

The Integral Role of Coaching and Aftercare in Maximizing Small Business Growth in Pretoria, South Africa

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Abstract

In the dynamic landscape of South African small business development, coaching and aftercare emerge as pivotal elements. This study scrutinises their integral role in catalyzing growth, particularly through the lens of value creation and the multiplier effect. Engaging ten Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) from Pretoria, the research employs a qualitative, interpretivist approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to capture nuanced insights. The findings reveal a triad of outcomes: high satisfaction with coaching methodologies, a positive shift in entrepreneurial behavior, and a tangible multiplier effect on financial and employment metrics. However, the need for content refinement and enhanced aftercare support is evident. This study underscores the imperative of a beneficiary-focused measurement framework and the strategic incorporation of aftercare to bolster the efficacy of coaching interventions.

Key words: Small Business Coaching; Entrepreneurial Aftercare; Business Growth Strategies; Situational Learning; SMME Development

1. Introduction and background

South Africa as a third-world country still has a great opportunity for entrepreneurial growth and expansion and like in many other third-world countries, those who chose the entrepreneurial route may be for survival purposes, especially in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic with many losing their livelihood (Companies and Intellectual Property Commission, 2022). Thus, getting into entrepreneurship with a lack of knowledge and skills to navigate the landscape is often found to be extremely challenging. However, there is no lack of assistance and support for emerging entrepreneurs, with one such assistance coming in the form of customised entrepreneur coaching programmes (International Coaching Federation, 2019). Janse van Rensburg, (2013) affirms that the benefits of such coaching include fostering acceptable entrepreneurial behaviour, enriching business management etiquette, and reinforcing positive decision-making attitudes.

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According to Alsalamah and Callinan, (2021), small business coaching is not only a driving force, it is a useful program that focuses on iterative problem-solving pathways for maximising decision-making aptitude of emerging entrepreneurs while fostering collaborative learning. However, despite the well-known benefits of entrepreneurial coaching, it is not without its challenges; commonly cited as lack of national bias towards small business coaching, poor coaching architecture in terms of infrastructure, budgets, that negatively affect programme impact measurement (Ganesh, Bozas, Subban and Munapo, 2015), the absence of a shared national vision to guide the small business coaching profession (Bozer and Jones, 2018), an acute shortage of seasoned small business coaches (Schutte, 2019) as well as the failure of small firms to fully appreciate the value of coaching (Kotte, Diermann, Rosing, and Möller, 2021).

Coaching is a goal-directed exercise whose main objective is to enhance performance and accelerate the growth journeys of small firms. The practice of coaching is designed in such a way that a coachee rides on the wings of a coach's wealthy of expertise, in extracting the knowledge buried within the coachee struggling to find its way out. This knowledge reservoir places the coachee in a formidable position to drive the business on a high growth trajectory.

Many small firms are optioning for coaching because it unlocks highly personalized and bi-directional learning experiences. In its ideal form, coaching assists entrepreneurs not only in reflecting on the journey travelled but also in crafting uncommon and practical solutions to real problems affecting small firms. By its nature, entrepreneurship is an emotionally draining and stressful experience which requires a different mindset for one to succeed. The 'entrepreneurial riddle' becomes more complex and tricky for a novice or inexperienced start-up, placed in a formidable position to manage stress, and work long hours under pressure while navigating through equally high levels of uncertainty and complexities.

In addition, the entrepreneurship assignment is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional calling that requires the entrepreneur to wear several hats simultaneously, for example, whilst he plays a managing director role, the entrepreneur is also under pressure to provide visionary leadership to the business (Mvelase, 2019). In light of this view, Neneh, (2012) highlights that building an entrepreneur's growth mindset allows him or her to generate novel solutions thus helping to keep the business afloat, especially in the face of an ever-evolving operating climate. This also helps the entrepreneur to unlearn traditional management styles thereby minimizing new business failure rates.

However, despite its well-known benefits, the coaching field especially at the small business level is still plugged by a plethora of fragilities and pitfalls. Commonly cited challenges include an acute shortage of seasoned small business coaches (Devine, Meyers and Houssemand, 2013), the failure by small firms to fully appreciate the value of coaching (Kotte *et al.*, 2021), the absence of a shared national vision to guide the small business coaching profession (Bozer and Jones, 2018), the lack of national bias towards small business coaching, poor coaching architecture in terms of infrastructure, budgets, and programme impact measurement tools (Audet and Couteret, 2012). Against this backdrop, this study investigated the impact of small business coaching programme not only on the entrepreneurial pedigree of budding entrepreneurs but also on the viability of their businesses. Put differently, this study sought to examine the efficacy of the coaching interventions directed at owners of small firms based in Pretoria. The study further sought to ascertain whether the various coaching engagements resulted in meaningful improvements in the entrepreneurial pedigree of beneficiaries as well as their businesses.

The article is outlined as follows: an outline and discussion of the study site and the methodology selected for this study is provided in the next section. The theoretical framework is discussed immediately

thereafter, while review of appropriate literature is offered in the section to follow. The article discusses the results before offering an analysis of the results and the conclusion in the next sections, respectively.

2. Study Site and Methodology

The study evaluated the efficacy of the various coaching interventions that were administered by private coaching firms around the City of Pretoria between 2020 and 2022, which is under the Gauteng Province. Most of the beneficiaries of the coaching intervention operate within the Central Business District (CBD) of the city. Pretoria serves as the administrative capital city of SA, located approximately 56 km northeast of the country's commercial hub, Johannesburg.

This made the task of tracing them easier and cheaper. As far as it can be remembered, there is no record or report of any sort to demonstrate that such an evaluation ever took place in Pretoria hence this study sought to bridge this information gap (Brinkley and Roux, 2018; Audet and Couteret, 2012). Sadly, this unfolding reality contradicts the globally held practice of making a post-coaching impact evaluation an integral part of the (De Meuse, Dai and Lee, 2009).

The study relies on the qualitative approach as the two main reasons (1) it allowed the beneficiaries of coaching sessions to share their perspectives using their own words and insights (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). and (2) it also allowed for a semi-structured probe into the impact of coaching sessions using analytical reasoning which in turn enriched the understanding of the subject matter (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). This research strictly made use of the inputs collected from people with real businesses and real challenges such that it rendered the collection of quantitative measurements unnecessary since this is a qualitative study (Saunders *et al.*, 2019). Thus, purposive sampling of a relatively smaller population group of 10 participants was adequate to collect data to the saturation point. According to Burns, Bally, Burles, Holtlander, and Peacock, (2022), the number of participants for a qualitative study cannot be prescribed since the amount of participants must be guided by the phenomenon being studied, on condition that they are enough to guarantee both representability and manageability, especially in the face of budgetary and time constraints.

Semi-structured interviews were employed to collect data as scheduled, since they are popular for generating large volumes of data in a small space of time while allowing for flexibility and two-way interaction between the researcher and the participants (Islam and Aldaihani, 2022). Ten (10) participants who benefited from the coaching intervention were preferred as they were deemed to possess valuable insights and real-life testimonies on the impact of coaching on their personal development and that of their firms, and context-specific information about a phenomenon of interest is required to uncover deep-seated perspectives about the subject matter (Braun, Clarke and Weate, 2016).

The questions were subdivided into four main sections, namely, (1) questions that focused on the demographic profile of the participants. In that regard, six demographic variables were used (gender, age, experience, duration of coaching, type of coaching and professional qualifications). (2) The second batch of questions were linked to the first sub-research question. This batch contained 4 sets of questions which focused mainly on the reactions of the participants regarding the coaching design. (3) The third set of 5 questions focused on the notable improvements that were noted during the post-coaching period and (4) the fourth set of 5 questions focused on the impact of the coaching programme on the participant's personal growth as well as their firms.

3. The Situational Learning Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by the Situational Learning Theory, which has its origins in the 1990s, a brainchild of Lave and Wenger, (1991). The theory holds that for the learning effort to bear fruits, there is a need to ensure that the learning context takes to heart the learner's unique social circumstances (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Most importantly, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, (2014) assert that the theory is built on the assertion that learning can only be a fulfilling and rewarding experience if it is situation-specific, highly personalized, and manifestly collaborative. In other words, a novel learning effort is a function of bi-directional interactions and mutually reinforcing interactions between the coach and the coachee. In agreement, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, (2014) insist that meaningful learning is realized if it is premised on ideals of collaboration, real-life conversations, and mutual respect.

Tan and Saucerman, (2017) claim that by its nature, knowledge is not just abstractly transmitted, rather, its currency flows via the veins of a learner's special circumstances and cultural biases. Simply put, learning can only be impactful in an atmosphere of open and honest engagement and personalized feedback. The implication of this theory to the study is that it implores coaches to place the social circumstances of the coachee at the centre of the coaching experience - implying that every coach has the moral duty to ensure that the design, methodology and content of a coaching programme must be designed with the social circumstances of the coachee in mind.

The efficacy of a coaching intervention is both qualitatively and quantitatively measurable, and according to Zielińska-Tomczak, Przymuszała, Tomczak, Krzyśko-Pieczka, Marciniak, and Cerbin-Koczorowska, (2021), the measurement function of the coaching intervention remains one of the mainstays of the coaching cycle. Zielińska-Tomczak *et al.*, (2021) argue that the logic behind the measurement function is simple, coaching does not come cheap, rather, it is a costly enterprise, implying that a growth-oriented coaching firm must prioritize or invest in coaching projects that stand to yield better returns on investment (ROI) (Lawrence and Whyte, 2013; Weaver, 2015). On the flip side, Weaver, (2015) implores coaches to choose coaching solutions that offer value for money. The idea is to choose coaching options that create, capture, and deliver maximum value and impact (Wexley and Baldwin, 1986). In concurrence, Weaver, (2015) claims that the net impact of a coaching intervention can only be fully realized or recouped if it is measured using the right metrics, which, according to De Meuse, Dai and Lee, (2009) and Khalid & Islam, (2020) may include but are not limited to, improved productivity, customer satisfaction, and increased shareholder's value, organizational strength and quality, as well as the ultimate realization of a return on investment (ROI) of nearly six times what it cost for the coaching intervention. In light of this, the question one must constantly ask should be; what do I stand to gain from this coaching intervention?

3.1 Understanding the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

There are several ways to measure or evaluate the efficacy of a coaching session or intervention, such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), ROI as already mentioned, 360-feedback and many more according to Rhee, (2023). One commonly applied method is the Kirkpatrick evaluation model (Williams, 2021; Miller, 2018). The use of the method is wide across the globe, and it is considered one of the most comprehensive and simple-to-use evaluation models (Reio, Rocco, Smith, and Chang, 2017), besides, gauging the responsiveness and engagement value of the coaching intervention, the model also measures its desired or intended outcomes (Williams, 2021; Wexley and Baldwin, 1986). According to Williams, (2021) and Welke, LeBlanc, Savoldelli, Joo, Chandra, Crabtree, and Naik, (2009), in its ideal state, the model seeks to achieve two broad aims to establish: (1) whether the coaching sessions resulted in a change of behaviour and firm performance and (2) whether the sessions led to the embedment of desired values

and norms. At the heart of the model are four dimensions of evaluation: Reaction, Learning, Behaviour, and Results (Welke et al., 2009). Each successive level of the model represents a more precise measure of the effectiveness of a coaching programme.

The figure 2.1 below illustrates the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model Adapted from (Williams, 2021).

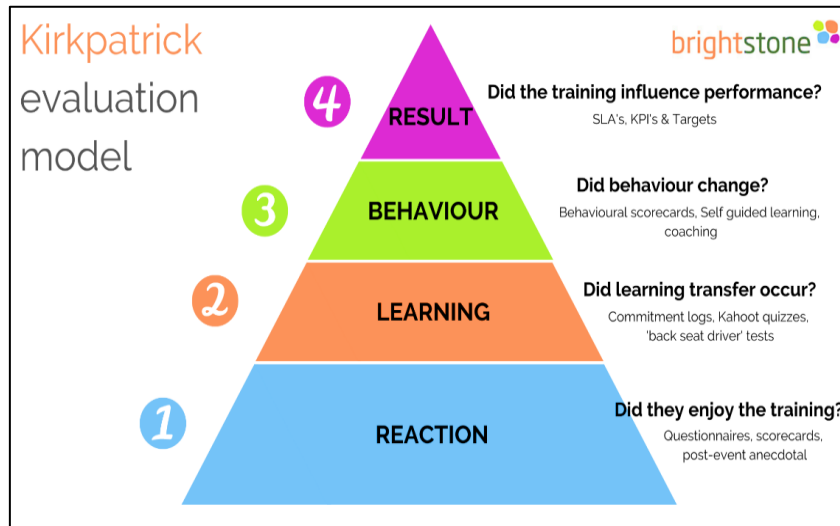


Figure 2.1: Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model

3.1.1 Reaction dimension

The reaction dimension schedules an opportunity for beneficiaries to gauge whether the coaching exercise was worth it, or whether it was conducted using the right mix of engagement tools (Welke *et al.*, 2009). Regarding outcomes, Wexley and Baldwin (1986) states that the idea remains constant, being to determine whether the coaching session was done in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Lastly, it also assesses whether the coaching content was appropriate or tailored to the unique needs of each beneficiary outcomes (Wexley and Baldwin, 1986). In other words, it solicits beneficiaries' level of satisfaction with the coaching session.

3.1.2 Learning dimension

According to Wexley and Baldwin, (1986), the learning dimension is founded on the notion that an excellently executed coaching encounter must effectively enrich and stimulate the participant's cognitive and reflective thinking. Proponents of this view like Welke *et al.*, (2009) insist that coaching is primarily designed to equip participants with new perspectives, new skills and new insights. This explains why Weaver, (2015) views coaching as a mind game. The overarching goal of every coaching encounter is not only to reset or recalibrate the mind but also to change one's worldview and in the process disengage him or her from the old way of doing things (Zielińska-Tomczak *et al.*, 2021). In other words, coaching plays a catalytic role in helping participants unlearn old ways whilst simultaneously helping them to learn new ways and experiences.

3.1.3 Behavioural dimension

A powerful coaching encounter must not only strive to recalibrate and update existing knowledge settings and convictions but also strive to embed new cultures, norms, rituals and habits with the view place the behavioural template of participants on a reset mode (Zielińska-Tomczak *et al.*, 2021). The behavioural dimension holds that for a coaching encounter to yield prolific results, a coaching solution must lead to

new behavioural experiences (Tracey, Hinkin, Tannenbaum, and Mathieu, 2001); van Coller-Peter and Cronjé, 2020). The ultimate is to usher in a new set of business management ethics and norms and to inculcate ideals of professionalism, diligence, service excellence and ethical trading in the minds of entrepreneurs (Velada and Caetano, 2007). The focus of the behavioural dimension is therefore to gauge whether the beneficiaries applied newly acquired knowledge, skills, insights and attitudes in a real business context to catalyze the growth journeys of their businesses (Van Heukelom, Begaz and Treat, 2010). In a nutshell, the dimension underscores the importance of applying what was learnt during the coaching encounter Alsalamah and Callinan, (2021).

3.1.4 Results dimension

The old-aged paradigm “Results do not lie” implies two things to the coaching field, that is, (1) results remain the sure and most accurate way to measure the efficacy of a coaching encounter and (2) results communicate the true and authentic value of any encounter (Leleko, 2021, pp. 23-25). This explains why the results dimension is regarded as one of the most verifiable indicators of success of a coaching encounter (Lawrence and Whyte, 2013). In short, the result dimension measures the degree to which the coaching intervention achieved its intended objectives or desired impacts (Alsalamah and Callinan, 2021). The dimension strives to attain the best fit between the goals of the coaching intervention and its intended outcomes closely related to the rapport built between the coach and coachee (Audet and Couteret, 2012). Any mismatch between the two variables is a fair reflection of failure. A coaching encounter is deemed a flop if it fails to generate sufficient change in behaviour and attitude to trigger notable improvements either in a participant’s thinking, problem-solving and decision-making capabilities or improvements in the growth of a participant’s business (Boysen, 2018).

3.2 An overview of small business coaching

Small business coaching has long been identified as a powerful weapon to advance the objectives of struggling small firms, especially in the face of increased global uncertainty. Boyatzis, Smith and Oosten (2019) make two vital touchpoints, that is, (1) that coaching is a recognizable catalytic force that inspires personal growth and resilience and (2) that an excellent coaching encounter must be based on measurable objectives and targets. The game-changing effect of business coaching is fully acknowledged in literature. Thus, Khalid and Islam, (2020) assert that the current wave of business failure which was largely triggered by Covid-19 induced vulnerabilities can only be reversed if those at the helm enlist the support of seasoned business coaches.

A novel business coaching programme seeks to systematically embed a resilient winning mindset for desired change, implying that coaching is primarily a goal-directed experience (International Coaching Federation, 2019). In support of this view, the International Coaching Federation, (2023) a global organization that advocates for the professionalization of the coaching profession describes small business coaching as a mind-stimulating and creative effort designed to optimally unleash the business management potential of small firms for competitive advantage. In concurrence, Audet and Couteret, (2012) highlight that in its ideal state, small business coaching can steer entrepreneurs on the path of matchless creativity, productivity and leadership aptitude thus helping them to stay ahead of the curve and compete effectively on the global stage.

3.2.1 The concept of aftercare and its relevance

Small firms are vulnerable to high attrition rates. Currently, the attrition rate of start-ups within the first 5 years of their formation is estimated to be high, meaning that only a handful survive the harsh territories

of entrepreneurship (van Coller-Peter and Cronjé, 2020). Since the advent of Covid-19, several small firms plunged into a vicious cycle of stagnation and retardation. As a result, many entrepreneurs scrambled to find ways to keep their distressed firms afloat. Coaching became one of the vital cogs entrepreneurs used to keep their businesses on top of the game (van Coller-Peter and Cronjé, 2020).

Most importantly, new evidence shows that coaching sessions tailored for small firms do not only reverse their downward spiral but also place them in a good space to increase their chances of surviving the existential threats posed by an increasingly uncertain and turbulent environment (Grant, 2012). In other words, small business coaching is globally regarded as one of the panaceas of high small firm failure rates. Thus, suggesting that the winning trajectory and benefits enjoyed by small firms already enrolled in coaching programmes, can only expand even further in aftercare programmes.

3.2.2 Coaching effectiveness and aftercare impact

Coaching is a widely recognized solution for entrepreneurs who are struggling with little success to turn around their ailing firms (Boysen, 2018). Studies have shown that owners of distressed firms who enroll for continual coaching sessions often place themselves in a formidable position to revive their waning fortunes. There is a strong belief that coaching is what progressive entrepreneurs need to insulate their firms from the risk of business failure.

According to Crompton and Smyrnios, (2011), up to fifty (50) per cent of firms' growth was attributed to business coaching by seventy nine (79) per cent of the entrepreneurs in their study. And any form of growth does require time and effort, the willingness to change which Audet and Couteret, (2012) found to be a success factor due for the entrepreneur, supported by (Szilvia, Slavic and Berber, 2019) in their assertion that private coaching firms play a major role in inculcating a winning attitude and mindset in entrepreneurs. Thus, van Coller-Peter and Cronjé, (2020) argues in support of this view that coaching is effective in assisting entrepreneurs further develop thinking capabilities, that is to think outside the box in solving their problems.

Terblanche, Jock and Ungerer, (2019) suggests the need to lay the foundation and recalibrate existing coaching solutions to improve the value-creation effect derived from the coaching firm's capabilities, resources and knowledge by continually evaluating the coaching efficacy.

One of the major fallacies of existing perspectives on small business coaching is to drive an erroneous narrative that coaching alone without being backed by other equally critical interventions like mentorship, training, and funding support can catalyze a small business growth journey. The problem with this narrative is that it extensively focuses on the entrepreneur alone whilst it manifestly ignores the centrality of employees in the business growth equation. In contrast, this study considers a blended approach to coaching in which other equally vital elements of the capacity-building mix are brought to bear.

4. The impact of coaching and aftercare support on small businesses

The impact of small business coaching on small business owners using metrics such as personal and firm growth remains at the core. Whilst it is obvious that those who benefited from the intervention had different experiences, the most important finding is that the majority widely acknowledged its positive bearing not only on their firms but also on their personal development. In other words, there is consensus regarding the net impact of the intervention on their personal and business journeys.

It is important to note that from a methodological standpoint, the efficacy of coaching intervention was measured using five metrics or proxies, namely, (1) participants' reactions, (2) learning experiences, (3) transformative effect on behaviour (4) improvement in personal growth and (5) business growth. These

proxies were borrowed from Kirkpatrick’s Evaluation Model (Williams, 2021). What this means is that every coaching encounter must pass the transformative effect test. In the case of this study, four major insights that resonate with the dominant views in literature emerged.

4.1 The importance of coaching and aftercare in business growth

The study outcomes highlighted the dissatisfaction of many coaching beneficiaries citing the lack of coaching aftercare programmes. This discovery highlights the impediment that such a lack has on the quantitative measurement of the coaching intervention output. Thus the establishment of post-coaching programmes as an added support service would ensure that goals set at the beginning of the coaching intervention bear the results intended and can thus be maintained. The measurement of efficacy in this case was premised on two proxies, namely, improvement in personal growth and improvement in business performance.

4.1.1 Beneficiary satisfaction with coaching design and methodology

Saadaoui and Affect, (2015) assert that the nature and quality of the coaching design are strongly correlated with the quality of the coaching outcomes, implying the need for coaching firms to repurpose energies towards a systemic and holistic review in maximizing the novelty and efficacy of their coaching designs. In this case, the coaching design was measured using four metrics, namely, the level of satisfaction with the coaching duration or/schedule, content deployment, methodology and tools used which also included the degree to which technology was used in the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR). When asked to ascertain whether they were satisfied with the four metrics, a mixed reaction was recorded meaning that whilst others expressed total satisfaction with the design, others expressed a different view.

Table 1.1 below shows the majority of the participants were confident in the coaching design and the flexibility of their coaching sessions as this accommodated their demanding schedules. Online coaching was also rated highly probably because beneficiaries were receiving tips and clues in the comfort of their homes or offices. A lot of the participants preferred to interact with their coaches in the afternoon, especially after 4 O’clock or on Saturdays. This gave them ample opportunity to focus on other equally pressing tasks. There is an obvious mixed reaction with regards to the coaching content deployment and how much of technology was used in facilitating these sessions. In the essence of staying relevant in the 4IR, indicating that the coaches must keep up with the ever-changing technological advancements if they are to stay relevant and attract a variety of clientele.

Regarding the type or nature of the coaching programme attended, the most common programme was the coaching and mentorship type which was linked to eight out of 10 (80 per cent) participants whilst the least popular was the one-on-one private coaching session which was linked to only two out of 10 (20 per cent) of the participants. From a methodological standpoint, role plays, problem-solving and demonstrations emerged as the most popular whilst collaborative interactions to address real-business puzzles were the fourth most popular tool.

Table 1.1: Learning Experience Ranking

Ranking factor	Lowly ranked	Modestly ranked	Highly ranked
Quality of the coaching design			
Quality of content deployed			
Suitability of the tools in the 4 th IR era			
Flexibility of the duration and schedule			

Source: Authors’ own

Based on the Table 1.2, it is self-evident that the majority of participants had zero confidence in the quality of the content implying the need to benchmark the current content with best practice to elevate its quality leverage. Similarly, the methodology used was deemed by many to be unsuitable, making it also a candidate for future review. In contrast, high confidence levels were recorded in areas such as (1) the appropriateness of tools used, (2) the suitability of methodology employed (3) levels of engagement and rapport. Meanwhile, the value-for-money effect of the intervention was found to be modest, highlighting the need to ensure future interventions guarantee high returns on investment.

Table 1.2: Coaching Programme Ranking

Ranking factor	Lowly ranked	Modestly ranked	Highly ranked
Quality of content			
Appropriateness of tools			
Suitability of methodology			
Engagement and rapport			
Value for money			

Source: Authors' own

4.1.2 Transformative influence of coaching on entrepreneurial behavior

The doctrine of “transformative effect” holds that coaching can only be effective if it directly or indirectly triggers changes in behaviour and attitude (Kochanowski, Seifert and Yukl, 2010). This implies that any coaching programme that fails to disengage participants from the “old order” with the view to lead them into the “new order” is lowly rated or regarded whilst those programmes that catalyze behavioural transformation are highly rated and regarded by the market. To this end, participants were asked whether the coaching sessions resulted in noticeable changes in their behaviour, attitude, and ability to apply acquired knowledge.

The transformative effect of the coaching intervention was roundly affirmed by the majority of participants. For example, 6 out of 10 admitted that the coaching had a positive influence on their attitude toward business growth, whilst 7 out of 10 conceded a shift in their behaviours towards cash management (as illustrated in Table 1.3). However, 3 out of 10 of the participants were upbeat that the coaching sessions enhanced their ability to apply newly acquired knowledge and insights in real-life situations.

Table 1.3: Transformative Effects Ranking

Ranking factor	Lowly ranked	Modestly ranked	Highly ranked
Adjustment of behaviour			
Adjustment of attitude			
Changes in knowledge application			

Source: Authors' own

The intervention’s transformative effect was strongly felt in areas such as behaviour and attitude meaning that the intervention had a positive influence on the entrepreneurial behaviour and attitude of the majority of the participants. On the contrary, the majority felt that the coaching intervention was less impactful in the application of the knowledge imparted, many stating that the programmes they were enrolled in lacked feedback. Put simply, the programmes they enrolled had no after-tasks feedback mechanisms, thus lacking

in the evaluation of their implementation, as, perhaps, more time is required to monitor and re-evaluate to ensure the knowledge is applied accordingly.

4.1.3 The multiplier effect on entrepreneurial pedigree

Concerning whether the coaching resulted in improvement in personal growth, mixed reactions were obtained. This is so because the participants were coached under different atmospheres and conditions. From a problem-solving perspective, a sizeable number of participants (6 out of 10) noted significant improvements whilst 3 out of 10 noted moderate improvements. One participant was indifferent. On the other hand, only 5 out of 10 noted a positive shift in their decision-making acumen, whilst the other half felt the coaching sessions slightly enhanced their decision-making pedigree. Mostly, a considerable number of the participants (8 out of 10) conceded that the coaching sessions had a multiplier effect on their entrepreneurial pedigree, meaning that the sessions leveraged their opportunity-spotting and risk-taking capability.

The results below show that the interventions were highly ranked in mission-critical areas, that is, areas that have a direct correlation with either a participant’s personal growth or his or her business growth, as can be seen in Table 1.4. Participants experienced noticeable improvements in their decision-making and problem-solving acumen including their entrepreneurial pedigree.

Table 1.4: Personal Growth Ranking

Ranking factor	Lowly ranked	Modestly ranked	Highly ranked
Decision-making acumen			
Entrepreneurial pedigree			
Problem-solving acumen			

Source: Authors’ own

4.1.4 The multiplier effect on revenue, assets, and job creation

Business growth is not a once-off event. Rather, it is a systemic and multifaceted effort that is driven by a composite of underlying factors. However, coaching is globally regarded as one of the catalysts for business growth. In light of this, participants when asked whether the coaching sessions led to notable improvements in the growth of their businesses, their responses were mixed. Whilst the majority (6 out of 10) confirmed its positive effect on revenue growth, at least 4 out of 10 took a pessimistic view meaning that they did not witness a meaningful improvement in the growth of their revenues.

A handful of participants also noted a marked improvement in the margins after the sessions signifying that the coaching sessions’ contribution to margins was insignificant. However, on a positive note, the majority of participants recorded a significant improvement in job growth meaning that the size of their workforce increased during the post-coaching period. Another positive story was recorded in the asset side of the business where the majority of participants (9 out of 10) acknowledged that the sessions had a multiplier effect on their asset account. Similarly, the order book of 8 out of 10 participants’ businesses reportedly climbed up, perhaps signifying a positive correlation between the two (see Table 1.5). These indicators show that the attitude of the entrepreneurs shifted in the positive direction, indicating increased confidence in the prospects of the business.

Table 1.5: Business Growth Ranking

Ranking factor	Lowly ranked	Modestly ranked	Highly ranked
Revenue growth			
Order book growth			
Margin growth			
Asset growth			
Employee growth			

Source: Authors' own

The highest multiplier effect was recorded in (1) employee growth (where participants claimed that the sessions resulted in them hiring more employees to cater for additional demand), (2) asset growth, where participants asserted that the post-coaching period witnessed a marked increase in asset growth, (3) order book growth, where the post coaching era was accompanied by a sudden surge in the number of orders, however (4) Lower Margins were experienced, and lastly in (5) moderate revenue growth as a result of steady increasing demand on their services.

It is self-evident that the majority of small business owners were not explicitly aware that coaching is a goal and result-oriented adventure the underlying goal of every coachee should be to recoup better returns from every rand invested. Thus, requiring the need to track and report the realisable changes triggered by the coaching intervention, the need to evaluate the transformative effect or its effect on the behaviour and attitudes of beneficiaries and lastly the need to gauge its impact on the participants' personal growth and on the growth of their firms.

A close analysis of the participants' opinions regarding the above, reveals three important touchpoints, namely that the participant expressed divergent views regarding the efficacy of the methodology and content used, while the majority of the participants lowly rated the quality of the coaching intervention. Mixed responses were reported concerning the transformative effect of the coaching intervention although a slight majority gave the coaching intervention a thumbs-up.

And regarding the impact on personal and firm growth, positive impacts were reported on problem-solving acumen, entrepreneurial pedigree, revenue growth and order book growth whilst modest impact was registered on decision-making aptitude and job growth. Meanwhile, the impact on margins was lowly rated. However, this study strongly argues that to achieve tremendous results, concerted efforts should be made to measure the value creation effect or multiplier effect of coaching interventions.

5. Discussion

Besides, constructing a contextual meaning to the varied experiences and opinions of different participants, attempts are also made to examine the implications of these reflections on beneficiaries, their businesses and on the global coaching movement in general. To recap, this study sought to examine the efficacy of the coaching interventions directed at owners of small firms based in Pretoria. The study further sought to ascertain whether the various coaching engagements resulted in meaningful improvements in the entrepreneurial pedigree of beneficiaries as well as their businesses. In other words, the measurement of efficacy in this case was premised on two proxies, namely, improvement in personal growth and improvement in business performance.

The above findings are clear on one thing. That coaching must be sought after with purpose in mind. This purpose must be clearly defined and explicitly communicated. By implication, the findings reiterate the

need to constantly evaluate coaching projects to attain the best fit between their intended purpose and their realized outcomes. Any mismatch between the two means its propelling effect and meaning is lost. This led International Coaching Federation, (2019) to assert and affirm that coaching is primarily a goal and result-oriented effort. From a small business standpoint, the overarching goal of coaching is to develop and sharpen the entrepreneurial acumen of small business owners to leverage their business management aptitude for a competitive advantage. In light of this, three important insights emerged from this study that is, (1) the need to take an investment approach to coaching, (2) the need to ensure every coaching encounter is goal and result-directed, and (3) the need to measure the efficacy of coaching projects using the right mix of metrics and tools is paramount in order to continually improve, evolve and stay technologically apt.

At the core of this study was the need to determine whether the coaching intervention achieved its desired impact or was worth the effort and cost. The coaching intervention resulted in modest payback gains or reasonable ROI yields implying that those who acknowledged its multiplier effect and long-term benefit were in the minority. In other words, the overall efficacy of the intervention was modestly ranked. The quality of the methodology employed and the relevance of the content used did not meet the desired standard. The coaching content covered a wide range of topics, chief of which included inter-alia entrepreneurial resilience, decision-making aptitude, problem-solving acumen, financial intelligence, risk-taking mindset and deal-making and business-to-business networking. The aim was to embed ideals of self-drive, innovative and creative thinking, leadership adeptness and decision-making astuteness in the participants.

The absence of summative and reflective assessments to gauge the knowledge application proficiencies of the participants was cited as lacking and therefore the missing link. Notable behavioural and attitudinal changes during the post-coaching period were observed more in some areas than others. In others words, the transformative effect of the intervention was profound in certain learning areas whilst other learning areas reported zero transformation effect, perhaps meaning that the knowledge application propensity of the participants was not as developed as it should. This brings this study to the conclusion that the absence of a systemic aftercare support undermined the efficacy of the intervention.

To this end, a beneficiary-focused measurement framework that recognizes aftercare support to enhance the coaching methodologies, trigger entrepreneurial behaviour shift and the attainment of multiplier effect on financial and employment metrics is an innovation option. Betto and Garengo (2023) assert that effective coaching ought to prioritise coachee engagement and satisfaction, in what they framed as coachee-centric approaches. As Aker et al., (2022) argue, aftercare interventions are crucial to sustaining behavioural changes and enhance self-sufficiency to imbue entrepreneurial behavioural change and improve decision-making. For Azizi et al., (2023), such a framework should include metrics for assessing behavioral change, satisfaction, financial impacts and multiplier effects on business growth anchored on employment and financial metrics. To this end, the study reaffirmed the centrality of making impact measurement one of the key ingredients of an impactful coaching recipe. The study also focused on the need for private coaching firms to infuse digital transformation into the coaching menu as part of a grand plan to reposition small firms for the 4IR era. Sadly, the current regime of coaching programmes lacks a strong digital focus.

6. Conclusion

Digital transformation and content relevance must be the centre of independent coaches and coaching

firms and thus their most key performance areas, notwithstanding the post-coaching programmes in support of the entrepreneurial fraternity, more relevant now in the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, cognizant of the current generation of entrepreneurs and their technological prowess. In line with the proverbial, “what you measure is what you get”, private coaching firms are encouraged to benchmark their methodologies and content with global practice to improve the appeal and impact of their interactions, make both mid-term and end-term impact assessments the mainstay of their coaching programmes.

A tracer study to track and measure the performance or growth of firms owned by coaching clients should form part of that assessment. The firms are encouraged to continually conduct systemic and holistic reviews of their coaching content to improve its relevance and responsiveness, especially in the face of an ever-evolving skill landscape. Private coaching firms should ensure that the relationship between them and the coachees does not end on graduation day but rather should be of a continuous and systemic nature to encourage continuous improvement and lifelong learning. Methodologies that recoup better engagement value and high problem-solving effect are highly advisable to improve the quality of outputs and outcomes.

Summative and reflective assessment should be a natural part of the coaching cycle to gauge the participants’ aptitude and knowledge about a subject matter of interest, to ensure each coaching intervention is grounded on clearly defined goals and targets to facilitate ease of measurement, thus ensuring the continual growth of the coachee. Follow-up and support programmes should form an integral part of the coaching intervention to maximize the knowledge application proficiencies of coaches. The post-coaching period of continual engagement will ensure greater transformative effects are evolutionary in the personal and business growth factors of the coachees. The development and utilization of a coaching methodology based on a beneficiary-focused measurement framework stand out as an innovative approach to maximising entrepreneurial transformation.

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