

Study of Social Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystems in South East and East Asian Countries

Case Study: Bettr Barista Coffee
Academy, Singapore

The Japan Research Institute

Office of the Multilateral
Investment Fund

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CASE STUDY

Bettr Barista Coffee Academy, Singapore

Multilateral Investment Fund

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Tania Chew, Head of Marketing and Communications of Bettr Barista
Tomohiro Hamakawa, Co-Founder of Earth Company

1. Introduction

Name: Bettr Barista Coffee Academy	
Description	A Singapore-based barista training academy for the disadvantaged, underprivileged that offers a holistic development approach focusing on mental, emotional, physical, and vocational skills.
Founded	2011
Legal format	Limited company
Num. employees/volunteers	18 members including part-time staff
Geographical reach	Singapore
Certifications/ awards	President's Challenge Social Enterprise Start-Up of the Year Award (2013) B-Corp certification (2015)
Social innovation variables of Bettr Barista Coffee Academy	
Innovation type	Bettr Barista provides not only world-class professional barista training but also life skills, emotional management, and multi-dimension physical training in order for the underprivileged to improve self-esteem and secure employment.
Social impact	Over 3,500 people have been trained at the academy to date. Of the 50 graduates of its signature training program, 80% has found permanent employment in the specialty coffee industry.
Financial sustainability	More than 80% of revenue from sales, with the remainder derived from government subsidies.
Key Partners and Supporters	Business model was developed through multi-sector collaboration including banks, IT-based corporations and nonprofits.
Scalability and Replicability	Scalable if it secures investments and manages to operate its own coffee shops; replicable if it develops a franchise system.
References	http://www.bettrbarista.com/



(Source: Vulcant Post)

2. Local Social Issues and The Challenge

Economic and social disparity in Singapore has been widening in the past decade. As the Gini coefficient has remained over 0.45 in the recent years¹, income gap between the rich and poor is gradually expanding. The current income pyramid suggests that the average wage of the segment in the top 10% is 25 times greater than that of the bottom 10%.

Amongst the low-income segments, women, at-risk youth, and the disabled in particular struggle to gain access to upward mobility given their lack of practical skills. Without enough educational and training opportunities, many have little choice but accepting low-wage jobs, while the more unfortunate ones remain jobless. They are often caught in a vicious cycle of lack of skills, low confidence, and inability to seize the few opportunities that do come along. Given their circumstances, merely focusing on vocational skills or formal education are not effective solutions; they need alternative, more holistic measures including training in leadership, resilience, and self-esteem. While Singapore is known as a country with well-established social welfare and women's social advancement², it also struggles to cater to the underprivileged and vulnerable who fall through the cracks of its safety-net system.

3. Solution and Social Impact

Adopting a holistic approach focusing on mental, emotional and physical training, Bettr Barista Coffee Academy (hereafter Bettr Barista) is a leading provider of specialty coffee education. Bettr Barista provides 12-week program that arms underprivileged women and at-risk youth with vocational and life skills in order to pave the way for long-term careers in the specialty coffee industry. The social enterprise takes in two kinds of trainees: 1) late-teen-to-early-20s youth with low or no academic training who may be school dropouts; and 2) women in their mid-20s to 50s from low-income backgrounds. Many of the women face personal challenges such as lack of self-discipline, low self-esteem, financial difficulties, etc. that could be considered “unemployable” by mainstream businesses.³

¹ Department of Statistics Singapore, “Singapore Economy 2014”

² According to the 2014 Labor Force Statistics (Singapore), the employment rate for women was at its peak of 76% for the prime working ages of 25 to 54 (<http://newsroom.mastercard.com/asia-pacific/files/2016/03/Report-MasterCard-Index-of-Womens-Advancement-2016-Asia-Pacific.pdf>[Accessed 29 April 2016])

³ <https://www.asiaforgood.com/article/doing-good-doing-bettr> [Accessed 29 April 2016]

Figure 1 The Bettr Barista team



(Source: Vulcant Post)

“It is not enough to equip them with a skill. We must equip them with emotional, mental, and physical resilience, as well as confidence, teamwork, and discipline”, believes Pamela Chng, the founder of Bettr Barista. She explains that their curriculum is designed with specific intentions and reasons: “Incorporating emotional and physical skills training in our program is a proactive strategy that uses rational, effective methodologies and tools to build up resilience, self-confidence and other social skills that are the ‘heartware’ to the hardware of world-class barista skills”.⁴ At the end of the 12-week program, Bettr Barista assists graduates find employment opportunities. However more importantly, they emerge with a fundamental change in mindset and the confidence and skills to succeed.

Bettr Barista won the 2013 President’s Challenge Award for Social Enterprise Startup of the Year, and was also Singapore’s first recipient of the Arthur Guinness Fund in 2012, which targets businesses with a social heart that are committed to finding innovative solutions to real world social problems.⁵ Bettr Barista became a certified B Corporation⁶ in 2015, the first

⁴

<http://www.scaa.org/chronicle/2012/03/09/bettr-barista-helps-disadvantaged-women-through-barista-training/> [Accessed 29 April 2016].

⁵ <http://socialventurechallenge.asia/> [Accessed 29 April 2016]

⁶ B Corp certification is a private certification issued to for-profit companies by B Lab, a global non-profit organization. The certification is given to a company that has shown socially and environmentally high performances and has accountability and transparency. As of September 2016, there are 1,863 certified B Corporations across 130 industries in 50 countries.

and only certified corporation in Singapore.⁷

4. The Social Entrepreneur

Prior to founding Bettr Barista in 2011, Pamela Chng co-owned, ran and grew a successful web consultancy called Digital Boomerang for eight years. As project director, she managed major projects and all key client relationships with government agencies such as The Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING), Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), Ministry of Social and Family Development (MCYS), among others. Before setting up Digital Boomerang, Pamela was part of the web division of the Singapore Press Holdings during the dot-com boom where she managed sales representatives in Europe, Australia, and East Asia.⁸ She realized earlier in her career that she was not motivated only by financial incentives.

Figure 2 Pamela Chng, founder of Bettr Barista Coffee Academy



(Source: The specialty coffee chronicle)

When Chng left her consultancy business, she knew she wanted to do something to empower those who are in need of skills to become economically independent.⁹ “I found there were

⁷ As of April 2016

⁸ IBID.

⁹<http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/coffee-academy-helps-marginalised-women-youth-wins-presidents-challenge>[Accessed 30 April 2016]

many marginalized women struggled in not only ‘material poverty’, but ‘poverty of mentality and confidence’”, describes Chng. She decided to support women who in turn would have an impact on their children and their surrounding communities. The key reasons for targeting the coffee industry were 1) it was a developing market in Singapore at the time and 2) Chng herself is a coffee-loving entrepreneur. Trained in Melbourne, Singapore, Italy and the US in various aspects of the coffee industry, Chng holds a plethora of certifications and licenses including the following:

- Certified Judge by the World Barista Championship
- Licensed Q Arabica Grader
- Specialized Instructor of the Specialty Coffee Association of America,
- Certifier and Authorized Trainer of the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe
- Certified Trainer and Assessor of the Singapore Workforce Development Agency.¹⁰

5. Business Model

Bettr Barista has contributed to developing world-class coffee professionals and established itself as a significant player in the coffee industry value chain in Singapore. Bettr Barista operates three businesses including 1) training, 2) mobile brew bar and barista service, and 3) wholesale of coffee beans and equipment.

(a) Barista training courses

Bettr Barista provides full-fledged training courses in basic knowledge of coffee, skills of brewing, sensory and roasting, and soft skills that are suitable for amateurs, professionals and everyone in between. Its signature course is the Bettr Holistic Training Programme, a 12-week program for underprivileged women and at-risk youth which includes four weeks of intensive barista training and an eight-week internship component. During the internship, Bettr Barista provides weekly emotional and psychological sessions to enable students to understand what they should overcome in their mind. “The physical activities such as yoga, outrigger canoeing and Kapap self-defence training help to build up their strength, endurance and discipline”, explains Chng.¹¹ Bettr Barista matches interns with its partner companies that offer reasonable salaries, such as Forty Hands, Smitten Coffee & Tea, and Jimmy Monkey Café. Once completing the 12-week program, graduates work in the industry on full-time basis for three

¹⁰ <http://socialventurechallenge.asia/> [Accessed 29 April 2016]

¹¹ Kapap is a self-defence training originally developed for the Israeli Special Forces in the 1940s.

months and come back to the academy once a month to check in on their emotional and overall well-being.

Bettr Barista has attained the Approved Training Organization status from the Singapore Workforce Development Agency and offers the Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ¹²). The social enterprise is also the only organization in Southeast Asia that offers international coffee certification programs from America and Europe.

Upon graduation, the students join specialty coffee outlets that Bettr Barista partners with throughout Singapore. In addition, many of them return to help subsequent batches and build vertical connections across generations, as Chng explains: “They coach the trainees, help reach out to social service organizations, and share their stories with potential students”.¹³

¹² The Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) is a national credentialing system. It trains, develops, assesses and recognizes individuals for the key competencies that companies look for in potential employees.

¹³ <http://singaporemagazine.sif.org.sg/wake-up-and-smell-the-coffee> [Accessed 30 April 2016]

Table 1 The list of courses and fees (as of 2016)

Skills	Courses/modules		Contents	Fee
All	Bettr Holistic Training Programme		A six-month customized program that imparts professional skills of coffee barista and emotional management skills to support to pave the way for long-term careers in specialty coffee.	USD 2,600 or USD 222 if subsidized.
Barista Skills	WSQ specialty coffee service		Introducing core barista skills to those in the food and beverage industry who have no prior specialty coffee experience. Upon completion of 2.5-day course, participants are able to apply to the workplace.	USD 71 to 633 ¹⁴ depending on sponsorship and citizenship
	SCAE coffee education program	Introduction to Coffee	Offering basic knowledge in coffee beans (4-hour Introduction module) and 7-day classes in core barista skills classes from entry to professional levels. Upon completion of all modules, 50% of condition needed to obtain a SCAE diploma is fulfilled.	USD 143
		Barista Skills Foundation		USD 355
		Barista Skills Intermediate		USD 629
		Barista Skills Professional		USD 1,406
	SCAA Barista Guild of America (BGA) Certification Program	BGA Level 1	A 4.5-day course covering basic and foundational knowledge and skills to professionals in the coffee preparation sector of the specialty coffee industry. Upon completing Levels 1 and 2, participants can receive BGA certification.	USD 1,188
		BGA Level 2		USD 1,109
Home Barista Basics		A 3-hour practical, interactive, completely hands-on introductory course to all things espresso. Students who complete this course will receive a Home Barista Basic Course certification from Bettr Barista.	USD 143	
Brewing Skills	SCAE coffee education program	Brewing Skills Foundation	A 3-day workshop to learn the core brewed methods and skills and equipment required to produce great brewed coffee. Upon completion of the two modules, 15% of condition needed to obtain SCAE diploma is fulfilled.	USD 355
		Brewing Skills Intermediate		USD 629
Sensory Skills	SCAE coffee education program	Sensory Skills Foundation	A 3-day workshop to understand the sensory of specialty coffee including cupping practice. Upon completion of the two modules, 15% of condition needed to obtain SCAE diploma is fulfilled.	USD 355
		Sensory Skills Intermediate		USD 629
Roasting Skills	SCAE coffee education program	Roasting Skills Foundation	Providing a basic understanding of the roasting process in one day. Upon completion of the module, 5% of condition needed to obtain SCAE diploma is fulfilled.	USD 355
	SCAA Roaster's Guild of America (RGA) Certification	Roaster Pathway Level 1	A 10.5-day course with subjects ranging from practical to scientific knowledge. By completing two levels, graduates obtain RGA certification.	USD 2,217
		Roaster Pathway Level 2		USD 2,771

¹⁴1SDG=0.74USD unless otherwise specified.

Green Coffee	SCAE courses	Green Coffee Skills Foundation	A 3-day workshop including principles of coffee growing, processing and green coffee grading and coffee contracts and green coffee portfolio management. Upon completion of the two modules, 15% of condition needed to obtain SCAE diploma is fulfilled.	USD 355
		Green Coffee Skills Intermediate		USD 629
Q-Grader	Q Arabica Combined Training & Exam		An advanced course for 6 days including exams to test individual skills and understanding. A student who passes all tests is given a professional accreditation as Q-Grader.	USD 2,886
Master-classes	-		Guest instructors provide one or two day module for those who would like to polish up their professional skills.	USD 147

Betr Barista currently works with social service organizations, family service centers, and community development councils to identify and reach out to potential students. Betr Holistic Training Programme costs around USD 2,600 per student but is subsidized for qualified individuals who pass an application process that includes two rounds of rigorous interviews to ascertain their emotional readiness and motivation. These qualified students pay only USD 222 in total, which can be paid later when they receive internship stipend. Betr Barista has been supported in part subsidies provided by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) Comcare Enterprise Fund.¹⁵

(b) Mobile brew bar and barista service

Betr Barista has been operating its own full-service mobile coffee offering customized to event set up (bar, countertop, or mobile cart) from private parties to corporate events, and large-scale simultaneous multi-location deployment.¹⁶ The social enterprise also provides coffee-themed team-building experiences and programs for corporate clients.

Betr Barista is now looking to turn this model into a social franchise and would like to focus on expanding the social franchise model idea that will be supported by a sustainable supply chain and an ecosystem of education, resources, and industry partners that the enterprise has spent the last five years cultivating¹⁷. The idea is that a mobile bar on a van or truck would be a natural next step for graduates completing the training and want to start their very own

¹⁵<http://www.scaa.org/chronicle/2012/03/09/betr-barista-helps-disadvantaged-women-through-barista-training/> [Accessed 28 April 2016]

¹⁶ <http://www.betrbarista.com/> [Accessed 28 April 2016]


¹⁷ <https://www.asiaforgood.com/article/betr-barista%E2%80%99s-new-coffee-carts> [Accessed 28 April 2016]

cafés.¹⁸

(c) Wholesale

The wholesale business is a more straightforward commercial initiative to help the social enterprise achieve financial sustainability. A range of top-grade, single-origin, freshly roasted Arabica beans are delivered through a specialty coffee subscription service. Bettr Barista purchases green beans from trusted partner-farmers whom the enterprise has deeply committed to building relationships with in order for long-term positive economic and social impact on the extended communities that they support.¹⁹ In addition, Bettr Barista as a wholesaler distributes coffee-making equipment such as professional barista tools, coffee grinder, and coffee makers for individual users at wholesale market prices.

Table 2 Examples of Coffee Beans products

	Bold Heart Espresso Blend (Bettr Barista Original Blend)	USD 9.6 per bag (250g)
	Seasonal Espresso Subscription	Weekly deliver for 3 months USD 115.4 (250g) Fortnightly for 3 months USD 57.7 (250g)
	Single Origin Subscription	Weekly deliver for 3 months USD 133.2 (200g) Fortnightly for 3 months USD 66.6 (200g)

(Source: Shop Bettr Barista website)

6. Social Impact and Financial Performance

6.1 Social Impact

6.1.1 Social impact achievements

A total of 3,200 individuals have participated in one of the courses offered by Bettr Barista. In terms of its signature Holistic Training Programme, more than 50 graduates have been trained, 80% of whom have found permanent employment in the specialty coffee industry; combined they earn more than SDG 0.5 million (USD 0.37 million) in annual salary. Another noteworthy figure is that over 90% of the participants have reported improved confidence and self-esteem.

¹⁸ IBID

¹⁹ <http://www.bettrbarista.com/> [Accessed 20 September 2016]

“Graduates of our barista course command a starting salary of USD 960. After two years, they can make up to USD 1,480 per month”, Chng said.²⁰ The graduates are welcomed in the coffee industry, as an owner of Smitten Coffee & Tea Bar, Darren Chang praised, “Better Barista’s comprehensive training fills the gap of demand for professional local baristas who are well-trained and motivated.”²¹

In addition, through its mobile brew bar and barista service, Bettr Barista has served more than 82,000 cups reaching more than 64,500 people.

Over the next five years, Bettr Barista aims to help 150 more women and young people through Bettr Holistic Training Programme, and positively impact over 450 of their dependents.²² “Our work is not about numbers, but the depth of its impact and how amplifiable that impact is. How does helping one person affect her family and community?”, comments Chng.

6.1.2 Social impact measurement

Bettr Barista has developed its own KPIs for measuring social impact, by incorporating indicators from B-Corp. However it does not publicize the details of its impact measurement items. The social enterprise has recognized the importance of tracking its social impact from the first day.

6.2 Financial Performance

6.2.1 Revenue and expense trend

As Bettr Barista does not publish the details of its financial performance, any commentary or estimate of its financial standings would be groundless. Yet, according to ASIA FOR GOOD.COM, an information portal site operated by DBS Foundation that focuses on social businesses in Singapore, Bettr Barista is currently working towards its goal of financial sustainability. This can be interpreted that the enterprise belongs to the early stage (before achieving the break-even point) according to our definitions as described further below. As Euromonitor International 2014 indicated a burgeoning in the number of specialty coffee

²⁰ <http://singaporemagazine.sif.org.sg/wake-up-and-smell-the-coffee> [Accessed 30 April 2016]

²¹ <http://www.scaa.org/chronicle/2012/03/09/bettr-barista-helps-disadvantaged-women-through-barista-training/> [Accessed 29 April 2016].

²² <https://www.asiaforgood.com/article/bettr-barista%E2%80%99s-new-coffee-carts> [Accessed 28 April 2016]

shops and observed an increasing consumer trend towards visiting cafés in Singapore²³, it would be surprising if Bettr Barista's revenue has not been upward in the past few years.

6.2.2 Proportion of income from sales trend

The majority of Bettr Barista's revenue comes from the fees of its training courses. The enterprise also receives MCYS Comcare Enterprise Fund to cover a portion of its expenses. According interview research conducted for this study, Bettr Barista has been gradually decreasing its dependence on this government subsidy; from 50 percent at the initial stage to less than 20 percent at present.

In addition to self-investment, Bettr Barista has been financially buoyed by a grant from DBS Foundation which has supported over a hundred social enterprises in Asia. Bettr Barista also takes advantage of DBS's Social Enterprise Package, a set of favorable banking services that, for example, give social enterprises preferential transaction rates and removes the need for minimum monthly balance.²⁴

²³ Euromonitor International 2014 showed cafés/bars had a 2.5% value sales increase in 2012 on average, while specialty coffee shops had the highest values sales increase of 7.2% (<http://www.agr.gc.ca/>) [Accessed 30 April 2016]

²⁴ <https://www.asiaforgood.com/article/doing-good-doing-bettr> [Accessed 29 April 2016]

7. Business Development and Ecosystem Evolution

The five-year journey of Bettr Barista can be categorized into two stages: start-up and early²⁵.

Table 3 A summary of Bettr Barista Coffee Academy business development milestones

Stage	Year	Event
Start-up	2010	Pamela Chng divested her stake in Digital Boomerang and resigned from the company
		Chng took a year off to reconnect with herself through travels in several countries. She also participated in various training courses all related to coffee industry and obtained several international certifications.
	2011	Chng decided to start something new that would help people maximize their potential and become better versions of themselves. She started to set up a business with a co-founding member.
Early	2011	Registered Bettr Barista in November 2011.
	2012	Received the Arthur Guinness Fund (USD 22,200 grant or SGD 30,000)
		Received Comcare Enterprise Fund (USD 220,000 grant or SGD 300,000)
		Developed partnership with Salesforce
	2013	Won the 2013 President’s Challenge Award for Social Enterprise Startup of the Year (USD 29,600 or SGD 40,000)
	2015	Obtained B-Corp certification
Receive the Social Enterprise Grant award from the DBS Foundation		

7.1 Start-up Stage (2011)

7.1.1 Business milestone

The start-up stage of Bettr Barista refers to the period before the founder registered Bettr Barista as a private limited corporation. In the initial segment of this stage, the founder left her own company Digital Boomerang that ran for eight years and decided to take a year off for deep reflections. Unlike other social entrepreneurs analyzed in this study, Chng did not have many supporters when she first conceived the idea of building a business around coffee - a business that would be both commercially viable and socially purposeful.

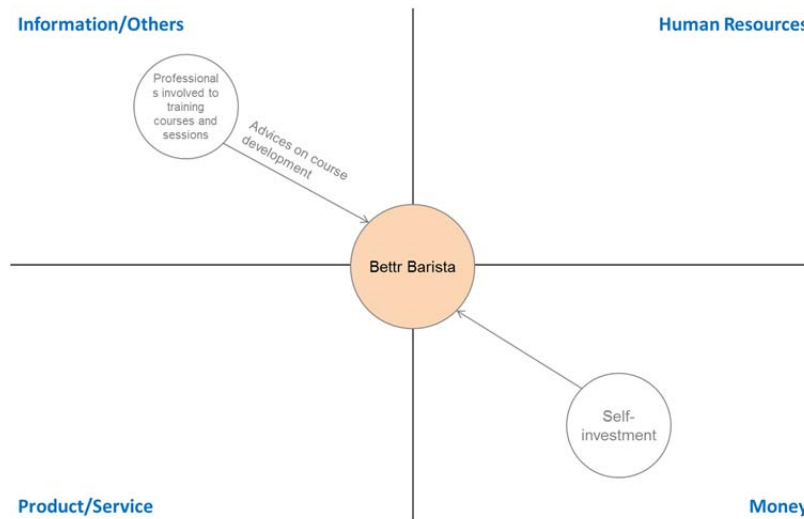
Her passion and vision dovetailed with the market trends: “the specialty coffee industry then was growing, and there was a real need for international-standard training and education”,

²⁵ **Start-up stage:** a preparation period for setting up a business or an enterprise. An entrepreneur’s team develops a business idea and a business model. In some cases, they have product/service prototypes which are not fully developed or tested. **Early stage:** A period from business initiation until business scale-up. An entrepreneur’s team may first deliver its products/ services in a test market to examine its business model. Also, the team may file patents or obtain licenses, if necessary. Once the business model is consolidated, it starts its business. However, the business remains quite small due to lack of capacity and resources. It may reach a breakeven point at the end of this period.

Chng reflects.²⁶ Along with her friends including Tania Chew, currently working as Head of Marketing and Communications, Chng began setting up the business.

7.1.2 Key supporters

Figure 3 Key supporters in the start-up stage²⁷



Bettr Barista relied on very few external supporters in this stage, except for advice from professionals in developing training contents. In terms of finance, Bettr Barista managed its launch through its own initial seed money without raising or receiving external funding.

7.2 Early Stage (2011 to present)

7.2.1 Business milestone

The early stage of Bettr Barista spans from the registration of the enterprise as a for-profit corporation in 2011 until present. This stage can be best described as the period when the social enterprise has been focusing on consolidating its business model as well as improving its management structure. Important milestones include the following events registration as a limited corporation (2011), receiving the Arthur Guinness Fund and Comcare Enterprise Fund

²⁶ <https://vulcanpost.com/221911/pamela-chng-bettr-barista/> [Accessed 30 April 2016]

²⁷ How to look at this key supporter map:

- The name inside the circle represents the key supporters.
- Depending on the kind of support they provide (HR, Product/ services, money, information), the circles are located in respective zones.
- The brief descriptions of the support are written on the arrows.
- The size of the circle expresses the level of impact (high, medium, low).

in the same year (2012), winning the 2013 President's Challenge Award for Social Enterprise Startup of the Year (2013), and becoming a certified B-Corp and receiving a grant from the DBS Foundation (2015).

Betr Barista started as a limited corporation in 2011. Besides working as an instructor herself, Chng managed the entire business including hiring interns, promoting the academy, and reaching out to potential students. Tania Chew supported the business management as a volunteer in the early days, fully utilizing her work experiences in promotion and marketing, and later became a part-time employee.

In 2012, Betr Barista became the first recipient of the Arthur Guinness Fund in Singapore that came with a USD 22,200 grant. The social enterprise also secured USD 220,000 from the Comcare Enterprise Fund that supports social enterprises employing the disadvantaged including at-risk youth and chronically unemployed individuals. Securing these two funds early in this stage helped them to cover the necessary costs, particularly personnel cost, which enabled Betr Barista to turn its focus on building its business operations.

In 2013, Betr Barista's efforts reached another important milestone: the winning of President's Challenge Award for Social Enterprise Startup of the Year. More than the cash prize given to the social enterprise, it was significant for Betr Barista to receive corporate advisory support from leading organizations such as DBS Bank and Keppel Group. In particular, DBS Bank provided in-kind support including the DBS Social Enterprise Package, mentoring in organizational development, and recruiting pro bono volunteers to build a financial strategy. DBS Bank also became a key client of Betr Barista's mobile brew bar as the bank invited the social enterprise to offer catering services to the bank's various events.

As the award raised Betr Barista's visibility, corporate partnerships began to emerge such as with Salesforce, a cloud computing company headquartered in San Francisco. As part of its CSR program, Salesforce provides Betr Barista access to a customized customer relationship management (CRM) platform that enables Betr Barista to easily manage HR-related data such as recruitment, application, and performance of students.

The next key milestone took place in 2015 when Betr Barista announced that it became the

first and only Singaporean business to be a Certified B-Corp. This stamp of approval recognizes that the company meets rigorous standards of social and environmental performance, accountability and transparency.²⁸ While B-Corp certification does not provide direct financial assistance, it brings intangible value such as enhancement of corporate brand and market presence, as well as attracting qualified talent to the enterprise. In addition, the certification helps team members rediscover the corporate culture and philosophy.

In the same year, Bettr Barista was awarded a grant from the DBS Foundation, namely in the scale-up category targeting social enterprises that have been operating for over 3 years, have reached closer to breaking even, and is seeking financial resources to scale up their social impact or geographical reach.²⁹ The grant size is undisclosed; the amount is customized based on the application and business plans.³⁰

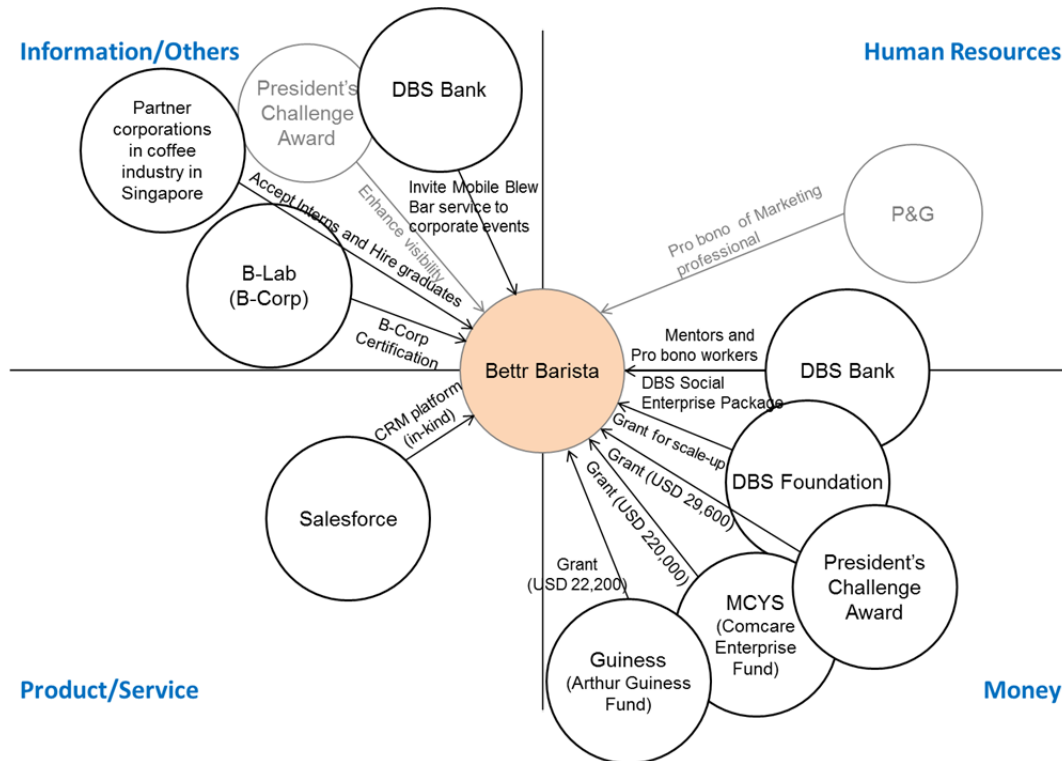
²⁸ B-Corp Website(<https://www.bcorporation.net>) [Accessed 20 September 2016]

²⁹ DBS Foundation website (<https://www.dbs.com/dbsfoundation/>) describes the grant in the following way: "The grant that encourages innovation by social enterprises to meet complex social needs and enables social enterprises to test product feasibility/pilot a prototype model, improve existing processes or add critical capabilities to achieve sustainability, or scale up their existing business that leads to greater social impact".[Accessed 30 April 2016]

³⁰ IBID

7.2.2 Key supporters

Figure 4 Key supporters in the early stage



Betr Barista obtained a diverse set of support in this stage including financial assistance, pro bono support, public recognition, and in-kind ICT-based system.

From the beginning of this stage, Betr Barista explored funding opportunities to expand its geographical reach to identify more potential students, cover subsidies for qualified students, and stabilize its business operations. As described above, it managed to win grants from corporate supporters and public funds.

Besides their dedicated efforts to improve business performance, however, Chng and her team have undergone rich emotional journeys given the nature of the work involving trainees who face diverse and deep personal challenges. To address these challenges ranging from lack of self-discipline, low self-esteem, to financial difficulties, Chng and her management team have devoted their time and energy to listen to the trainees' situations and empathize with them, then infuse them with motivation and inspiration. It is hence crucial for her and her team to

calibrate their emotional energy.³¹ The colorful achievements Bettr Barista made in this stage not only enabled the team to develop its business model and operations, but also - equally importantly - to improve the morale and emotional energy of the team.

8. Scalability and Replicability

(a) Scalability

Franchising mobile brew bar:

Bettr Barista is almost at a financially break-even point and is expected to reach the milestone soon. To achieve further business growth, Chng envisions franchising its mobile brew bar, specifically to develop a social franchise model that would integrate graduates willing to become part-owners of mobile cafés. As the model still needs refinement, resources from the DBS Foundation grant may be used towards it.

Expanding its arm to the upstream of the industry:

Bettr Barista is seeking more strategic ways to collaborate with coffee farmers, not only purchasing green beans directly, but contributing to improve the quality of life of the unprivileged in the farming sector. The plan involves providing holistic training programs to farmers and establishing an interactive platform between farmers and subscribed consumers of coffee beans roasted by Bettr Barista. While a concrete business model has yet to be developed, Chng clearly articulates that “we have worked to contribute to establishing a sustainable supply chain of coffee industry, and working upstream in the industry will be our next phase for our expansion”.

Securing investment for expansion:

Bettr Barista requires additional capital to reinforce its business model in particular to enhance its franchise management capacity for further scale up. The enterprise already recognizes securing strategic investments is crucial for its business expansion: “Procuring around 10% of necessary capital would be needed for us to implementing our new initiatives”, said Chng. She and the management team are preparing to raise investments and developing necessary KPIs.

³¹ <https://www.asiaforgood.com/article/doing-good-doing-bettr> [Accessed 29 April 2016]

(b) Replicability

Finding appropriate model in targeted cities:

Chng is very passionate about solving problems and is constantly excited about the possibilities of social businesses' contribution to the betterment of business and society. Currently she hopes to be able to bring the holistic training model outside of Singapore – to other cities and towns in Asian countries where women and young people struggle with challenges associated with urban migration. In order to replicate the academy, Bettr Barista recognizes the need to modify and contextualize the model.

9. Final Reflections

(a) Incorporating emotional and physical training into vocational training programs

Provision of vocational trainings by the public sector and nonprofits is mainstream practice both in the emerging and developed world. Bettr Barista's holistic approach that enhances emotional and physical skills of the marginalized, however, is not common and should be considered the one that requires time and resources for adoption. To accelerate widespread adoption, one area needs to be strengthened, namely codifying the social skills and interpersonal management skills that instructors require to relate to the trainees with specific needs.

(b) Challenges in establishing processes and systems to sustain businesses

The founder of Bettr Barista recognizes that team building is a key challenge for sustaining businesses. Operating in an unpredictable world, issues and opportunities can emerge at any moment. Thus, developing an adaptable, resilient team becomes crucial not only for business expansion, but also mere survival, as Chng comments: "The roles of each staff member including the founder have changed and must be changed continuously". This is certainly easier said than done given the nature of the work. As Bettr Barista engages with the underprivileged who have low self-esteem and difficulties in regaining self-confidence, instructors and staff need to be able to calibrate and energize themselves to focus on their trainees. In other words, like its unique training curriculum, Bettr Barista also needs a holistic approach for organizational development that balances high performance, emotional well-being, financial sustainability, and social impact.