

Entrepreneurship as an Alternative for the Labor Insertion of Trans People: A Case Study in the City of Tijuana

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Abstract: This document posits that inclusive social innovation can effectively drive sustainable regional development. Its primary goal is to assess the feasibility of a social business model designed to cultivate the entrepreneurial capabilities of transgender communities and foster their economic empowerment. The underlying assumption is that entrepreneurial training can significantly enhance the financial independence of these communities and, subsequently, their overall well-being. A case study conducted in Tijuana involved the analysis of 103 surveys from individuals who identify as transgender. The study's key findings reveal that workplace discrimination significantly impedes their job prospects and tenure, compelling them to seek alternative sources of income. The respondents expressed a keen interest in entrepreneurship but emphasized the need for inclusive entrepreneurship training. These findings illuminate untapped opportunities for research, collaboration, and project development from an underexplored entrepreneurial standpoint.

1 Introduction

From a biological standpoint, sociopolitical mechanisms influence sexuality in a heteronormative and procreative manner [1]. Consequently, public systems overlook individuals who do not adhere to the traditional male/female or man/woman gender binary. This results in transgender lives being perceived as unconventional and not aligning with institutional interpretations of biology. While the term "trans" is relatively modern [2], it's important to acknowledge that various cultural designations have been used throughout history. From a biological standpoint, sociopolitical mechanisms influence sexuality in a heteronormative and procreative manner [1]. Consequently, public systems overlook individuals who do not adhere to the traditional male/female or man/woman gender binary. This results in transgender lives being perceived as unconventional and not aligning with institutional interpretations of biology. While the term "trans" is relatively modern [2], it's important to acknowledge that various cultural designations have been used throughout history.

The distinction between sexual orientation and gender identity is important to understand. Sexual orientation refers to the specific sexual attraction a person feels toward others, while gender identity is the internal and individual experience of the gender with which a person identifies. For transgender individuals, experiencing a gender identity different from the one assigned at birth can lead to internal and external conflicts, particularly when society misunderstands their gender identity and sexual orientation. This misunderstanding can result in

discrimination and exclusion towards transgender individuals who do not adhere to traditional gender and sexuality norms, known as cisheteronormative.

The term "trans" encompasses a diverse range of gender identities that extend beyond the traditional male-female binary. According to the World Health Organization [3], "trans people are those whose gender identity and/or expression do not align with the societal norms and expectations typically associated with the sex assigned at birth [...] These may include transsexuals, transgender individuals, and other non-conforming gender identities. As a result, trans identities and communities are recognized in the plural, forming an umbrella spectrum that encompasses binary and nonbinary identities. This evolution of language and recognition of gender identities extends beyond traditional categories. Gender identities falling under the trans umbrella, whether include the letter "T," encompass non-binary, queer, gender fluid, agender, bigender, and many other identities."

There is no medical-academic evidence supporting the notion that transgender individuals suffer from any genetic variance or psychiatric disorder of dysphoria. Biology and medicine have historically pathologized a phenomenon that was once considered "natural" or "normal", given that the contemporary gender dichotomy did not exist in the past. Initially, there existed only one gender category: male, while female biology was primarily associated with reproduction and caregiving roles [1]. The transgender community encompasses a wide range of experiences and methods of expressing gender identity [1]. In this context, transition can manifest in

diverse forms, as it is not bound by a singular process and can be a dynamic and individualized experience. Homosexuality and transsexuality have historically been constructed from pathologization, exclusion, and marginalization [4] It was not until 1990 that the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the list of mental disorders, marking an important advance in the recognition of sexual and gender diversity. Perspective made visible the discriminatory realities of exclusion and marginality faced by LGBTIQ+ communities.

In Mexico, the situation is similar. In 2018, the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims (CEAV) [5] released the first Diagnosis of Discrimination against LGBTI People in Mexico. The study focuses on the employment status of trans individuals and highlights the discriminatory challenges they encounter when trying to enter the job market. In the hiring process, they face invasive requirements such as testing for venereal diseases and are subjected to inquiries about their sexual orientation and gender identity. Once employed, they are expected to limit their gender expression, leading to their exclusion and exposure to work environments characterized by harassment, bullying, and discrimination. This situation adversely affects their emotional well-being and job performance, making it hard for them to sustain employment and advance professionally. Furthermore, the CEAV study highlights that the gender gap is exacerbated for individuals belonging to one or more vulnerable groups, further worsening issues of exclusion and economic insecurity.

One crucial approach to breaking down barriers to inclusion and enhancing the economic agency of marginalized communities is to equip them with the means to create their sources of livelihood. When employment opportunities are scarce, entrepreneurship naturally emerges as a pathway to generating income. It serves as a tool for social and intellectual empowerment, enabling the acquisition of skills necessary for pursuing self-employment and ultimately improving the lives of individuals in these communities [6]. reduce exclusion barriers and enhance economic empowerment within discriminated communities, it's crucial to equip them with the necessary tools to create their sources of income. When traditional employment opportunities are scarce, entrepreneurship naturally emerges as a viable path to generate income. It serves as a social and educational strategy that fosters skill development for launching business initiatives, ultimately improving the livelihoods of individuals in these communities [6].

Entrepreneurship presents an opportunity for vulnerable populations to create self-employment and attain financial independence, thereby enhancing their living standards and those of their community. These individuals must seek pathways to achieve economic autonomy, as taking on more responsibility and generating their resources leads to improved well-

being. Economic empowerment not only bolsters financial stability but also enhances personal attributes such as self-esteem and negotiation skills. Moreover, it facilitates improved access to healthcare and education for both the entrepreneur and their family [7].

Sexual and gender minority groups are not immune to these challenges. Among the LGBTIQ+ community, transgender individuals experience the most significant social and economic disparities. Following the 2018 Survey on LGBT Diversity and Talent in Mexico conducted by the Alliance for Labor Diversity and Inclusion (ADIL) [7], 46% of LGBTIQ+ individuals do not hold a higher education degree. Specifically, transgender communities encounter limited job opportunities, regardless of their level of education. The 2018 National Diagnosis on Discrimination against LGBTI Populations, conducted by the Executive Commission for Attention to Victims in Mexico (CEAV) [5], found that 72% of transgender men and 67% of transgender women in the sample reported facing obstacles in gaining employment due to their gender identity. It's worth noting that this study followed a binary approach and did not provide data on non-binary communities.

In 2016, the International Labor Organization (ILO) conducted the Pride at Work study, revealing that LGBTIQ+ individuals encounter challenges in securing employment due to discrimination. This discrimination takes the form of withheld training opportunities, promotions, and unequal pay. Trans communities, in particular, may face additional barriers to economic participation, including discrimination in educational settings, high levels of violence, and difficulties obtaining official identity documents [9]. These circumstances drive individuals to pursue alternative income-generating avenues, such as entrepreneurship and self-employment. For instance, in Vietnam, 47.4% of the population is engaged in small businesses with fewer than 10 employees [10].

Considering the figures mentioned above, it is important to recognize the challenges that hinder the economic inclusion of transgender individuals and to assess their interest in enhancing their economic status through entrepreneurship. If there is a desire for entrepreneurship, strategies can be developed to support and streamline entrepreneurship through the provision of training and consulting within a social business framework.

It's crucial to recognize the significance of trans individuals entering the workforce. For them, finding employment not only provides economic stability in the face of family and social exclusion but also contributes to their self-realization. Work plays a pivotal role in shaping their sense of self and collective identity. However, the work environment can often be challenging, hindering the development of their personal and socioeconomic potential. The stress and emotional strain of not being able to

express their gender identity fully, alongside social pressures, can restrict their full participation in the workplace [11].

Due to the hostile work environment that many trans people face, one of the recurring problems within trans communities, mostly trans women, is the tendency to opt for sex work activities, although the issue generates debates among those who wish to regulate and those who seek to abolish it, the reality for many trans women is that sex work becomes the last link in the chain of exclusions that they experience throughout their lives [12], a rejection that generates a feeling of disability in front of others and themselves, and that the shores to street prostitution, the hairdressing profession, or the informal market, [13] mention whether recurrent or self-employment or entrepreneurship as an option to generate economic resources.

Entrepreneurship not only contributes to improving economic conditions but also comprehensively empowers people. It gives them greater security to function, gives them a sense of social acceptance that they might not otherwise achieve, and even one of their motivations for entrepreneurship is social recognition [14]. Furthermore, entrepreneurship helps them overcome gender inequalities [15].

2 Literature review

Entrepreneurial activity, as defined by Ahmad and Seymore [16], pertains to human endeavors aimed at creating value through the establishment or expansion of economic initiatives, as well as recognizing and capitalizing on novel prospects in products, processes, or markets. Similarly, Pontius [17] characterizes it as encompassing the undertaking of a business venture, its organization, pursuit of funding, and acceptance of risks. Entrepreneurship entails being innovative, resourceful, and perceiving opportunities where others might only see uncertainty or even failure [18].

Entrepreneurship extends beyond just starting a business venture; it serves as a vehicle for social and economic empowerment [19]. Its significance lies not only in creating personal wealth but also in its ability to positively impact society as a whole. Entrepreneurship transcends the mere initiation of a business endeavor; it catalyzes social and economic empowerment [19]. Its significance extends beyond the creation of personal wealth to its broader impact on society, contributing to the enhancement of social and economic conditions and the mitigation of pervasive issues such as economic vulnerability.

Economic vulnerability is not tied to personal traits, but rather a societal condition arising from insufficient resources to meet basic needs. Unemployment and economic vulnerability are widespread issues in developing nations, where small and micro businesses are the primary job providers. Thus, fostering entrepreneurship not only boosts

productivity but also plays a vital role in tackling social underdevelopment and enhancing the living standards of individuals looking to generate employment opportunities [19].

Enterprises play a vital role as catalysts for social change and can help address socioeconomic issues such as poverty, marginalization, and inequality [20]. Removing barriers to inclusion is crucial in enabling disadvantaged communities to enter the workforce and access well-being and development opportunities with dignity. According to Olivares, Moreno, Olivares and Silva [6], entrepreneurship has emerged as a social and knowledge-based strategy in recent years, enhancing people's quality of life through self-employment ventures. Entrepreneurship not only serves as an avenue for economic advancement but also meets environmental needs and can result from experiences of exclusion, disillusionment, and disappointment.

The issue of the gender gap for trans individuals stems from the pervasive lack of visibility of trans identities, as discussions often revolve around a binary understanding of gender (man-woman). This binary framework shapes the way economic participation is measured, thereby imposing social expectations. Studies indicate that trans individuals face a complex array of vulnerabilities that impede their agency within an unsupportive economic climate [10]. Additionally, factors such as employment disparities, income inequality, wage gaps, and limited entrepreneurial opportunities further hinder their progress [10]. For instance, trans women experience greater socioeconomic barriers compared to cisgender women, while trans men encounter limitations on their earning potential due to societal perceptions of their gender identity. The intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including those based on ethnicity, physical ability, age, and socioeconomic status, exacerbates their vulnerability and social marginalization.

Two primary barriers are limiting the economic integration of transgender communities: external barriers, which encompass the challenges faced in gaining recognition in their environment, and internal barriers, which are the individual limitations hindering transgender individuals from entering the workforce [11]. This situation is exacerbated by prevailing gender stereotypes, where traits such as integrity, diligence, and cooperation are associated with femininity, and aggressiveness, competitiveness, and determination are linked to masculinity. This leaves transgender individuals at a disadvantage compared to their cisgender heterosexual peers, as neither set of qualities is fully acknowledged by society. The internal barriers, in particular, encompass self-image and one's perception of their gender identity, which can in turn impede their integration into professional networks. Overcoming these obstacles requires breaking free from the constraints of traditional gender roles [11].

Discrimination against transgender individuals in the workplace reinforces the hierarchy of certain bodies over others and perpetuates the marginalization of those deemed "different"[1]. By excluding transgender individuals from employment opportunities, we deny them access to the workforce and further marginalize them [21].

The prevalence of masculine dominance over the feminine reflects an inherent and subconscious shaping of gender, a dominance that influences sexualized bodies and their gender expression, often leading to exaggerated masculinity or femininity to fit into environments marked by symbolic violence. Trans individuals frequently have to navigate these spaces and adjust their presentation to be understood by others, often facing discrimination and symbolic violence in the process [22].

In 1975, Gayle Rubin proposed a theory regarding how sexuality serves as a framework for organizing and hierarchizing individuals within the societal structure [23]. Heterosexuality is established as the central norm from which social and productive activities are organized. Any behavior deviating from the norms of marriage, monogamy, and the reproductive purpose of sex is likely to face exclusion. Similarly, in 1993, Judith Butler [24] discussed the concept of a "matrix of heterosexual intelligibility" through which society, including partners, assumes a correlation between one's sexual biology and gender identity [23]. Individuals whose bodies do not align with this construct often experience rejection, discrimination, and segregation. The legitimacy of this hegemonic power, as well as its imposition on non-conforming bodies in professional settings, is asserted by the heterosexual norm and male dominance.

In the case of trans individuals in Mexico, there is limited data available on their rates of entrepreneurship. However, international literature suggests that the concept of entrepreneurship is often associated with traditionally masculine traits, despite the varying norms within the business world. Trans individuals tend to pursue entrepreneurial endeavors for similar reasons across different regions, with one motivation being the option of self-employment through sex work. While this is predominantly associated with trans women, other segments of the trans community also turn to this option due to limited access to formal employment and financial constraints. Many prefer this route due to its profitability [10]. For instance, in Vietnam, 20% of the trans population studied engaged in administrative work before transitioning to entrepreneurship due to discriminatory practices and a lack of support networks. The pursuit of independence in the professional sphere was driven by the desire for empowerment, a response to societal stigma, and a means of achieving personal fulfillment and reducing discrimination [14].

Numerous barriers to entrepreneurship are acknowledged, including inadequate financial

resources, a lack of social approval (especially from close support networks like family), limited technological expertise, insufficient self-determination, waning motivation, a dearth of knowledge about entrepreneurial prospects, and a lack of access to training for enhancing business skills. Prejudice, exclusion, and societal discrimination emerge as particularly significant obstacles. Embracing entrepreneurship may present itself as a viable pathway when other avenues are shut.

3 Analysis methodology

The research proposes an exploratory case study to gain insight into the entrepreneurship needs of individuals who identify as transgender. The study utilized a convenience and non-probability sampling method and administered a survey to 103 transgender individuals. The survey instrument was developed based on the Diversity and Inclusion study conducted by INEGI [25], the research by the Commission for Attention to Victims [5], and the report on Pride (PRIDE) from the International Labor Organization (ILO) [9]. Despite being conducted virtually through Google Forms, the survey was administered in person and directly with the participants.

The application period occurred between September and November 2022. The process took place in universities, meeting places of the trans community, and various civil associations such as SER Service Center, La Casita Unión Trans, Casa Arcoiris, and Comunidad Cultural de Tijuana LGBTI A.C. (COCUT). These organizations provide support to diverse communities. Additionally, a snowball method was employed to reach more people, recognizing that trans communities tend to be cautious in their interactions with outsiders due to safety and privacy concerns.

The study focused on individuals between 18 and 35 years old who identified as transgender and were residing in Mexico at the time of the survey. This age range was selected for two principal reasons. First, according to data from the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (2016), the life expectancy of a trans person in Latin America is approximately 35 years. Second, it was chosen due to age discrimination, as around the age of 35, companies in Mexico tend to exclude individuals from the workforce [26]. Given the scope of the study as a micro-study, a quantitative approach was chosen for data collection, the survey consists of 53 closed questions, divided into four sections: sociodemographic data, education, work experience, and entrepreneurial intention. Each section aimed to explore the impact of gender transition on various areas of the participants' lives, as well as determine whether they were interested in entrepreneurship and what tools were considered necessary.

4 Results

In the survey, 63% of the participants were between 18 and 23 years old, 24% were between 24 and 29 years old, and 10% were between 30 and 35 years old. In terms of education, 12% had completed high school, 53% had a high school education, 33% had a bachelor's degree, and 2% had completed postgraduate studies. About rectification of documents, 65% had not undergone this process, 6% had, 10% were in the process, and 19% chose not to respond.

Regarding work experience and discrimination, 32% of the participants had not yet entered the workforce, leading to a high incidence of "not applicable" responses. However, among those who had worked, 8% mentioned always facing obstacles in obtaining employment as a trans person, 18% frequently encountered difficulties, and 29% occasionally experienced discrimination. These results support existing literature that underscores discrimination as a significant barrier to job access and retention for trans individuals.

According to the findings, it was noted that there is a possibility that some individuals who were surveyed may have been involved in sex work but chose not to disclose this due to the associated stigma. This could have led to a bias in the results, potentially indicating a higher inclination towards entrepreneurship. Specifically, 86.4% of the participants reported having had prior opportunities to start a business, while 13.6% expressed otherwise.

Table 1. Previous entrepreneurship.

Previous entrepreneurship	Answers	Percentages
Yes	45	43.68%
No	58	56.31%
Total	103	100%

Source: Own.

In response to the question of whether they would be interested in entrepreneurship eventually, 86% of the individuals surveyed answered affirmatively, as detailed in Table 2. This demonstrates a strong interest in entrepreneurship within the trans community. For transgender individuals, entrepreneurship presents an opportunity to pursue professional aspirations that may not be feasible within the traditional job market, and to attain financial independence, thereby improving their socioeconomic circumstances. The entrepreneurial inclination among the trans community is striking when compared to the 22.5% entrepreneurial intent among self-employed individuals in Mexico as of June 2023 [27].

For transgender individuals, entrepreneurship is not solely about seeking financial opportunities, but also about seeking acknowledgment and the potential to achieve professional milestones that have

previously been inaccessible within the conventional job market, as noted by Chukkuny and Raj [14].

Table 2. Entrepreneurial intention

Entrepreneurial intention	Answers	Percentages
Yes	89	86%
No	4	4%
Does not apply	2	2%
Not interested	8	8%
Total	103	100%

Source: Own.

It is important to note that negative experiences significantly impact the willingness to pursue entrepreneurship again, a phenomenon not limited to trans individuals. However, trans people encounter even greater barriers to establishing and maintaining businesses, often facing challenges related to official documentation that does not align with their gender identity or expression. Although legislation has been introduced in Baja California to amend birth certificates, many agencies continue to refute and disregard these corrected documents, hindering access to the essential training and financial resources needed for entrepreneurship.

To gauge the level of discrimination perceived by the respondents, they were surveyed about their encounters when seeking employment and while in work settings. The findings are presented in Table 3. According to the data, 34.0% of the respondents indicated that the question was not applicable as they had not yet entered the workforce. Among those with work experience, 2.9% reported always experiencing discrimination, 12.6% stated facing it frequently, and 33.0% experienced it occasionally. Approximately 48.5% of respondents with work experience had encountered some form of discrimination at work. These results underscore the importance of tackling workplace discrimination and striving to establish more inclusive and discrimination-free work environments.

Table 3. Labor discrimination.

Discrimination in the work area	Answers	Percentage
Always	3	2.91%
Frequently	13	12.62%
Occasionally	34	33.00%
Never	18	17.47%
Does not apply	35	33.98%
Total	103	100%

Source: Own.

Findings from the analysis of responses regarding hiring experiences for trans people reveal significant insights. As it show in Table 4 out of the total sample, 49% reported encountering some form of discrimination during job applications due to their gender identity. Among this group, 3% reported consistent rejection, 33% reported frequent rejection,

and 13% reported occasional rejection. Conversely, 17% of the sample indicated that they had never experienced discrimination when applying for a job.

Notably, 34% of the sample noted that hiring discrimination did not apply to them, potentially due to not having applied for jobs for various reasons. While a significant portion of the sample experiences hiring discrimination, there is also a considerable group that has not yet sought employment or had the opportunity to do so.

Table 4. Discrimination in hiring.

Hiring discrimination	Answers	Percentage
Always	3	3%
Occasionally	34	33%
Frequently	13	13%
Never	18	17%
Does not apply	35	34%
Total	103	100%

Source: Own.

The comparative analysis of the results in Table 2 and Table 4 provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by trans individuals in securing employment and their inclination towards entrepreneurship. The data distribution indicates that individuals who demonstrate less interest in entrepreneurship, making up 20% of the sample, are more likely to have encountered significant discrimination in job hiring, accounting for 33% as per Table 4. Conversely, those who exhibit greater interest in entrepreneurship, constituting approximately 16% of the sample, are more likely to have never applied for a job previously, representing 34% according to Table 4.

These statistics hint at a potential correlation between perceived discrimination in the job market and a preference for pursuing independent income-generating opportunities among trans individuals. Furthermore, these findings could lend support to the feasibility of entrepreneurial initiatives, as prospective entrepreneurs primarily consist of young individuals entering the job market and play a significant role in the overall growth of the trans community.

The study inquired about the interest on receiving training, as is shown in Table 5, 85% are interested on it.

Table 5. Interested on receiving training.

	Answers	Percentage
Yes	88	85%
No	15	13%
Total	103	

Source: Own

The data gathered from inquiring about their preferred training areas provides important insights for shaping the business model's value proposition. As is shown in Table 6. Specifically, 46.6% indicate an interest in financial management training, 43.7%

seek guidance in strategic planning development, and 41.7% are interested in learning about marketing and advertising for their venture. This information helps in identifying the key focus areas for offering consulting services.

Table 6. Interested area of training.

Area of interest	Answers	Percentage
Strategic Planning Development	45	43.7%
Business Incubation	26	25%
Marketing and advertising	43	41%
Human resources	28	27%
Financial management training	48	46%
Sales and customer services	41	39%
Legal business	34	33%
Other areas	10	8%
Total	273	

Source: Own

The data suggests a strong demand for training in essential entrepreneurial skills, presenting a significant opportunity to offer specialized consulting services in this field. Additionally, the findings highlight areas where transgender individuals seek to enhance their expertise and overcome challenges, emphasizing the business model's potential to provide tailored training and advisory services to address these specific needs.

5 Discussion

The aforementioned context of discrimination against trans individuals may shed light on their preference for independent work over mainstream employment, as it provides them with more autonomy to explore their gender identity in inclusive and less hostile settings. According to Coll-Planas and Missé [11], trans individuals are not a monolithic group but consist of diverse subgroups facing unique challenges in employment and entrepreneurship, which are influenced by various factors. This understanding can help companies enhance their value proposition, which demonstrates that prior experience in traditional employment, or the lack thereof, can impact interest in pursuing entrepreneurial ventures.

Factors such as age, gender, and education play a significant role in developing different subgroups. For instance, research by Oosterhoff and Hoang [10] highlights that trans women often encounter greater economic challenges compared to trans men, as they frequently lack family support networks and are the primary breadwinners for their households. This disparity may stem from distinct needs among various subgroups, underscoring the importance of tailoring value propositions to accommodate these differences.

Furthermore, the gender pay gap affects trans individuals, with trans women experiencing a more pronounced disparity than cisgender women [10]. This discrepancy contributes to limited job opportunities and may influence a higher prevalence of self-employment among trans women. Another relevant aspect is how failure in entrepreneurship impacts the intention to try again, as seen in Table 2 those who have had negative experiences may be more reluctant to start a business again, which could be attributed to economic, emotional, and social motivations. For this reason, it highlights, the importance of creating supportive environments for those who want to try again.

Financial education is identified as a pressing need, with Table 6 highlighting the impact of external financial constraints on the endeavors of trans individuals, coupled with a lack of widespread financial knowledge. Consequently, a business proposal delivering training in this area could provide significant benefits for the trans community.

In summary, the reduction of discrimination is pivotal for enhancing the economic integration of trans individuals, necessitating a collaborative effort from civil society, businesses, and the government. Simplifying the document rectification process and fostering inclusion in educational and occupational settings are crucial steps in this endeavor. The concept of a social business model that offers tailored consulting services to address the business training and mentoring requirements of the trans community is not only viable but also essential, particularly if its primary goal is to eliminate discrimination and establish connections with other sectors to facilitate successful integration into the labor market.

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