# The Critical Success Factors for Entrepreneurial Coaching in South African Business Incubators

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**Abstract**. This study examines the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in South African business incubators through a qualitative method that involved interviewing 32 participants. The research aimed to identify the factors contributing to successful coaching interventions between coaches and entrepreneurs. The key findings include the importance of demographics, diversity, and cultural intelligence, coaching relational aspects, the coach's personal attributes, the entrepreneur's characteristics, the coach's competence, and coaching elements. The study highlights the need for coaches to possess emotional intelligence, empathy, and a cultural understanding of their coachees. Additionally, the research underscores the significance of coaching programs and methods tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of the entrepreneurs being coached. The study's findings have significant implications for coaching practitioners and programme developers who work with entrepreneurs in South Africa, and it underscores the need for a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to coaching and mentoring in the context of South African business incubators.

**Keywords**: Coaching; Critical success factors; Entrepreneurial coaching; Business incubators; South Africa.

**Abstrak**. *Penelitian ini mengkaji faktor penentu keberhasilan pembinaan kewirausahaan dalam inkubator bisnis di Afrika Selatan melalui metode kualitatif yang melibatkan 32 peserta melalui wawancara. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap keberhasilan intervensi pembinaan antara pembina dan pengusaha. Temuan utama penelitian ini mencakup pentingnya demografi, keragaman, kecerdasan budaya, aspek relasional pembinaan, atribut pribadi pembina, karakteristik wirausaha, kompetensi pembina, dan unsur-unsur pembinaan. Penelitian ini menekankan perlunya para pembina memiliki kecerdasan emosional, empati, dan pemahaman budaya terhadap orang yang dibinanya. Selain itu, penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya program dan metode pembinaan yang disesuaikan dengan kebutuhan dan karakteristik unik wirausahawan yang dibina. Temuan dalam penelitian ini mempunyai implikasi yang signifikan bagi para praktisi dalam program pembinaan dan pengembangan yang bekerja dengan pengusaha-pengusaha di Afrika Selatan. Temuan penelitian ini juga menggarisbawahi perlunya pendekatan yang*

*berbeda dan sensitif secara budaya dalam pembinaan dan pendampingan dalam konteks inkubator bisnis di Afrika Selatan.*

## BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurial coaching is a form of business coaching that focuses on helping entrepreneurs develop their skills, knowledge, and confidence to start and grow successful businesses (Brinkley & le Roux, 2018; Kotte, Diermann, Rosing, & Möller, 2021). On the other hand, business incubators provide resources, services, and support to early-stage startups to help them overcome the challenges of starting and scaling a business (Karim, 2017; Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021). While entrepreneurial coaching and business incubators have become increasingly popular in recent years, not all coaching programmes and incubators are successful in helping entrepreneurs achieve their goals (Schutte & Direng, 2019).

The failure of small businesses has a negative impact on the country's economy and its development goals. The main reasons for small business failure in South Africa include a lack of access to markets, business support, infrastructure, and technology, as well as inadequate entrepreneurial skills among emerging entrepreneurs (Matekenya & Moyo, 2022; Rens, Iwu, Tengeh, & Esambe, 2021). The government has established Business Development Support Programmes (BDSPs), including business accelerators, innovation parks, and business incubators (BIs), to address this issue. Business incubators offer a supportive and nurturing environment for small business owners to enhance their chances of success (Bergman & McMullen, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to identify the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching and business incubation to improve the effectiveness of these programmes. By understanding the factors contributing to the success of coaching programmes in this context, we can develop better strategies to support entrepreneurship in South Africa. Therefore, the main objective of this study is: *To identify the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in South African business incubators.*

This study highlights the importance of identifying critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in business incubation programmes in South Africa to enhance their effectiveness and promote economic development. The findings can contribute to the literature on entrepreneurial coaching in incubation programmes by providing insights into factors that lead to their success in a developing country context. A comprehensive analysis of these factors and how they interact is necessary to develop effective coaching programmes that meet the unique needs and challenges of the country.

Furthermore, this research is unique in that it delves into the specific dynamics and challenges that South African business incubators face. While there is a substantial body of literature on entrepreneurship coaching and business incubation around the

world, there is a scarcity of research that specifically addresses the unique environment and challenges faced by South African entrepreneurs. This study contextualises critical success factors within South Africa's socioeconomic and business landscape, which differs significantly from more established entrepreneurial ecosystems. This contextualisation is critical for developing effective coaching strategies and policies in South Africa.

Entrepreneurial coaching, despite being a growing field of study, is still under-studied in South Africa. By providing a comprehensive analysis of the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching within South African business incubators, our research contributes to filling this gap. This book fills a gap in the literature by providing valuable insights that can help policymakers and practitioners support the growth and success of local startups and entrepreneurs. Lastly, this research represents a ground-breaking effort to advance understanding of entrepreneurial coaching within the unique context of South African business incubators.

## THEORETICAL REVIEW

Entrepreneurial coaching has been identified as a critical intervention for the success of small businesses worldwide, particularly in emerging economies, such as South Africa (Schutte & Direng, 2019; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). Entre-preneurial coaching is defined in this study as a collaborative process between a coach and an entrepreneur to achieve the entrepreneur's personal and business goals (Kotte et al., 2021). Previous research has identified a few success factors for entrepreneurial coaching, including the coach's business acumen, communication skills, and ability to establish trust with the entrepreneur (Dobrea & Maiorescu, 2015; Hawkins & Turner, 2019). However, little research has been conducted on how these success factors contribute to the success of coaching programmes in the South African context, which is distinguished by distinct cultural and socio-economic dynamics (Schutte & Direng, 2019; Stout-Rostron, 2006). As a result, this research aims to address this gap by investigating the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in South Africa and how these factors contribute to the success of coaching programmes. The research is based on coaching psychology, entrepreneurship, and small business development theoretical frameworks. While the concept of coaching has been studied extensively in other contexts, such as sports and management, the specific role and impact of entre-preneurial coaching on small business success remains relatively underexplored in the literature. Therefore, this study seeks to contribute to the theoretical understanding of the factors contributing to entrepreneurial coaching programmes' success in South Africa.

Entrepreneurship is an active process derived from the French verb "entrepredre", meaning "to undertake" (Davis, 2002). Due to its multifaceted nature, entrepreneurship is conceptualised through various perspectives, such as economics, psychology, and sociology (Hisrich, Langan-Fox, & Grant, 2007; Landstrom, 2005), emphasising its multidisciplinary nature. According to Iversen, Jørgensen, and Malchow-Møller (2008), entrepreneurship has been a key economic driver since the 1700s, as recognised by Richard Cantillon. Cantillon's view on entrepreneurship as a risk-taking activity in the marketplace is a common perspective, which is still relevant in modern-day entrepre-neurial studies (Cantillon, 1959, as cited in Landstrom, 2005). Hisrich et al. (2007)

define an entrepreneur as an individual who identifies and acts on opportunities despite the risks involved, emphasising the importance of the entrepreneur's thinking processes. Possessing entrepreneurial skills is crucial for small business growth and development, as evidenced by entrepreneurial development in South African small business incubators and entrepreneurial coaching. Conversely, a lack of entrepreneurial skills is a significant hindrance to entrepreneurship and has been identified as a major reason for the high failure rates of small businesses in South Africa post-apartheid (Kelley, Singer, & Herrington, 2012; Mamabolo, Kerrin, & Kele, 2017; Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021).
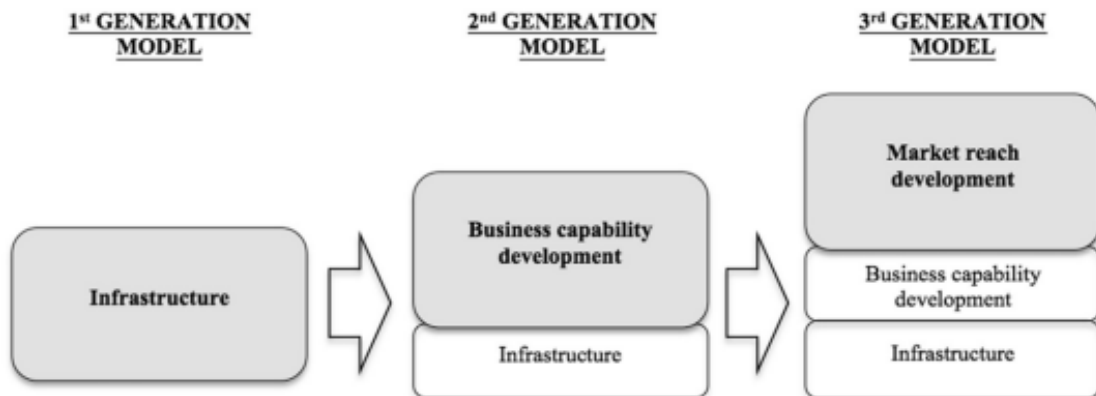


Source: Ayatse, Kwahar, and Iyortsuun (2017) in Bruneel, Ratinho, Clarysse, and Groen (2012).

**Figure 1. Evolution of Business Incubator (BI) Models**

Business incubators (BIs) play a crucial role in the entrepreneurial coaching field, particularly those that use coaching to support the development of entrepreneurs. These BIs are led by programme managers and industry experts who contribute to coaching interventions. The study focuses on the second, third, and subsequent generations of BIs that provide coaching to improve small enterprises' success rates.

The evolution of business incubation models is depicted in Figure 1. These models have evolved from providing infrastructure only to offering intangible business services, such as market access (Akçomak, 2011; Bruneel et al., 2012; Mrkajic, 2017). Bruneel et al. (2012) have categorised the models into three generations, with increasing offerings in each subsequent generation. South Africa currently has a mix of all three generations, with some business incubators failing to meet best practice standards (Lose & Khuzwayo 2021; Meyer & Meyer 2016). The critical skills South African entrepreneurs need include financial management, human resource management, Start-up, social and interpersonal, business leadership, business personality, marketing, technical, and business management (Mamabolo et al., 2017). Currently, business incubators in South Africa focus on fostering skills acquisition in most of these areas and support entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial coaching (Msimango-Galawe & Hlatshwayo, 2021).

Entrepreneurial coaching involves mentorship and support provided by a coach to the business owner and has been identified as an effective way of developing entrepreneurial skills (Hunt, Fielden, & Woolnough, 2019; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). Despite ongoing debates about coaching and mentoring concepts for small

businesses in South Africa, Brinkley and Le Roux (2018) argue that the benefits of coaching far outweigh any perceived drawbacks. The study identifies a critical gap in the effective use of entrepreneurial coaching models adapted to the South African context. Although various coaching models are currently used, most are adopted from Western contexts and lack the necessary contextual fit for South African entrepreneurs and their entities. This gap highlights the need for the intentional contextualisation of coaching models as such knowledge of the critical success factors can aid entrepreneurial coaches in ensuring that the critical success factors for the South African business incubators enhance their adoption of coaching models from other contexts. Schutte and Direng's (2019) finding that business [entrepreneurial] coaching is under-utilised and under-researched in South Africa further underscores the importance of developing effective coaching models and their success factors. The high failure rate of South African startups and the low innovation rate due to limited access to funding highlights the urgency of this need. In this regard, the study argues that contextualised critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching can enhance the capacity and potential of entrepreneurial coaching for emerging entrepreneurs to operate successfully in complex business environments in South Africa. This includes developing township and rural economies and marketplaces and more developed business internal economies and marketplaces.

Systems theory is a theoretical framework that views organisations and their environments as complex systems composed of interrelated parts (Lynch, Andersson, & Johansen, 2021). According to this theory, changes in one part of the system can have ripple effects on other parts, and the system as a whole can adapt and evolve to maintain its stability and functionality (Goodman, 2002; Soltanzadeh & Mooney, 2016). In this study, systems theory is particularly relevant for understanding the entrepreneurial ecosystem of small enterprise development in South Africa, which includes multiple stakeholders, such as entrepreneurial coaches, programme managers, industry experts, and policymakers (Isenberg, 2016). These stakeholders are all part of a larger system that influences the success of entrepreneurial coaching programmes, and their inter-actions and relationships can significantly impact the effectiveness of these pro-grammes. Systems theory also emphasises the importance of feedback loops and continuous learning and adaptation, which can be useful for improving the design and implementation of coaching programmes over time.

**Critical Success Factors for Entrepreneurial Coaching**

Critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching significantly contribute to the success of coaching programmes and, as a result, help entrepreneurs achieve their goals. The following are some critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching.

1. *Clear Goals and Objectives:* A clear set of goals and objectives is essential for the success of any coaching programme (Mmaditla & Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo, 2022). Together, the coach and the entrepreneur should set goals consistent with the entre-preneur's vision, mission, and values (Kotte et al., 2021; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). These should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals (SMART).

2. *Individualised Coaching:* Effective coaching programmes should be tailored to each entrepreneur's needs and goals. The coach should take the time to learn about the entrepreneur's strengths, weaknesses, and learning style before tailoring the coaching

programme; this includes the coach understanding the individual entrepreneur as central to the development of their business (Grant, 2022; Schutte & Direng, 2019).

3. *Experienced Coaches:* The success of an entrepreneurial coaching programme depends on the coach's expertise and experience (Kotte et al., 2021). Effective coaches should deeply understand entrepreneurship and the skills to help entrepreneurs overcome challenges, develop new skills, and achieve their goals.

4. *Access to Networks and Resources:* Entrepreneurs require access to networks and resources to help them start and grow their businesses (Mlotshwa & Msimango-Galawe, 2020).

5. *Accountability and Support:* To stay motivated and focused on their goals, entrepreneurs require accountability and support. To help entrepreneurs stay on track and overcome obstacles, effective coaching programmes should provide regular check-ins, feedback, and support (Mohd, Onileowo, & Farrah, 2021).

6. *Continuous Learning and Improvement:* To ensure that effective coaching programmes meet the needs of entrepreneurs, they should be evaluated and improved regularly. The coach should be open to feedback and willing to change the programme to make it more effective (Blackman, Moscardo, & Gray, 2016).

Overall, according to the reviewed literature, the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching assist entrepreneurs in achieving their goals, overcoming obstacles, and developing the skills and knowledge required to succeed in the competitive world of entrepreneurship.


## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used pragmatism to investigate the experiences of business incubator managers, industry experts, and entrepreneurial coaches in South Africa. An exploratory cross-sectional research design was used to collect and analyse qualitative data per the study's objectives. The information was used to determine the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in business incubators in South Africa.

The study focused on business incubator programme managers, industry experts, and entrepreneurial coaches in South Africa who had valuable experiences and insights. The sampling frame for entrepreneurial coaches was derived from the main coaching bodies in South Africa, which had an estimated population of 4,700 coaches. The study included three categories of participants — industry experts, entrepreneurial coaches, and business incubator managers in South Africa. The population size for the ecosystem industry experts was unknown due to the inclusion criterion. The study included 13 business incubators from a non-exhaustive list of 63 South African incubators. The sampling size was determined by saturation (Saunders et al., 2017). The target sample size was 18 participants (6 from each category), but 32 interviews were conducted due to emerging new information.

The study sample of 32 participants was purposefully diverse in order to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences relevant to our qualitative investigation into critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in South African business incubators. The sample had a 69% male predominance (22 participants), with females accounting for 31% (10 participants). The sample was diverse in terms of racial back-

ground, with 62% (20 participants) identifying as black, 25% (8 participants) as white, and 13% (4 participants) as coloured.

Participants were classified into three occupational groups: 34% (11 participants) were entrepreneurial coaches, 38% (12 participants) were BI Centre Managers in charge of programs, and 28% (9 participants) were industry experts. Furthermore, participants' entrepreneurship experience levels varied, with 60% (19 participants) having 0 to 9 years of experience, 28% (9 participants) having 10 to 19 years of experience, 9% (3 participants) having 20 to 29 years of experience, and 3% (1 participant) having 30 or more years of experience. The study sample's diverse and multifaceted composition enriched our qualitative investigation, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the critical success factors under investigation.
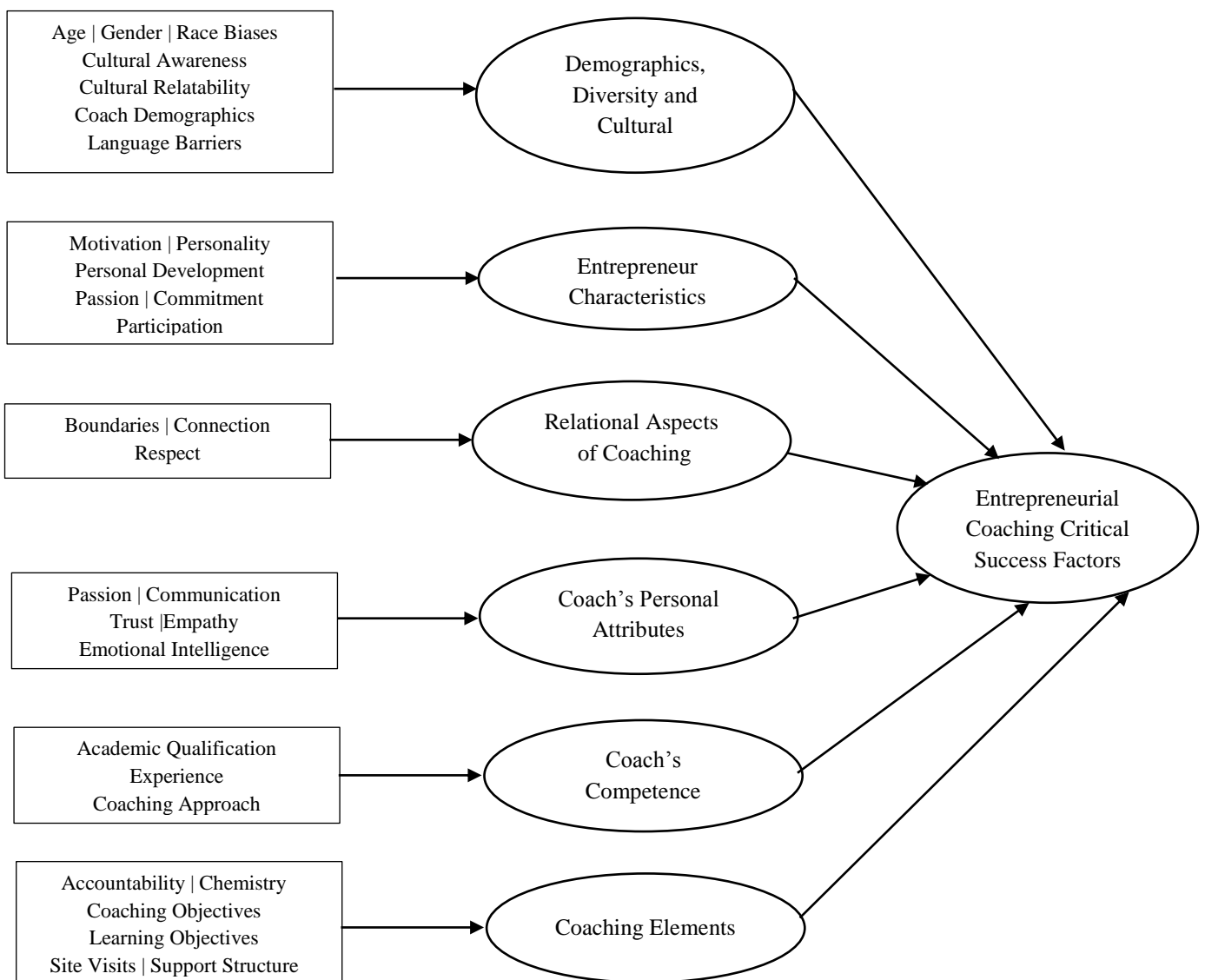


**Figure 2. The Critical Success Factors for Entrepreneurial Coaching
in South African Business Incubators**

These interviews were conducted online, specifically on MS Teams and Zoom. The study employed a semi-structured interview to collect the data. The programme managers were identified using a database of business incubators per province, and snowball referrals were sought from other interviewees. The qualitative data were transcribed into Word and analysed holistically and contextually using the software package, Atlas.ti, and Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic analysis guide.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The primary data analysis for this theme resulted in sixty-one (61) codes, further categorised into six code groups. The key findings were demographics, diversity, cultural intelligence, coaching relational aspects, the coach's personal attributes, competence, entrepreneur characteristics, and coaching program structure. The following critical success factors emerged from the interviews with the participants. Figure 2 is a diagrammatic representation of the critical success factors for entrepreneurial coaching in South African business incubators.

*Demographics, Diversity, and Cultural Intelligence*

This study found that the coach's demographics, diversity, and cultural intelligence can affect the coaching relationship. Language plays a significant role in coaching entrepreneurs in different provinces in South Africa due to the country's historical dynamics (Folscher-Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019; Khoza-Shangase & Mophosho, 2018). Participants from the Eastern Cape and Western Cape stressed the importance of speaking isiXhosa and Afrikaans for better connecting with coachees (Folscher-Kingwill & Terblanche, 2019).

Participants in this study highlighted the importance of considering the coach's demographics, such as language, in the South African context; unlike Gyllensten (2018), who asserts that demographics are not important considerations for the coach, the data indicated that demographics of the coach are indeed an important consideration in the South African context. In this regard, there were certain differences according to provinces, demonstrating the multicultural complexity in South Africa that entrepreneurial coaching must consider. Cultural complexity was evident across different provinces, where even black coaches had to cater to the diverse language needs of entrepreneurs within a single province. For instance, a coach placed in Tshwane in Gauteng must speak Sepedi to connect with entrepreneurs, as explained by Participant 20. Participant 20 was a Gauteng-based participant who stressed that language is crucial when hiring coaches in their incubation programme in the region, with various languages spoken in different areas. This participant pointed out that the ability to speak multiple languages was influential in the decision-making process at their organisation. This participant's observation challenges the notion of a universal township culture and highlights the importance of language in coaching, which transcends race.

Participants in the study emphasised the importance of coaches' cultural intelligence and language abilities in the South African context, with the ability to speak isiXhosa being critical in the Eastern Cape and Afrikaans in certain areas of the Western Cape. Understanding cultural norms and respecting the entrepreneur's culture was also necessary for coaching success in the diverse South African context. Therefore, multi-

lingualism could be an essential competency for coaching success in entrepreneurial coaching programmes in South Africa.

### *Coaching Relational Aspects*

The study found that commitment and passion from both the coach and coachee are crucial for successful entrepreneurial coaching, which is related to the connection and trust between them (Cox, Bachkirova, & Clutterbuck, 2018). Lose et al. (2020) also identified the importance of commitment as a challenge in business incubators. Empathy and respect from the coach towards the entrepreneur were also crucial in building a connection, especially in South Africa, where socio-economic differences exist. This gap results from the historical inequalities of colonialism and apartheid (Amamou & Ali, 2019; Cox et al., 2018). A connection between coach and coachee is linked to empathy in the coach and respect for the entrepreneur, which is particularly important in South Africa, where socio-economic disparities exist. The need for empathy highlights the gap between coaches and entrepreneurs regarding societal position and experience stemming from the country's history of inequality. Participant 7 provided insights that the coach's empathy is an important relational factor in coaching.

> "*If you don't have empathy as a coach* and the ability to be personified in the profile of the entrepreneur, then you're going to miss the opportunity to really drive the impact that you intended for that entrepreneur. *What I feel sometimes is missing in a lot of coaching relationships is empathy.*" [emphasis added] (Participant 7, black male industry expert based in Western Cape Province)

Participant 7 saw the coach's empathy as "the ability to be personified in the profile of the entrepreneur"; that is, the coach must be seen as a fellow entrepreneur of sorts on the entrepreneur's journey of development or must wear the hat or mask of an entrepreneur alongside the coachee. Furthermore, the commitment was highlighted as an important relational aspect, with Participant 8 highlighting the importance of coach commitment.

> "*I know in the coaching space for coaching to work, the coachee does most of the work than the coach. but … if I am to be able to shift a coachee from where they are [at] point A to point B, I have to be committed to that, I have to be fully bought into that, otherwise I'm wasting this coachee's time.*" [emphasis added] (Participant 8, black female entrepreneurial coach based in Gauteng Province).

However, according to Participant 15, the coach-coachee relationship often fails because the entrepreneur "fails to come to the party" or fails to pitch up and participate fully in sessions or the coaching intervention. Essentially, the mutual commitment was positioned as critical for the success of the intervention.

### *The Coach's Personal Attributes*

The coach's personal attributes that were indicated by the participants as important include the coach's personality, being approachable and relatable, the ability to build rapport, and how they connect and interact with the entrepreneurs/coachees. The personal attributes of a good coach are seen as: "having a positive attitude, being supportive and respectful, being patient with the learning process and building trust and being a motivator of others" (Crumpton, 2021, pp. 136-137). These also align with other studies that cite what coachees want from their coaches (Rojon & Saunders, 2012). The key sub-theme indicators analysed in the responses are presented, in no order of

importance, as the coach has emotional intelligence, capacity for empathy, patience, passion (matching that of the coachee's passion), trustworthiness and confidence in the coach, and effective communication. Participant 4 added compassion, empathy, and good listening skills. The latter participant observed the coaching process thus: "It is not linear", and Participant 17 observed coaching as about "developing other individuals". Developing/coaching someone is thus conveyed as complex because it involves "individuals". Thus, the personal attributes of the coach involve "the basics" -- soft skills for developing the entrepreneur according to their business needs and goals.

### The Entrepreneur's Characteristics

The key sub-theme indicators discussed are the entrepreneur's passion, drive and motivation, voluntary participation in BI programmes, personal development, and personal aspects. Entrepreneur characteristics are understood as the entrepreneur's contribution toward the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial coaching intervention, such as their commitment, dedication, and engagement in training or mentoring sessions (Schutte & Direng, 2019; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020). It primarily includes the entrepreneur's passion and needs and involvement in the coach and coachee matching process. This was highlighted as important by the participants because, in addition to the responsibility of the entrepreneurial coach and incubator to ensure that the other critical success factors are in place, the entrepreneur has a vital role to play and responsibility to enable success in implementing the programme (Lose & Khuzwayo, 2021).

> "So that is the next thing in the *success ingredient*—you have to get that *entrepreneur to believe in themselves and their business*, like really believe. So, if I sum it up in one word, both sides of the equation, it is passion. *If the passion is there, the drive will be there.*" [emphasis added] (Participant 32, white male entrepreneurial coach based in Gauteng Province).

Participant 11 offered insights about the entrepreneurs' voluntary participation in the programme and getting their buy-in as critical.

> "I think the first starting point is that *the people who are participating in coaching must do so voluntarily*. They must [also] have a full understanding and buy in as much as possible, as early as possible, in terms of what the coaching is supposed to deliver and what it is not supposed to deliver." [emphasis added] (Participant 11, black male entrepreneurial coach based in Western Cape Province).

### The Coach's Competence

The coach's competence identified by the participants in this study includes the coach's experience in entrepreneurship (the most emphasised aspect of the coach's competence), academic qualifications, certification, coaching approach, and experience with small enterprises. These are important in the selection criteria for entrepreneurial coaches and the programme's success. Wycherley and Cox (2008) emphasise the selection and matching of coaches and coachees as a critical success factor in the coaching intervention. Learning is a key coaching outcome. Hence, entrepreneurial coaches must be competent enough to adapt their approach to suit the entrepreneur's needs for successful coaching (Mansoori, Karlsson, & Lundqvist, 2019). The key sub-theme indicators analysed in the responses are presented, in no particular order of

importance, as the coach's academic qualifications, entrepreneurial coaching experience, ethical coaching, coaching approach, entrepreneurial experience, and coaching certification.

> "*Our qualifications in their purest forms need to be combined with some experience* or insight into where you're going." [emphasis added] (Participant 30, white male entrepreneurial coach based in Western Cape Province).

Participant 30 emphasised the importance of academic qualifications and relevant entrepreneurial experience for coaches, while other participants also stressed the need for a balance between academic and practical experience in assessing coach competence. The participants reflected on the importance of the coach having entrepreneurial experience.

> "*Pure coaching (and this is my own opinion) doesn't work*. Even in the corporate space, *you can't just be purely coaching. At some point you're going to have to wear a hat of a mentor*. You can't just be only probing and mining the coachee." [emphasis added] (Participant 8, black female entrepreneurial coach based in Gauteng Province).

Participant 8 noted that "pure coaching" or coaching alone does not work. Rather the coaching intervention must include a component of mentorship. For this participant, the coaching process was not about "probing" and "mining" the entrepreneur regarding their needs but passing on the benefit of the coach's experience to the coachee.

### *Coaching Elements*

This pertains to the configuration and orientation of the coaching programme, which encompasses the coach's methodology, application of coaching models for entrepreneurs, and recognition of the distinctiveness of the entrepreneurial coaching context, compared to other coaching contexts. Participants highlighted important coaching elements that are crucial for successful coaching and their interrelationships. These include understanding the unique nature of entrepreneurial coaching, clear coaching objectives, building rapport, establishing a support structure, conducting on-site visits, using appropriate learning styles, employing multiple approaches, and accountability. The presented key sub-theme indicators, analysed from the responses, are not listed in any particular order of importance and include chemistry sessions, clear coaching objectives, support structure, coach site visits, appropriate learning styles, multiple approaches, and accountability.

Participant 8 observed the need for the coach to know the business in which the entrepreneur is operating so that the goals towards which the coaching are directed towards a tangible landing place—the actual business the entrepreneur is operating and for which the coaching is happening. The participant explained:

> "*That's [site visits] very important; you're able to connect to this business because you've seen exactly what the entrepreneur does. Site visits give the coach a mental picture and a deep understanding of what the entrepreneur is doing there.*" (Participant 8, black female entrepreneurial coach based in Gauteng Province).

The participant emphasises the importance of site visits, which should happen early in the relationship while goals are set. Participant 20 emphasised the need for

coaches to research coaching and learning styles and adapt their methodologies to suit different coachees. This highlights the importance of academic capacity and pedagogic methods in coaching beyond entrepreneurial knowledge.

> *"If you're going to be a coach or a mentor you've got to understand that you need to do a lot of research on different styles and understand that you are able to do an analysis of the group. You've got to be flexible to change a little bit of your methodology to suit the group so that you get to the outcomes. We know that people have different learning styles, therefore you've got to be able to navigate that space so that whatever you're trying to [teach], [teach] in the way that entrepreneur understands."* [emphasis added] (Participant 20, black female programme manager, based in Western Cape Province).

The participant acknowledged that coaching approaches and learning styles must be tailored to accommodate individual learning styles. However, the impact of education levels and types on learning cannot be ignored, especially in South Africa, where access to quality education is still unequal due to the legacy of apartheid. This has resulted in high levels of unemployment, particularly among the youth. As a result, entrepreneurship has been identified as a critical area for economic growth and job creation, as highlighted in the National Development Plan (NDP). Emerging entrepreneurs with poor education levels may face challenges in entrepreneurial coaching due to their educational background, which may affect their learning styles. While poor education levels do not necessarily indicate a lack of potential for entrepreneurial success, coaching, and learning approaches must consider education levels in programme design. The coach and incubation programmes may need to factor in the entrepreneur's education as part of their developmental trajectory and coaching and mentorship opportunities to support emerging entrepreneurs.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After examining the data, this study recommends that coaching programmes for entrepreneurs should be culturally sensitive and consider the unique needs and challenges of entrepreneurs from diverse backgrounds. To achieve this, coaches must thoroughly understand the entrepreneur's cultural context and tailor the coaching programme accordingly. The coach-coachee relationship should emphasise mutual commitment, responsibility, and respect. The coaching relationship should enable the coach to bring their entrepreneurial experience and skills to help entrepreneurs develop their business and soft skills and grow their business entities (Kotte et al., 2021; Salem & Lakhal, 2018; van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).

The study findings indicated that the critical success factors in entrepreneurial coaching go beyond the literature's output, with a focus on the coach-coachee relationship. The coach's competence, personal attributes, diversity, cultural relatability, and the entrepreneur's traits were deemed important. These factors are crucial for delivering successful training and providing entrepreneurs access to resources, such as funding and markets. Entrepreneurial success was also linked to the coach's experience, communication abilities, and understanding of the coachee's language and cultural context. While most entrepreneurs viewed the coach's gender, age, and race as inconsequential, industry experts and programme managers highlighted the importance of race in coach selection procedures (Kotte et al., 2021). The study suggests that diverse

matching can work effectively if there is cultural intelligence on the coach's part and a mutual commitment to the relationship on the part of the entrepreneur.

The current study's conclusion aligns with Stout-Rostron's (2006) view that the criteria for the entrepreneurial coaching relationship may differ in South Africa. Empathy for the entrepreneur was identified as a crucial factor in the coach-coachee relationship, in addition to the coach's entrepreneurial experience and qualifications. The study further recommends that professionalising entrepreneurial coaching and establishing a professional body with continuous professional development for coaches is necessary to ensure competency in entrepreneurship development (van Coller-Peter & Cronjé, 2020).

This study examines entrepreneurial coaching, its differences from executive and life coaching, and the specific needs and demands of entrepreneurs and their businesses. Unlike a purist coaching approach, entrepreneurial coaching involves providing expertise, experience, and networks related to entrepreneurship. As most incubated entrepreneurs lack access to resources, coaching interventions often embed entrepreneurial experts and experience coaching within the coach. Therefore, coaches should have various functions, including consulting, training, and teaching, which should be considered when selecting a coach for a BI programme. This aligns with Crumpton's (2021) argument that coaching involves multiple functions.

A limitation of this study is that the findings and conclusions may not be applied universally to understanding the critical success factors of entrepreneurial coaching. While this study focused on the perspectives of entrepreneurial coaches, BI programme managers, and industry experts, the entrepreneurs' voices were not directly included. Future studies should consider including the perspectives of entrepreneurs to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the critical success factors of entrepreneurial coaching. Additionally, there is a lack of quantitative research on this topic, and conducting a longitudinal quantitative study focusing on the recipients of coaching in a future study could provide valuable insights.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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