

Hidden Stories | What innovators read to gain competitive advantage: Inside Pune library that's nourished minds of entrepreneurs for 17 years

With an annual membership fee of Rs 1,000, the Venture Center Library in Pune is popular with startup founders and budding business minds.

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This is the Venture Centre Library, tucked away in the premises of one of India's largest technology incubators, Venture Centre in Pune, which was set up by the National Chemical Laboratory in 2006 (Express photo)

The strange clock seems to think that it is always the right time to read. It occupies an entire wall and appears to glow as people stop to admire its curious features. The hours on the clock face are not numbers, letters or symbols but models of famous books. The Power of 2 sits at 2 o'clock, The Five Biggest Ideas in Science at 5 o'clock, and The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People at 7 o'clock.

The books hold a clue that the clock ticks in a space where a reader seeks out a certain kind of knowledge—about science, entrepreneurship, financial economics, product design, emerging science, business planning, inspiration and some Sudha Murthy (whose book is at 3 o'clock)—that will give them a competitive advantage.

This is the Venture Center Library, tucked away in the premises of one of India's largest technology incubators, Venture Center in [Pune](#), which was set up by the National Chemical Laboratory in 2006. A separate non-profit at present, the centre has supported more than 1,000 science-based startups since its inception. The courtyard is buzzing with innovators as they

think, innovate and plan the next big disruption. The library, which contains 3,500 books, as well as magazines and journals, offers a glimpse into what such entrepreneurs read as they navigate challenges in the life cycle of a product.

Words that matter

The cosy, warmly lit space overlooks the greenery and activity outside its glass windows and houses 21 sections—ranging from Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Startups to Motivation, Personality Development, Skill Development, Marketing, Management, Biographies, Popular Science, and Science and Technology. One rack is stocked with market research reports and studies that may be difficult to find. There are shelves with magazines that business leaders swear by—*Harvard Business Review*, *Forbes* and *Entrepreneur*, among other international and Indian titles.



As the clock on the wall reminds visitors, there is always some knowledge to be gained every hour. (Express photo)

Among the regulars is Kishor Harale, an accomplished scientist who is moving into entrepreneurship. “We get the latest magazines and a very good collection of books here,” he says.

Yet, while the library is popular with startup founders and budding business minds, it has escaped the attention of almost everyone else in Pune. This, despite the annual membership being an affordable Rs 1,000.

Dr V Premnath, Director, Venture Center, emphasises that the library is open to the public. “We are eager for more people, including children, to use the library. We do a lot of gaming-based learning for children and have a collection of games, such as Battleship and Othello,” he says. Premnath adds that a Marathi collection and a selection of books from the library are also available online.

Rohit Joshi, head, People and Community Development, at Venture Center, says, “While we have books on Intellectual Property, such as for software patents, which are generally not easily available, you also have many books on Mahatma Gandhi.”

He points to one of the sought-after books, *Angel Financing for Entrepreneurs*. “This is for any entrepreneur who is looking to raise angel investment,” he says. Leading the way to the reference section, he points out titles that are a little more expensive than the others.

Ideas and some fun

Yogesh Shelke, a med-tech entrepreneur, comes here every fortnight. “When you look at the mainstream library or resources present online, you find that these are not curated for, let’s say, entrepreneurship in the Indian context. If you were to look for books on ‘technology and Indian market’, you would find very limited literature out there. This is where the Venture Center Library becomes an important resource,” he says.

Events organised by the library have been rewarding experiences, he adds. These have included sessions on Artificial Intelligence, Intellectual Property and a Toastmaster series which trains people for better communication. “We organise a lot

of knowledge transfer events, where people from different startups come together and discuss issues, from research papers to idea formations. There are book clubs, author talks and technical and non-technical events. Recently, we started a journal club,” says Manisha Kharat, the librarian.

Botanist S Natesh, author of *Iconic Trees of India*, held a session on his books, and those who attended are still talking about the “walking mango tree in Gujarat” that he spoke about. The events calendar brings in all age groups. “A lot of children want to know a little more than what they are taught in school. We did these STEM workshops, where they learnt to use a 3D printer to build small models,” says Joshi.

As the clock on the wall reminds visitors, there is always some knowledge to be gained every hour.