

Webinar (with Rebel)

1. Who are you? UNE/Angelo/ Bernice

UNE is a regional university located in Armidale, the heart of the New England region in NSW. UNE's purpose is to enhance the future of our communities through quality research and formative educational experience.

Bernice is a Professor of Entrepreneurship with expertise in SMEs and regional development at the University of New England. Rebel approached Bernice who is my research supervisor to carry out an impact assessment of THE Rural Women. She applied for a grant for the project with Bernice but they were unsuccessful and in 2019 Bernice asked me if I would take up the project for my Master's thesis. I am currently carrying out the project as part of the requirements for my Master's qualification.

I was an entrepreneur myself running a virtual business that provided digital solutions to SMEs. I also worked at the Business Enterprise Centre in Armidale training entrepreneurs in digital technologies. I am carrying out the project and Bernice is directing my work.

2. Why would I complete this survey? What's in it for me?

After assessing available tools for impact assessment of business incubators, I found that and techniques were developed to assess outcomes for traditional (physical) business incubators and not online or virtual incubators. In collaboration with Bernice, I have developed a method that assesses operational aspects as well as outcomes for a virtual incubator. In this case, our method will look at all the processes of THE Rural Woman and its services and how these services are building the skills of the entrepreneurs they support and helping them to access the resources they need for their businesses

Our method is the first of its kind and will be used not only to assess the outcomes but the operational processes behind the outcomes. You will be participating in the first set of surveys associated with this method. The findings will be used to improve all aspects of the Rural Woman' operations and services which in turn will benefit you.

3. Why is this research important?

This research is important because currently there are no methods for assessing the effectiveness of business support programs delivered online. We have developed a new method that will solve this problem. Our method will help THE Rural Woman to assess outcomes from its current operations as well as identify weak areas of operations so it can make improvements. Also, demonstrating high-performance and effective operations will help The Rural Woman to attract public and private funds, quality partners and more entrepreneurs who seek support.

The method was presented at an international conference on entrepreneurship early this year and was well received by top global researchers in the field of entrepreneurship. This method will be published in top journals and consequently, it will be available to other virtual incubators globally. This means that virtual incubators can use our method to improve their services to clients.

4. How long will it take?

The survey is quite comprehensive and covers all aspects of THE Rural Woman and your business. In particular, the survey will gather information about your perceptions of various areas of THE Rural Woman's operations including the digital platform that you are using to access resources, how effectively THE Rural Woman is operating as a virtual organisation and how effectively THE Rural Woman allows all members (e.g. participants and strategic partners) to come together to provide and share their knowledge and expertise necessary to help you achieve your business goals.

Because the questionnaire is comprehensive, it will take between 45 and 60 minutes to complete. However, you do not have to complete it in one sitting. You can save your responses and continue when you are ready.

5. What is the research for?

This study is conducting an assessment of all aspects of THE Rural Woman's operations and outcomes for its clients and it will contribute to the theory and practice of entrepreneurship. To theory because we are extending the existing body of knowledge of virtual incubators and to practice, because of the application of the method in the real world.

6. How will my information be used?

The information you provide will be aggregated and used to write a report that will inform THE Rural Woman about its operations and outcomes.

Your responses will be stored in Qualtrics, the system we use at UNE to prepare virtual surveys. We are also going to store the information in a repository cloud platform owned by the university called CloudUNE. After completing this study, the data will be removed from Qualtrics. If I need to print some or all the information, printed materials will be stored in a locked cabinet in my office. It is important to mention that at all times in the process, the information you provide will be kept confidentially.

7. What is the benefit for society?

As mentioned earlier, the method will be published in top international journals and will be available to virtual incubators globally. It means our model will be accessible to virtual incubators around the world and they can use it to assess their

performance (internal operations and processes) as well as the impact of their virtual support programs on their clients.

8. What is the benefit for me? (the person filling out). What is the benefit for THE Rural Woman?

After a thorough analysis of the data collected, THE Rural Woman will receive a detailed report which will indicate how each operational factor is contributing to the overall performance of the business and how their support services are facilitating access to resources and contributing to the development of your entrepreneurial skills and to growth of your business

The findings and recommendations in the report will help THE Rural Woman improve their services to and outcomes for clients. If the support for you improves, it means that you can improve your business. This is because when THE Rural Woman improves its services and operations it will be able to attract quality partners, public and private funding and expand its services.

Finally, the report will provide ideas and recommendations for innovations that align with THE Rural Woman's objectives and goals. These ideas and recommendations are based on current developments in digital technologies and global exemplar cases of virtual incubators.

9. What is the benefit for UNE/Angelo/Bernice?

UNE: Because the model is novel and is recognised by the top academics in the field, it will raise UNE's profile in the area of entrepreneurship, globally. This will contribute to the reputation of UNE in the area of entrepreneurship and small business development.

Angelo: This study will help me to advance my career as an academic. It is one step forward toward my doctoral studies. It has already benefited me as I presented the model early this year at a global conference of entrepreneurship, where I received positive feedback and ideas to improve the model. I also intend to publish my work in global entrepreneurship and information systems journals.

Bernice: It will enhance my reputation in entrepreneurship and small business development. I will be able to co-author journal articles with Angelo and it will open new opportunities for me.

10. What is the value of research generally?

The method is new and provide a holistic assessment of virtual incubators and will be available to be adopted by virtual incubators globally. It will also make a significant impact on industry and for developing entrepreneurs in Australia. Because of the current situation of COVID-19, virtual incubators are becoming the new way to provide support, and this is particularly important in regional and rural areas.

11. How will this help my business?

We want the business support programs delivered virtual by THE Rural Woman to be as effective as possible. We want to create the certainty that when you undertake these programs, you are gaining or improving your entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. This will be reflected for example in your motivation, confidence, knowledge and better decisions that will ultimately contribute to the success of your business.

12. How will this help my community?

If your business is successful, you are contributing to the economic development, economic diversification and resilience of your community. Besides, if you are successful you can help others to be successful too. Moreover, you are contributing to building an entrepreneurial culture in your community, motivating others to become entrepreneurs, giving the message that **Yes, this is possible, if I have made it, you can make it too!**