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Evaluating Post-Training Engagement

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Evaluating Post-Training Engagement

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Abstract

Impact Launch (IL) is a collective of social impact professionals dedicated to creating sustainable and equitable change. IL provides strategic planning, project design, collaborative capacity building, individual and team coaching, and leadership intensives for leaders, businesses, and organizations. Similar to those who have undergone other training programs, alumni of IL's leadership training are prone to becoming disengaged with the tools they have learned and stagnant in their learning. The purpose of this project was to begin efforts to increase alumni engagement with the tools and each other through conducting a series of interviews; 6 alumni were interviewed to collect feedback on how IL can better support engagement. The major expected outcome for this project was that IL will implement at least two of the recommendations from the final data report. The most important findings of this project were that alumni were very interested in remaining engaged with the tools, and there were large calls for a return to in-person gatherings and the creation of a newsletter.

Keywords: engagement, leadership training, continued education

Agency & Communities Served

Impact Launch is a collective of social impact professionals dedicated to creating sustainable and equitable change (Joseph, 2022). Impact Launch provides strategic planning, project design, collaborative capacity building, individual and team coaching, and leadership intensives for leaders, businesses, and organizations (Joseph, 2022). Their knowledge and experience in leadership development and community collaboration for change in areas such as “economic opportunity, housing and homelessness, criminal justice, behavioral health, and more” (Joseph, 2022). The work here is done using the Radical Transformational Leadership (RTL) framework created by Dr. Monica Sharma. These ideals guide individuals on their journey of learning their values and stances as well as collaboration to create equitable and sustainable change. The RTL cohorts are open for everyone and anyone that is looking for a change, to avoid burnout, or to do things differently.

Impact Launch is aiming to increase collaboration with its alumni population. Their work has previously been focused on the Bay Area and the Monterey Bay area with a recent focus on national outreach with a statewide cohort. The online connection became key during the pandemic as in-person outreach in each of its respective locations began to dwindle. Their current alumni network does not have much engagement. Because of this, alumni may not be able to work together and assist each other in many areas. Their use of RTL tools may have decreased as well. Just as much, without a strong network, Impact Launch’s reach may continue on a path to be stagnant.

Problem Model Background and Literature Review

Problem Statement

When alumni are not engaging with their community, they are more prone to become stagnant in their application and learning of RTL tools. The RTL training teaches and supports individuals to collaborate and communicate effectively with their peers and coworkers. It can affect them in many areas; their home life, their work life, and their social life. Because of this, these tools are versatile. There are various techniques one can use such as the transformative results chain, synergistic operational strategies, daily reflection journal, or commitment for action behind complaints. They have an abundance of choices and when alumni choose to use these new skills, they become principal game changers. Principle game changers “engage passionately in a joyful pursuit of a world that works for everyone. (They) criticize what does not work by creating alternatives” (Sharma, 2017, pg 155). Changers have courage and are in touch with what they stand for and who they are. Communities may face minimal growth in many areas when RTL changers are not realizing their potential or using the tools they learned to make a difference.

Continued learning is extremely important for those looking to make social change. Lifelong learning consists of, “a set of values and principles regarding the role of ongoing acquisition, integration, and application of new knowledge throughout one’s lifetime,” as well as being effective and engaged in their career (Mueller & King, 2018). This type of learning has many benefits like, “enhanced understanding of the world, the provision of more and better opportunities for employees, improved quality of life, keeping the brain active, openness to change when it occurs, (and) acquisition of new knowledge” (Mueller & King, 2018). Alumni, when they continue to learn and educate themselves, can have a better quality of life in their

social and personal lives. They can adapt to new environments and better achieve the change they desire.

Contributing Factors

COVID-19

The pandemic that arose from COVID-19 had a huge impact on society in many ways, but energy and willingness to participate in communities was an important one. It created fatigue and led to burnout for a large number of people. Psychological fatigue is caused by, “inadequate rest, physical effort, or mental strain unrelated to a medical condition” (Kalwani, 2021). With this type of energy drain, people became disconnected from their work and felt lost or a lack of incentive to continue. This burnout effect leads to problems at work, at home, and within oneself. The way to combat this is to put one’s mental health first in order to have continued success when serving others (Peinado & Anderson, 2020). Impact Launch offers training that will connect the participants’ values and their work. It emphasizes mindfulness in combination with united work practices. This emphasis ensures one does not get lost in their work and they continue to take advantage of the community support around them.

Lack of Staff

There are a few factors that cause the lack of alumni engagement. One of these factors is the minimal amount of staff and the lack of bilingual staff. There are only 10 practitioners at Impact Launch. Of those ten, only four practitioners speak Spanish (Joseph, 2022). It takes at least four to do a cohort in English if the background work in Zoom and planning are included. It is generally Megan Joseph, Robyn McKeen, and Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson speaking and sharing, with Michelene Moayedi doing the background Zoom tasks. With how large these

cohorts can be, the staff is spread thin. They may not be able to connect individually with each participant, leading some to fall off and discontinue.

When the cohorts are in English, there are multiple translators needed to do simultaneous translation for Spanish speakers. If it is an all Spanish cohort, there will need to be at least four Spanish speaking practitioner coaches to plan and lead the training. There is an inequity happening here as there are less resources available for the Spanish speaking community. It is important for these cohorts to be ethnically and homogeneously created so that there is more cohesion, cultural understanding, and trust more immediately (Jones, 2008). When group leaders are similar to the participants, they are able to identify common experiences with the group and create an environment of openness and safeness (Jones, 2008). If Spanish speakers feel comfortable and understood in the cohorts, they will be more likely to return. However, because of the lack of staff, there is minimal engagement with Spanish speaking alumni after they complete an RTL cohort.

Limited Alumni Availability/Interest

Learning within cohorts is extremely valuable. This type of education, “fosters social interaction, collaboration, and a strong sense of belonging to a community” (Hurley, 2022). This is because of the group work and support one can find in a cohort as opposed to self paced courses. They lead to greater satisfaction, greater engagement, and quality learning outcomes (Hurley, 2022). However, for some reason, there is a disconnect between RTL alumni and cohort learning. While it is rich in content, when their schedule is work versus cohort work, participants’ paid work may come first. This can be seen in the limited amount of pods still meeting with each other. A 2022 survey found that of the 30 English and 8 Spanish responses, 30 of those people do not meet with their pods anymore (Gonzalez & Trinity, 2022). There were a

few reasons why they stopped meeting. Fifteen individuals said their pod members stopped responding, seven said they did not have enough time and energy, and four respondents said their schedules did not align with the meetings (Gonzalez & Trinity, 2022). Alumni have ever-changing and packed schedules so trying to meet is not always the easiest to schedule among a group. Because some individuals said they didn't have enough time and energy, it shows that there is not enough of a reward with the way things are currently done for engaging with alumni. Impact Launch needs to target their alumni's interests and wants when creating their cohorts and gatherings to gain the potential benefits a cohort can have.

Consequences

Alumni Not Using Tools

The issue of stagnant alumni comes with its consequences. One of these is that alumni are no longer applying the RTL tools they have learned. The survey found that 39% of alumni are using the tools monthly and 42% are practicing them daily (Gonzalez & Trinity, 2022). These low numbers raise the concern that alumni not using their tools leads to being stagnant in their lives whether it's professionally or personally. If they are stagnant, they are not learning new trends and developments in the work they do so they are not likely to challenge the status quo (Gallagher, 2007). Challenging the status quo is a key component of the RTL framework and should be something the alumni are constantly doing in their work.

Additionally, it has been observed that more Spanish-speaking alumni practice their tools. A majority practice daily with 75% of them doing this compared to only 33% of English-speaking alumni practicing daily. The interesting thing about this is that Spanish-speaking alumni do not have as much access to these tools and yet they use them more than their counterparts. This difference should be considered when seeing how Spanish speaking alumni

are engaged compared to English speakers and why it is more successful. It also raises a new set of questions as to why this is and what is the significance of this training to each culture.

Lack of Communication

Currently, one of the main forms of communication among alumni is expected to be the alumni forum. However, this forum only has five posts and each post averages three comments (Impact Launch, 2022). The most recent post was in August of 2021 and it received one like and two comments on it and it was an alumni discussing their inability to stay with a pod (Impact Launch, 2022). If people are not connecting on the forum, they have their pods to communicate with but clearly there are minimal pod meetings happening due to scheduling and priorities. Some alumni may communicate one on one after creating lasting connections, but based on survey results it appears overall communication is low.

It is important to note that a large majority of alumni work at the same organizations so this limited communication is happening between coworkers or those close to each other. The lack of collaboration and communication can also be the fault of managers and leaders. When organizations send their staff to training like this, they need to continue to ensure the framework is actively being used. They should provide “a supportive environment that may enhance self-efficacy and retention capabilities (for) their employees” (Iqbal & Dastgeer, 2017). This allows employees to feel confident in themselves in using the practices and delivering the goals they desire. When they feel confident and comfortable with the work, they open themselves up to teamwork and efficiency.

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
Lack of Staff	RTL alumni are more prone to becoming stagnant in their learning	Alumni no longer applying RTL tools
Lack of interest or busy schedules on behalf of alumni		Lack of communication among alumni
COVID		

Project Description

Project Description

This project aimed to uncover the reasons for the limited alumni engagement. Currently, efforts to engage alumni have had minimal success, with a lack of knowledge on part of alumni for the latter options of engagement. These efforts included alumni gatherings, pod meetings, and an alumni forum. Various reasons were discovered as to why these efforts are ineffective and not engaging the alumni population as thoroughly as Impact Launch desired. Through research and outreach, the deeper reasoning for a lack of engagement was found and the Impact Launch team can then better serve their alumni.

Duties for this project included coordinating, conducting, and reporting the results of interviews. The interviewees were chosen from a list of alumni thought to have relevant input. This list came to be through collaboration with the mentors at this site. The questions for the interviews were created by Caitlyn Gonzalez and Alyssa Trinity, based on feedback from Megan Joseph and Robyn McKeen on what they needed to know at Impact Launch. Once all the interviews were conducted, the data and any recommendations were presented to Impact Launch.

Project Justification

Best Practice

Impact Launch knew there was a problem with how many alumni come back to gatherings but they did not know why. This project aimed to understand the reasons for low attendance on behalf of alumni as well as why previous efforts to engage them were not cutting it. It is important to Impact Launch that alumni have continued learning. Continued learning is essential in this scope of work and it only hurts society for people to be stagnant. Conducting interviews that would help influence future education aligns with the standards practiced within the human services workforce. The National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics: Ethical Standards section 3.08 illustrates that workers in this field need continued education and staff development within their practice. This continued education should include "current knowledge and emerging developments" related to their practices and ethics (NASW, 2022). The interviews allowed recommendations to be made to Impact Launch to increase their alumni engagement to ensure their continued learning is consistent and always evolving.

Addressing Contributing Factors

When working with groups like this, having someone who looks like the interviewee and is on a similar level as them is important to create trust and a safe environment for openness (Jones, 2008). In order to best serve alumni with this project, honest feedback needed to be obtained directly from the alumni because this framework emphasizes actively involving those affected to find a solution (Sharma, 2017). Interns were crucial for this as some people being interviewed could have felt uncomfortable or judged if they were interviewed by the Founder or a Senior Practitioner Coach. Interns had the ability to create a safe space for feedback that may

have been viewed as more negative than positive. They had the same level of RTL comprehension as the interviewees so they were not seen as higher up to them.

Benefits

There are a multitude of benefits that come with increasing engagement and increasing alumni's active use of their education. These benefits include an increase in engagement, communication, and connection between alumni. Additionally, continued learning contributes to making, "vibrant and inclusive communities, entrepreneurial, innovative, and successful businesses and public services, and the world a better place for children" (Mueller & King, 2018). By providing new ways for Impact Launch to work with their alumni, they are able to provide new lenses to view the world in as it is ever changing when trying to solve its problems. Through these benefits, alumni will be able to have better, more sustainable and lasting connections with their communities. Practicing the tools and engaging with each other is a great way for alumni to achieve personal growth as well because part of the work includes internal reflection.

Assessment Plan & Expected Outcomes

In order to assess the effectiveness of Impact Launch's engagement with their alumni, interviews were conducted with key personnel to identify where the disconnect was within this community. These interviews will determine why there was little engagement, ways to improve, and issues to address within the company. By combining this new data with already existing information, Impact Launch will be able to better serve its alumni community.

There are outcomes that can be measured to know if this project was a success. Impact Launch will receive the research and data report, which may trigger conversations that need to happen between staff members to ensure consistency and agreement on the implementation of

these suggestions. The other measurable outcome will be that Impact Launch will make changes within the company based on the findings of the data collection.

Implementation Process

This project entailed conducting a research project and assessing the effectiveness of Impact Launch's engagement with its past clients. This involved conducting interviews with past alumni of the RTL training program. The questions were decided upon based on what was needed to have a full view of the issue at hand. After choosing the questions, a master list of alumni was created and the individuals were then contacted. The alumni chosen varied in their engagement levels with Impact Launch, ranging from very active within the alumni community to no activity at all. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour long, followed by a debrief between Gonzalez and Trinity. Once all of the interviews are completed, they will be analyzed and organized into consumable data for Impact Launch. It was presented to Joseph and McKeen at the end of November 2022.

Project Results

The expected outcomes of this project were to have an abundance of feedback to give to the founders of Impact Launch to inform future decisions of how to support and promote alumni diversity and engagement. Since the success of this project and those that will follow was largely contingent on whether the alumni were interested in continued engagement, two of the interview questions were designed to gauge the level of interest of the interviewees. Based on the responses to the questions shown in Table 1 below, it was concluded that alumni had at least a moderate level of interest in remaining engaged with the RTL tools and each other. Each of the interviewees expressed enthusiasm for a newsletter, even those who reported being highly

unengaged. Each interviewee also reported time being a major boundary to them remaining engaged, and provided ideas to counteract time constraints.

Table 1

Alumni Response Themes Relevant to Level of Interest

Questions	Response Themes
How engaged are you with RTL alumni events What works for you? What doesn't work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loud call for returning to in person ● Scheduling conflicts/ large time commitment ● Alumni Gatherings are inspirational ● Requests for more frequent, short refresher gatherings ● Having a way to indicate alumni are certified in RTL ● Requests for evening and weekend classes
Would you be interested in engagement outside of gatherings?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enthusiasm for newsletter ● Request for video highlights of how to use tools ● Create web portal for tools and resources for alumni within Impact Launch website

Note. This table only contains the responses that addressed the level of interest on behalf of the interviewees. The complete feedback report can be found in Appendix B.

The success of this is also measured by the implementation of feedback. As the interviews occurred, an overview of the results were shared with Impact Launch. They integrated some of this feedback right away. This included reminding alumni during meetings about the forum and upcoming events as many were uninformed due to lack of knowledge of the forum and emails going to spam. Additionally, most of the feedback was accepted. Some of it included things that may take awhile to implement like newsletters or in-person gatherings. Ideally, it will be put into action sooner rather than later, but within the next few years.

In total, six interviews were conducted via Zoom, and two more alumni provided brief feedback via email. The desired number of interviews was not reached mostly due to scheduling

conflicts and time restraints of the project. However, the final data report is a robust 2.5 pages full of varying feedback and ideas for improvement.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The contributing factors make improving the issue of engagement difficult. In person trainings have been reported as being desired through the interviews, but COVID and other arising concerns have made this difficult. Maintaining engagement is also incredibly burdensome due to the disproportionate ratio of workload to number of staff. The results validated what Impact Launch already knew and has been working on including increased racial diversity and difficulties with email communication. The feedback gathered also confirmed the identification of availability of alumni as a contributing factor to lack of engagement. However, the feedback report also brought up suggestions that were less well received and may be overlooked.

The interviews opened up many doors for change. Three recommendations were made to Impact Launch. The first was to create a quarterly alumni newsletter that is no longer than two pages to spotlight different tools, remind alumni of how to use them, and highlight how other alumni are using tools. The second recommendation was to create tool refresher videos that are about 10 minutes to one hour long. The final recommendation was to increase focus on strategic planning within different organizations rather than providing a wide spread trainings. The recommendation for a newsletter was accepted, however whether or not it will be successfully implemented is not yet known. In order to increase the potential of this project, the outreach and scheduling process could have been expedited by sending out more invitations to a larger number of alumni at a time. Also, the more substantive interviews were with engaged alumni. These interviews offered more substance and recommendations. Increasing the number of engaged

alumni could result in more diverse feedback. Increasing diversity in ways such as age, race, and language spoken could have the potential for different aspects of input as well.

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Appendix A

Project Implementation Plan

Activities	Deliverables	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Meet to decide how to begin project	Project design	May 11, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Meet to build CSFR and base for interview questions	Conscious Full Spectrum Response form	May 24, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Create interview questions	List of questions for alumni interviews	May 25, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Meet to plan for June gathering and receive feedback on interview questions	Final interview questions and June gathering agenda	June 1, 2022	Megan Joseph
Discuss and contact potential interviewees at planning meeting	Email communication with interviewees	June 1, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct first interview (Adrienne S.)	Alumni feedback	June 9, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Meet to debrief interview	Present data	June 28, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Meet to discuss next interviewees and contact them	Email communication with interviewees	July 24, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct second interview (Chen K.W.)	Alumni feedback	August 2, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Meet to debrief interview, discuss next steps	Share data and email communication with interviewees	September 1, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Send out emails to potential interviewees	Schedule interviews	September 2, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct third interview (Susan B.)	Alumni feedback	September 15, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct fourth interview (Christina S.)	Alumni feedback	September 19, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Edit interview questions for Jacob	Concise questions for interview	September 19, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct fifth interview (Jacob M.)	Alumni feedback	September 26, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct sixth interview (Heather J.)	Alumni feedback	September 28, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct seventh interview	Alumni feedback	October	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph

Meet to debrief interviews		October 12, 2022	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Conduct eighth interview	Alumni feedback	October	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Meeting to debrief interviews		November	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph
Synthesizing interview responses	Data report	October - November	Robyn McKeen, Megan Joseph

Appendix B

Alumni Feedback Report

How to read response themes:

- Bullet points = in order of frequency
- Bold = considered very important

Questions:	Response Themes:
<p>How engaged are you with RTL alumni events What works for you? What doesn't work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Loud call for returning to in person - hard to be engaged and focused on zoom ● Scheduling conflicts as barrier to attending alumni gatherings ● Returning to attend cohorts/PC requires a major time commitment that many cannot give ● Alumni Gatherings are inspirational ● Alumni not receiving emails ● Requests for more frequent, short refresher gatherings with intersession format to remind alumni how to use tools in realistic/relatable/consumable forms ● Having a way to indicate alumni are certified in RTL training (i.e. through email signature line) ● Requests for evening and weekend classes
<p>How can we better support alumni use of tools?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alumni have forgotten most of the tools other than listening deeply, grounding in stand, background conversations, and feedback format ● Create an opportunity for alumni to pause and reflect ● Shared examples by Robyn/Megan/Shebreh could be more in-depth to show the process of their efforts not just the results (show the ugly/hard side of things)- request for more examples of modest change, "keeping it real" ● Practicing tools in speed dating format - alumni group does refreshers everyone gets to practice more than once on each tool - chance to practice with different people ● Use current events within the community being engaged in the respective cohort/gathering as examples for use of tools
<p>We're working to increase practices around racial equity and cultural competency</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● More diverse practitioner coaches and staff ● More focus on LGBTQ+ and people with disabilities - having gatherings or trainings focused towards serving different minority groups- partner with organizations that serve those groups

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase Latinx engagement in California cohorts to better represent and serve community ● Interruption statement - used to interrupt meetings or situations can clarify/correct the lens in question - empowers people to step into a space of self acknowledgment ● Have person of color interview other people to talk about why they lost interest (direct follow up) one on one comfortable conversation on why the program didn't resonate ● Need for white accountability as system that needs to be included and addressed - would like to see leaders look at their own comfort level with defaulting of systems to center around whiteness as privilege - calling out systems and still reflect on white accountability ● Being able to pod with people from same racial/ethnic backgrounds helps connectivity of BIPOC
<p>Would you be interested in engagement outside of gatherings</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enthusiasm for newsletter - Visuals and auditory for all types of learners (i.e. podcasts, videos, newsletters with visuals/audio having transcripts for accessibility)- sharing two pagers that focuses in on different skills, leadership, shared understanding, participatory strategies ● Request for video highlights of how to use tools (from a few minutes to an hour long) ● Social media platforms not particularly desirable for engagement ● Create web portal for tools and resources for alumni within Impact Launch website (similar to SUTRA for Marin LEO cohort)
<p>Do you still meet with your Pod?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pods are useful and well liked ● Pods have limitations - can get stuck, become chaotic/hectic, members stop responding, stop meeting due to scheduling conflicts ● Providing more clear way for alumni to form new pods - (link at bottom of newsletter) ● Helpful to pod with people working in similar areas/on similar projects
<p>Do you know about the alumni-only page on our site?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Alumni did not know about alumni only page ● Not likely to utilize alumni page or blog
<p>Anything else:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating specific focus trainings for different age

	<p>groups/ work areas (RTL for young professionals, senior leaders, executive directors, etc.) - young professionals have more time on their hands and can attend full training, senior professionals have less time to attend during the week</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need for more funding to support Impact Launch in engaging alumni ● Alumni highlights need to be less glorifying - SC is in a competitive mindset of who's "RTL enough" - We're not all champions which is okay! ● Turn focus away from trainings and towards strategic planning ● Intersectionality of good facilitation is confused with someone being biased- Shame and ego are a huge part that hold us back ● Debriefing as PCs is helpful ● How to do no harm: be careful with examples used during meetings as they can open trauma wounds without closing them before moving onto the next topic
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