

Field experiment implementation

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IGL Behind the Scenes Series





Behind the scene



One specific example



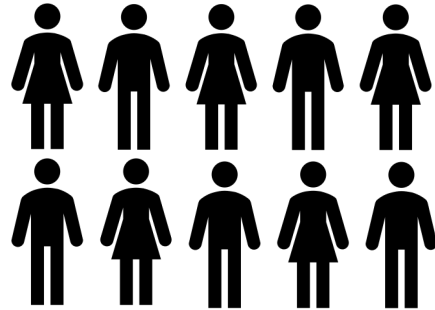
Department for
Business & Trade



Innovation
Growth Lab
by **nesta**

96%

of all businesses in
the UK have less than
10 employees



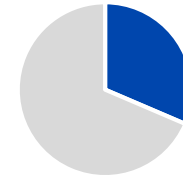
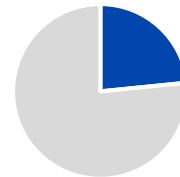
Yet they only account for

22%

of turnover

33%

of employment



Source: House of Parliament, 2017

- Can **systematic decision-making** improve their performance?
- Business Basics Grant: to fund a business support program to **deliver impact** and **measure impact** delivered

Study design

Step 1: Recruitment of participants and baseline interviews

Step 2: Random assignment to traditional & scientific groups



Control (Traditional)

Strategy frameworks and templates (e.g.,
business model canvas, balance scorecard...)

Evidence gathering techniques (e.g.,
surveys, A/B testing, qualitative interviews...)



Treatment (Scientific)

Strategy frameworks and templates (e.g.,
business model canvas, balance scorecard...)

Evidence gathering techniques (e.g.,
surveys, A/B testing, qualitative interviews...)

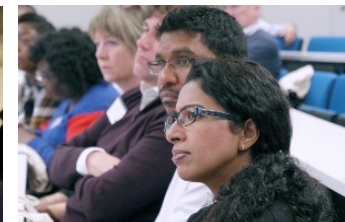
1.Theory

2. Hypotheses

3. Evidence

4.Evaluation

Step 3: Monitoring and data collection on key choices and performance



Interested in the results?

SMS | Strategic Management Journal

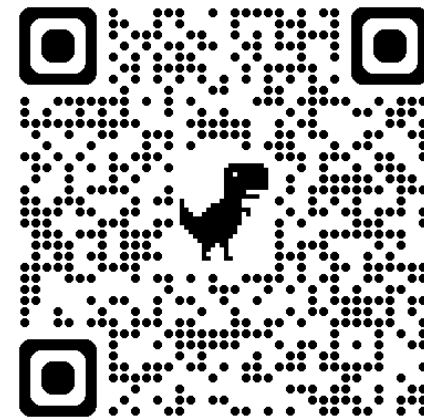
RESEARCH ARTICLE |  Open Access |  

Making business model decisions like scientists: Strategic commitment, uncertainty, and economic performance

Elena Novelli , Chiara Spina

First published: 09 July 2024 | <https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3636> | Citation:

[Find it here](#) 



Opportunities in field experiments

- Robust evidence of **causal relationships**
- **Depth and breadth of insight** (on the entrepreneurial decision making process)
- Opportunity to **make real impact** on the **user community** and **influence policy**



The implementation

Numbers:

- 250 + entrepreneurs
- 1 year project
- 50 + research
- administrators (RAs)
- 20 + speakers / instructors
- 7-10 events
- 10 interview rounds

Activities:

- Planning
- Team setup
- Partners
- Marketing (website, flyers, reach)
- Applications screening and evaluation
- RAs recruitment and training
- Instructor recruitment and training
- Scheduling, access and set up
- Materials preparation
- Delivery
- Supervision
- Data collection and monitoring
- Events
- Reporting

Teams to coordinate:

- Research Office
- HR (Human Resources)
- Department Administration
- Dean's Office
- Alumni/Events/ External Relations
- Legal / Contracts
- Marketing
- IT Services
- Web Team
- AV (Audio-Visual) Support
- Facilities Management
- Timetabling / Scheduling
- Data Protection committee
- Ethics Committee / IRB
- Finance Office
- Procurement
- Catering
- Reception and Security



The infrastructure

Field experiments are expensive — three routes:

- **Own** – use an existing infrastructure
- **Build** – create your own via grants:
 - Maximum design flexibility
 - But complex enterprise → Start small with seed grants; IGL a great starting point
- **Borrow** – partner with organizations:
 - Amplify reach
 - Critical to align research and organizational interests: finding the *sweet spot*: your research interest, their strategic priorities, and your expertise
 - Dependency on priorities and champions



- RCTs take time — often multi-year – and involves uncertainty

Career stage: Can you afford the timeline and uncertainty?

- Do it for the insight and real –world impact BUT
 - For PhDs: consider treating as an *option* with a clear back up plan
 - For faculty: does it align with KPIs (publications, funding, engagement)?

Capabilities and aspirations: Are you the right person?

- Do you enjoy field work and learning from participant direct experience?
- Do you enjoy designing and monitoring processes?
- Do you enjoy managing people?



People: Aligning interests

- **Organizational partners:**
 - Shared goals
 - Trust (need support irrespective of results)
 - Boundaries (setting expectations clearly and early)
- **Your research partners:**
 - Does every coauthor see their intellectual angle in the project?
 - Is the set-up consistent with each person's research agenda?
 - Clarity on decisions responsibilities
- **Your team on the ground (e.g. Research Admin Team):**
 - Connect roles to personal aspirations
 - Offer learning value (entrepreneurship, data strategy, etc.)
 - Celebrate progress and contributions
 - Plan for turnover
- **Operations staff (e.g. IT, security, HR):**
 - Their workload and workflow matter
- **Your participants!**
 - What are they hoping to achieve?
 - How effectively are you delivering for them?



Processes

1. **Understanding existing processes and what can be leveraged already:**

e.g. the organization already has a digital platform, a CRM system, or an event process you can repurpose

2. **Design new processes** in consultation with the **organizational stakeholders**

3. **Document the processes** (write them down) and **test them**

- When and how should participants be contacted and how,
- Who is responsible for which areas
- Who should be informed about what and when
- What should be documented

Think about:

- Escalation processes
- Consistency
- Space for sharing reflections and improving processes



Measurement and Data Quality

- Behind the scene series will talk more about measurement
 - **Solid design ≠ solid data without implementation discipline.** For instance, monitor that data collection processes are successfully implemented, that RAs have space for recording and escalate issues they did not expect, that these issues are sorted and then re-circulated for consistency
 - **Pilot everything** — website, materials, surveys, definitions, instructions for instructors and RAs
 - Prevent attrition by
 - Ensuring relevance and clarity
 - Ensuring ease of access
 - Ensuring participants' questions are answered
 - Ensuring rules are fairly and equitably enforced



Risk Awareness and Prevention

- **Operational:**

- delays, drift → monitor, buffer time & budget

- **Data:**

- errors → real-world piloting, data auditing

- **Partnership:**

- shifting priorities → multiple relationships, MoUs

- **Team:**

- turnover → codify procedures, record training, feedback loops

Culture

- Respect participants and their time
- Make communication clear and transparent
- Build a culture of integrity in the team





Thank you
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