consumer-facing and B2B enterprises, which are underrepresented in Kosovo. Mobilization activities, which involve the physical field presence of project staff and face-to-face interactions between staff and beneficiaries, are a vital confidence-building and accessibility measure: field presence establishes rapport with members of vulnerable groups, and creates awareness of the opportunity amongst adolescents and youth who may not have the inclination or means to discover the action on their own. Participants form teams around specific challenges; teams then apply to enter the full UPSHIFT programme.

To ensure accessibility, the application is made available online and via hardcopy in schools, youth centres, and municipal offices in Albanian, Serbian, and English, and the contact information of project staff is made available to support teams requiring additional adaptation. Selection of teams is conducted by

project staff in cooperation with local partners; selection criteria prioritizes vulnerable groups (girls and women, young people from rural areas, young people from non-majority communities, and young people with disabilities). Additional criteria include: the quality of the application (valuing grit and effort over writing talent) and the impact of the proposed problem (in terms of severity and scope, and whether the problem disproportionately impacts vulnerable groups).

UPSHIFT Phases

Selected teams are then trained in stakeholder/client and target market mapping and research skills foundational to entrepreneurship, and exercise those skills through practical research conducted with target group members and other stakeholders. Jointly, these experiences are referred to as "Phase 0. Observe"

In the next phase, **"Phase 1. Understand",** participants learn and exercise transferable professional skills in problem solving. Participants are capacitated in methods including the development-standard "problem tree" approach; Six Sigma's "Five Whys" root cause identification technique; and the use of Agile Development's "Personas" to represent needs, motivations, pain points, and other conditions of clients and target group members.

In **"Phase 2. Design"** participants learn and utilize emerging methods from the Human Centred Design and design thinking practices employed by leading private sector firms from marketing to ICT to service design, including the Design Challenge approach for conducting end state analysis, and creative and visual ideation techniques for structured and unstructured brainstorming and generating model product and/or service interventions.

In **"Phase 3. Build and Test"**, participants learn and employ methods for rapid prototyping (utilizing industry recognized approaches including storyboarding, paper prototyping for digital tools, and physical modelling), user testing for iterative, user-centred design, and working with feedback.

In **"Phase 4. Make it Real"**, participants analyse their product and/or service interventions and identify inputs and required resources—a key transferable professional skill for budget creation—as well as identifying revenue models and creating sustainability plans, and finally developing pitches for their products and/or services, in which participants learn principles of effective communication and marketing.

Youth-Led Project Implementation

Selected youth-led projects receive incubation services for three months, during which participating teams are in daily contact with mentors. Monitoring is integrated into the mentorship component; all major milestones of youth-led projects are monitored by the assigned staff mentor. Additional incubation services include:

- Seed funding up to 2,000 EUR,

- Access to a library of equipment (including videography/photography equipment, laptops and printers, mobile devices, projectors and other presentation equipment),

- Access to co-working space in the Innovations Lab or secured via local partners.