Strengthening entrepreneur business performance for South African SMEs by integrating behavioural courses into business skills training

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ABSTRACT

Skills and knowledge of business and management are essential for enterprise growth and business survival, to a point where entrepreneurs regard them as indispensable qualities desired in business management. These qualities are not the only ones necessary in business and management, as there are many determinants of business growth. However, there are numerous instances where a business enterprise fails despite its human resources having received high quality training in business skills, and sometimes even having adequate resources. The purpose of this study was to design an innovative way to incorporate attitudes and behaviour in the training of entrepreneurs to stimulate high performance. Evidence was produced to show that some small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which were on the verge of collapsing/failing could be revived by training on aspects of ‘attitude’ and ‘behaviour’. This paper demonstrated how an existing training on skills development can be improved by adding content that focuses on attitudes and behaviour to reduce their failure. The findings of this study have potential to enable business schools and colleges offering entrepreneurship courses to incorporate ‘attitude’ and ‘behaviour’ which could aid in the survival of the SMEs that are so critical for the economy of the country.

INTRODUCTION

Training programmes are directed at increasing skill and knowledge in the field in which they take place (González-Pérez & Ramírez-Montoya, 2022). Many of them provide only the basic technical skills and knowledge platforms for practice. However, experience shows that even if the apprentices make good grades, there may be a notable proportion of business enterprises which fail despite amply using the skills learned well, and the acquired knowledge of business and management (Assaad & El-Adaway, 2020; Amankwah-Aanoah, Khan, & Wood, 2021). It is a concern why many companies still fail even when they have business skills and knowledge. There are therefore many causes of failures apart from lack of skill and knowledge (Assaad & El-Adaway, 2020). Also, technical skill and knowledge of business do not guarantee performance in business and/or business success. Behavioural challenges tend to trouble entrepreneurs and business owners, even when they have ample business skills and knowledge. The topics in attitude and behaviour in the workplace are taught mainly in courses dealing with industrial psychology and organizational development (McKenna, 2020; Zeng, Zhao & Zhao, 2020; Kraiger & Ford, 2021). These courses cannot teach the behaviour to guarantee high performance and business success. Rather, they focus on the theory of behaviours and attitudes. They then require the student to change the behaviour without drilling business exercises to train on such behaviours.

The authors of this paper encountered one globally successful training programme that was developed through the United Nations agencies in Denmark, the Seda-UNCTAD EMPRETEC Training Programme (SUETP) (Denis, Bullon & Kamel, 2000; Ferreira Martins, Henrques-de-Brito & Ruiz Garcia, 2021). This training course is unique in that it trains the behaviour of apprentices. It is a fixed course that is taught in exactly the same way in participating countries and businesses. Evaluations of the course at global
and national levels show that the SUETP is an effective training programme that increases the capacity of entrepreneurial minds for business and life success.

This paper hypothesizes that such a course, when added to a skill course, can augment the original course to optimal levels. It therefore investigates how such a useful attitude and behaviour training programme could be fitted into a local skills-based course in an attempt to optimize its benefits and results.

**Literature Review**

**Theoretical and Conceptual Background**

**Curriculum**

Curriculum refers to the lessons and academic content for a specific training program with the knowledge and skills to be learned (Kelly, 2009). These include the learning standards and activities to be met; the units and lessons taught; the assignments and projects; the books, materials, videos, presentations, and readings; and the tests, assessment, and other methods to evaluate learning. By implication, curriculum dictates the human resources (e.g. teachers) and skills needed to drive or facilitate it. However, several authors emphasize that regardless of the quality of the training, there are no guarantees for high job performance after qualifying and graduating. There are many dynamics at play, and enhancers are sometimes necessary to invigorate a training to be useful in practice (Kumar, 2020; Landwehr, 2020; Tchemeveva, 2020).

When unpacked, curriculum can appear as (Kapur, 2018; Berger et al., 2020; Goshin et al., 2021):

- **Step 1:** Diagnosis of needs.
- **Step 2:** Formulation of objectives.
- **Step 3:** Selection of content.
- **Step 4:** Organization of content.
- **Step 5:** Selection of learning experiences.
- **Step 6:** Organization of learning experiences.
- **Step 7:** Determination of what to evaluate and of the ways and means of doing it.

Curriculum can be imagined from different viewpoints. Institutions’ vision for education is vital for curriculum design (Amove, 2020; Akib et al., 2020). A curriculum may be improved through various complex interactions. Thus, what is actually provided is the effective curriculum. The theory of curriculum also has an obscured curriculum, which is the unintended development of personal values and beliefs of stakeholders; unexpected curriculum impact; and unforeseen learning process aspects (Abroampa, 2020; Pugach et al., 2020; Paraskeya, 2021). Curriculum designers of the intended curriculum should be mindful of these different curriculum dimensions because the written curriculum does not exhaust the meaning of curriculum.

The undocumented curriculum dimensions are often important for society. The formal curriculum usually appears in inclusive and intelligible documents. These are curriculum frameworks; subject curricula and syllabi, pertinent and supportive learning materials.

The curriculum explains the taught subjects set out in textbooks. It ignores the wider goals of competencies and personal development. It also excludes attitudes and behaviours expected or required in actual practice. The subjects present the wider context, and the learning experiences in the subjects are geared to attain the wider goals (Pugach et al., 2020; Brewer & Cunningham, 2023).

In a dynamic developing and transforming economies, institutions use curricula actions to respond, adapt and adjust to advance (Supriani et al., 2022). They, henceforth, engage in curriculum development to respond to the emerging industry needs, to adapt to technological and other changes and adjust their didactic approaches.

**Core Curriculum:** Administrations and faculties may decree core curricula. Because of growing specialization and depth in student's main study field, a classic core curriculum mandates reduced student's course work (Ogunode, 2022). Columbia University and University of Chicago are amongst the leading American well-known and most extensive core curricula programs advocates and practitioners (De Bary, 2007). Core curriculum is designed to foster critical skills. Astute education practitioners can merge core curriculum with adding value electives to enhance impactful outcomes from a curriculum.

**Open Curriculum:** The open curriculum permits students to take courses without concern for any requirements, except those in their chosen concentrations or majors (Fomunyam & Khoza, 2020). This attitude also enables students to graduate without taking college-level courses. The open curriculum could fit entrepreneurs’ incidental learning. Some entrepreneurs benefit from it by entering the trade, viewed as incidental actions, such as having encountered a successful business owner or entrepreneurship inspiring a vision of employment or wealth, or even owning a business. This knowledge is usually sufficient for an idea to form a business. However, cases exist where business managers seem to lack in the idea to manage a successful business. Many South African entrepreneurs and small business owners lack business skill and knowledge.

**Curriculum Development:** Curriculum development (CD), according to Bilbao, Lucido, Iriingan and Javier (2008), refers to a mindful methodical process of designing a novel, or improving an existing curriculum. Numerous CD tactics are applied to develop curricula. A common one consists of conducting a need and task analysis; objective design; selecting suitable delivery method and fitting assessment method; and forming a committee for curriculum implementation, evaluation and review. When training and developing
employees for specific tasks of the jobs, intentional learning of core curriculum is vital. Intentional learning occurs when a trainee undertakes activities with an attitude of learning from those activities. Munir and McDermott (2013) insinuate that training of employees requires the approach of activities to be undertaken with the purpose of learning from every encounter and experience.

**Distribution Requirements:** The system of distribution enables combining specified and unspecified curricula (Seehawer, 2018). In this system, students may be required to take courses in particular study fields. In some cases, they have the latitude to choose specific courses within those fields.

**Responsibility for employee training and development**

Companies recruit qualified people. Thus, the employee is responsible for the core training by enrolling for courses that lead him to the job they secure. Once employed, part of the employee training becomes the responsibility of the organization. As a result, employee improvement is a joint responsibility of management and the individual employee (Truxillo, Bauer & Erdogan, 2016). The responsibility of management is to provide the right resources and an environment that supports the growth and development needs of the individual employee. The employee, on the other hand, should take the responsibility of taking advantages of opportunities emerging for empowerment.

**Framework for successful employee training**

For effectiveness of training initiatives and conversion of learning into work performance, it is the shared commitment of both management and employees that could translate into effective employee development (Magidi & Mahiya, 2021). If employees do not want training, it will be wasteful and costly for managers to sponsor any such training. On the other hand, some important training may be inaccessible if management does not support an employee who wants to be trained.

**Management Role:** The success of employee training and development requires management to provide a suitable job description. Then training should be provided to employees to satisfy the basic job competencies. Managers should also develop an understanding of the knowledge, skills and abilities that the organization will need in the future (Yang, Kuria & Gu, 2020; Benoliel, 2021). This entails predicting the long-term goals of the organization and the implications of these goals for employee development. Management should share this knowledge with employees. Moreover, managers should identify learning opportunities in daily activities. These may stretch from assessing if incident with a client is what other employees could learn from to determine if there is a new guideline with implications for the organization (Spector, 2021). Since employees at lower levels may be naïve on some issues, managers should clarify the employee development process and inspire employees to develop their own individual development plans. In addition, managers should support and guide employees who identify learning activities that make them an asset to an organization.

**Employee Role:** Employee development of suitably placed employees can become smooth and successful when the individual employees are capable, committed and motivated (Cannas et al., 2019; Karabati, Ensari & Fiorentino, 2019). For the employee development success to be realized, the individual employee should search for learning opportunities in routine activities, and also identify goals and activities for a development that is based on a properly planned individual development plan. The employee could identify own training needs and request the company to sponsor a suitable training programme, or the human resources training division of the organisation can assist in identifying training needs of their employees. The employee should make the best of that training.

The Individual Development Planning Process: In order to enhance cohesion and support, an individual development plan should be developed by the employee in partnership with the line manager. The plan should be driven by the employee’s needs, the position and the organization. A noble individual development plan is stimulating, achievable, practical and realistic, but can only be implemented with the approval of the employee's line manager. The following four steps (Ezeibe et al., 2014; Ratten & Umsanjij, 2021; López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez & QuinoA-Pineiro, 2022) are implied leading to a useful development plan.

Step 1 - Self-assessment
Step 2 - Assess your current position and your work environment
Step 3 - Identify development activities
Step 4 - Put your plan in action

These steps are unpacked as follows:

**Self-assessment:** Self-assessment requires the employee to conduct a self-assessment by identifying own skills, abilities, values, strengths and weaknesses (McIver & Murphy, 2023). In conducting a self-assessment, many assessment tools could be used. These can include asking colleagues to give their impressions about you, and the tools of assessment available in the internet. The employee should compare his knowledge, skills and abilities to those identified in the job description. Where applicable, he should review performance assessments. In modern organizations, performance assessments are used often as the starting place for developing individual development plans. It is also beneficial to ask for feedback from your supervisor.
Assess current position and work environment: The employee should assess the requirements of his position at present and the way the requirements of the position and organization are likely to change (Afsar, Masood & Umrani, 2019; Carnavale & tatak, 2020). In conducting a position assessment, the employee should identify the job necessities and performance expectations of the current position; identify the knowledge, skills and abilities for enhancing performance in the current job; identify and assess the impact on the position when alterations take place in the work environment such as changes in clients, programs, services and technology.

The above steps should lead to, or influence the development of the individual development plan. This could be done by identifying the career goals and those goals which are mutually beneficial to the individual and to his organization. The employee can inscribe what he would like to achieve as goals, selecting few to work on at a time, and setting time frames for accomplishing these goals.

Identify development activities: In identifying development activities, Niles, Anderson and Cover (2000) counsel that the employee should identify the best possible ways to achieve his development goals, specify the methods he will use, and the required resources. The employee can also solicit the help of human resources staff to assist in identifying developmental activities for the employee(s) and the organisation.

Put your plan in action: The steps should be completed by putting the plan into action. After developing a draft individual development plan, the employee should review the plan with the line manager for his input and approval, start working on the employee plan, and then evaluate the progress. If necessary, the employee should adjust or improve in areas where weaknesses or faults are shown.

Employee training and development methods

Employee training and development should suit the organization's context, job descriptions, employee needs and interest, employment contracts and collective agreements. Choosing employee training and development methods should be based on the learning process. Broad categories to provide employees with learning opportunities are on-the-job and formal learning.

On-the-job Experience: According to Maake (2002), participation in committees, conferences and forums, critical incident notes, field trips, job aids, job expanding, job rotation, job shadowing, learning alerts, peer-assisted learning, stretch assignments and special projects are common methods that can enforce learning while employees are working. Meetings of committees are part of daily activity in any organization. They can be effective learning tools, with the right focus as they consist of employees from different areas of the organization (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2019). Committees can also enhance learning by allowing members to view issues from different perspectives. Moreover, committee members can suspend the committee's work to discuss issues or trends that may impact on the organization in the future.

Employees often attend conferences that discuss themes that are relevant to their positions and the organizations. Upon return from a conference, the employee can make a presentation to other staff members as a method of enhancing the individual's learning experience and as an effort of enhancing the organization (Das, 2019; Carrirón-Martínez et al., 2020). Conference attendance should be used for both individual development and organizational growth.

One effective learning method that occurs in daily activities is contact and dialogues of colleagues (Schiavio, Biasutti & Antonini Philippe, 2021; Lal, Swivedi & Haag, 2023). Careful selection of the best of these opportunities and inscribing critical incident notes can be used for learning. Examples can include a client complaint that was handled effectively. In this case, it will be useful to summarise the incident and identify the employee's actions that resulted in a successful resolve. The notes could be shared with the employee involved and with others as appropriate. In the case of unresolved problems, such as when the situation was not addressed properly, a brief description of the situation identifying areas for improvement can assist learning. In all these, the critical incident notes should be discussed with the employees. Also, managers should assist in identifying the areas for the employee to improve upon and to assist the employees with the improvement route identified.

Field trips can be used in organizations that have employees at more than one site, or where there are similar organizations elsewhere (Gillespie et al., 2023). Management should provide employees with an opportunity to visit similar employment sites. This opportunity can help employees to gain a better understanding of the full range of programs and clients related to the organization’s services.

Job aids are essential initiatives for employees to perform their jobs better (Parnell et al., 2017; Bashir et al., 2020). These aids include manuals, checklists, phone lists, procedural guidelines, decision guidelines and so forth. Job aids are particularly more useful for new employees, employees taking on new responsibilities and for activities that happen infrequently.

An employee who has grasped the requirements of his job and performs satisfactorily may want greater challenges. As a result, managers could consider assigning additional duties to such an employee. The specific duties to assign additional duties should be decided by the employee and the line manager. Organizations with flat organizational structure tend to give some managerial tasks to experienced staff to keep those staff challenged (Ali & Anwar, 2021; Noorazem, Md Sabri & Mat Nazir, 2021; Riyanto, Endri & Herlisha, 2021). Jobs can also be rotated on a temporary basis, in which employees are given the opportunity to work in a different area of the organization (Sandhu & Kulik, 2019). The employee can still keep his existing job while filling in for other employees or exchanging responsibilities with another employee. Job shadowing occurs when an employee wants to learn what someone else in
the organization does and then following that person to observe his work (Van Wart et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2022). This is particularly used when succession planning is needed, such as when someone will need to be replaced after retiring or resigning.

Learning alerts from human resources offices are also used rarely but can be beneficial for employees and organizations when followed. Some common learning alerts are newspaper articles, notice board announcements, and reports. If a manager can prepare a brief covering page that includes a short summary and key questions for employees to consider, the learning alerts can become useful sources for research. These alerts can then be circulated, included on the agenda of a staff meeting and then discussed.

Peer-assisted learning can occur when two or more employees agree to help one another to learn different tasks (Matthews et al., 2022; Radley et al., 2022). Participating employees should have an area of expertise that other co-workers could benefit from. In this mode, the employees take turns to help their co-workers to grasp the knowledge or skills that are being shared.

For enforcing learning, stretch assignments can be brought in to give the employee an opportunity to stretch beyond his usual abilities (Zhang, Du & Ji, 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). As an example, a stretch assignment could require an employee to chair a meeting if he has never done it before. To ensure that such activities are effective learning experiences, the manager should take time after the event to discuss with the employee the merits and demerits of the experience and identify areas of improvement if necessary.

When a manager gives an employee an opportunity to participate in a project that is normally outside his scope of work, the employee can learn new skills (Freedman, 2013). For example, someone who has expressed an interest in events planning could be given the opportunity to work as part of a special events team.

**Formal Training**: These modes include classroom training (Bahl, Bhatt & Sharma, 2022; Calandra et al., 2023). Several of them exist, and they include courses, seminars and workshops and off-the-job learning such as academic courses, professional associations, reading groups and self-study.

Courses, seminars, workshops: These learning modes are formal training prospects offered to employees. A trainer, facilitator and/or subject matter expert can be brought into the organization to provide the training session, or an employee can be sent to one of these learning opportunities during work time (Gizaw & Tessema, 2020; Marcel et al., 2020; Iyamuremye et al., 2023).

Academic institutions: Some higher learning institutions offer courses relevant to employees of organizations. The courses may require contact classes, distance learning, online participation or a mix of some modes. Some of the courses may even be customised for the organization if several employees need to attend the same training for specific skills needed in the organization.

Professional associations: In organizations that are professionally based, there may be professional guidelines for the members of the profession. In such a case, professional associations such as networks, provide employees an opportunity to be up to date in their fields.

Reading groups: The method is practiced globally (Meretoja, Kinnunen & Kosonen, 2022; Daniels, 2023). It entails a group of employees meeting to discuss literature issues relevant to the workplace. Meetings usually take place outside normal working hours, such as noon hours or right after work. However, when formally organized, they may be held during office hours and even be sponsored by the organization.

Self-study: This is an effort when individual employees embark on reading concepts that relate to his work environment. It could be taken through self-paced independent reading or e-learning courses (Orr, 2023). In this mode, the employee engages in the learning activity by choice and at his desired pace of learning.

Relationships and Feedback: Whichever training method is used, it is vital for employees to engage in professional relationships, and to receive feedback on the learning. Modes for these training efforts include coaching, mentoring, networking, and professional appraisal.

Coaching: Coaching is generally a pre-arranged agreement between an experienced manager and his employee (Downham, 2020; Silva et al., 2021). The role of the coach is to illustrate skills and to give the employee guidance, feedback, and reassurance while he practices the new skill.

Mentoring: Mentoring resembles coaching, but requires a closer and more continual contact and occurs when a senior, experienced manager guides and advises a junior employee on work matters (Alred & Garvey, 2019; Garvey, Garvey & Stones, 2021). The senior and the junior employees would have usually developed a working relationship based on shared interests and values.

Networking: Networking is when employees relate with other employees sharing the trade (Yang et al., 2022). Some professional specialties have networks intended to meet the professional development need of their members. Members meet to discuss current issues and to share information and resources.

Performance appraisal: This approach shows employees what they are doing right, and where they need to improve (Lin & Kelkough, 2019; Al-Jedaia & Mehrez, 2020). With performance appraisals, the manager and employee evaluate the employee’s strengths and weaknesses. Feedback can be gathered from line managers, peers, staff, other colleagues and sometimes clients. The results of an appraisal can be used to identify areas for further development of the employee.
Study Problem

The discussions above show that there are various methods available to train employees at work. The problem in this study is that there are no guarantees of optimal performance when these trainings have occurred. The paper then aims to integrate methods for enhancing the desired performance optimization.

Research and Methodology

Study Design: The study is qualitative, as it addresses issues of training that would increase the chances of improved performance.

Sampling: Purposive sampling was used to select SME owners who had participated in the course, either as trainers or trainees. The experience in the course was the reason for their selection as study participants.

Participants: These were the principal who got respondents involved from different cities in South Africa. These were organizers, trainers, and trainees of the course. The trainees were SME owners who needed help and support with their ailing SMEs at the time of the training.

Data collection: Interviews were held with the master trainer, his immediate subordinates and the facilitators of training in the nine provinces of South Africa.

Data Analysis: The respondents indicated that the course is fixed in design and delivery, and is facilitated only by international certified trainers. It is not a skills course, but a course to condition a positive behaviour in business and more about attitude and approach of the business practice. It is intended to change the mind sets of entrepreneurs, and to motivate them to strive for success. Apparently, it supplements the business skills that these owners already had.

The training was found to change the attitudes and behaviours of entrepreneurs and small business owner-managers in conducting business. Some business practitioners who were on the verge of failing, were revived. The course apparently enables behavioural change in the business management approaches. It also instils a positive attitude of managers towards the businesses. It is offered separately from any training course.

Findings

The following discoveries were made:

i. Business courses focus on skills, but not much on attitudes and behaviours;

ii. A behavioural training designed for fully skilled people may help to change attitudes and approaches only when one knows what to do.

iii. Training on attitude and behaviour can enhance a positive attitude and cogent behaviours when conducting business.

iv. Such a training course possesses ample ingredients for transforming lower performing SMEs to become top performers.

Model integrating skill and behavioural courses

Revised curriculum

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 1:** The model

The model basically implies that while technical business skills are learnt, human side of the business is also learnt throughout the training process, which is enveloped in interpersonal skills, attitudes, and behaviours that are needed to gossip to the clients to return after a business transaction or encounter.
Revised curriculum relative to the original one

When unpacked in a stepwise fashion, a curriculum can appear (Kapur, 2018; Berger et al., 2020; Goshin et al., 2021) as:

Step 1: Diagnosis of needs.
Step 2: Formulation of objectives.
Step 3: Selection of content.
Step 4: Organization of content.
Step 5: Selection of learning experiences.
Step 6: Organization of learning experiences.
Step 7: Determination of what to evaluate and of the ways and means of doing it.

The model developed can occur at Steps 3 and 4 by adding more content to effect attitudes and behaviours. It can also be incorporated at Step 7, which could occur at the practical level by demonstrating positive attitudes and improved behaviour of approaching business in a more vigorous way. There is therefore no need to temper with the initial formation, except to be innovative in applying increased content in training.

Discussion

Training for acquiring skill and knowledge compels the trainees to plan emphasis on the application of the skills. In some cases, discontinuation of tasks or training based on the skills decreases due to lack of motivation and/or affordability. Boahin and Hofman (2014) also allude that lack of industry participation in training undermines the knowledge and skill acquisition. On the other hand, Kanyonga, Mhana and Wendt (2019) report that trainers lacked skill and knowledge of competency-based training. Furthermore, there may be some negative attitudes emerging, therefore focusing on behaviours that do not produce winning business results. An additional content of training on attitudes and behaviour can be a revitalizing mode to revive performance of the business. Similar studies demonstrated the potential benefits of competency-based training to augment training programmes with industry specific needs (Anane, 2013; Boahin & Hofman, 2014; Mbarushimana & Kuboja, 2016; Likisa, 2018; Kanyonga, Mhana & Wendt, 2019). Moreover, Mohammed et al. (2023) showed the success of competency-based training among TVET students, that the industry specific needs were successfully blended with the student’s acquired knowledge.

The effects of attitudes and behaviours in improving performance and increasing growth are universal, according to Haski-Leventhal et al. (2022) incorporation of attitudes and behaviours in business studies enhances students’ attitudes towards corporate social responsibility. In a study by Le (2023) integrating attitudes and behaviours in already learned skills is corporate social responsibility and has potential to improve SME industry performance, brand image and awareness, customer loyalty and corporate reputation.

Enhanced Focus on Stakeholder Engagement

Enhancing focus on stakeholder engagement is crucial for strengthening entrepreneur business performance (Anbarasan & Sushil, 2018; Chaudhuri et al., 2024) in South African SMEs by integrating behavioural courses into business skills training. According to Grewatsch and Kleindienst (2018), this approach involves actively engaging with various stakeholders, including customers, suppliers, employees, and the broader community, to better understand their needs and expectations. By doing so, entrepreneurs can develop more effective strategies that cater to these needs, leading to improved business performance and sustainability. Therefore, by integrating behavioural courses into business skills training, entrepreneurs can develop the necessary skills to effectively engage with stakeholders, leading to stronger business performance and a more sustainable future for South African SMEs.

Key Strategies for Enhancing Stakeholder Engagement

i. **Identify and Prioritize Stakeholders:** Identify the key stakeholders relevant to the business, such as customers, suppliers, employees, and the community. Prioritize them based on their power, influence, and interest in the business.

ii. **Develop a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy:** Create a comprehensive strategy that outlines the goals, objectives, and actions for engaging with stakeholders. This should include specific roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder group.

iii. **Build Trust and Transparency:** Foster trust by being transparent about the motivations and goals of the business. This can be achieved by actively listening to stakeholders, understanding their viewpoints, and addressing their concerns.

iv. **Encourage Feedback and Participation:** Encourage stakeholders to provide feedback and participate in decision-making processes. This can be done through various mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, and town hall meetings.

v. **Monitor and Evaluate Engagement:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement efforts. This includes tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) and adjusting strategies as needed.
Benefits of Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement

i. **Improved Business Performance**: Enhanced stakeholder engagement can lead to better customer satisfaction, increased loyalty, and improved brand reputation, ultimately driving business growth and profitability.

ii. **Increased Sustainability**: By considering the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, businesses can develop more sustainable strategies that benefit both the organization and the broader community.

iii. **Enhanced reputation**: Effective stakeholder engagement can enhance a business’s reputation by demonstrating a commitment to transparency, accountability, and social responsibility.

iv. **Better Decision-Making**: Stakeholder engagement can provide valuable insights that inform better decision-making, leading to more effective strategies and improved business outcomes.

Conclusions

The study designed an innovative approach to incorporate attitudes and behaviour within the training of entrepreneurs to stimulate high performance and market competitiveness. There exist numerous instances where a business enterprise fails despite its human resources capacity development in business skills, and sometimes even having adequate resources. Evidence was produced highlighting that some SMEs which were on the verge of collapsing/failing were revived by incorporating training aspects of ‘attitude’ and ‘behaviour’. Furthermore, the paper demonstrated how an existing training on skills development can be improved by adding content that focuses on attitudes and behaviour to reduce their failure. The findings of this study have potential to enable business schools and colleges offering entrepreneurship courses to incorporate ‘attitude’ and ‘behaviour’ which could aid in the survival of the SMEs critical for the economy of the country.

Implications

Specific attitudes and behaviours that are recommended for integration into the training of entrepreneurs include first, an acceptance for a need to improve on behavioural aspects of the role players. Some SMMEs/entrepreneurs who undertook such a training, were able to improve immensely, including one in Mpumalanga Province of South Africa that improved from just below USD107000 to over USD1.5 million annual revenue (SMME refused permission to disclose). Challenges in the provision of such an enhancing course is the scarcity of trained experts, and the high cost involved where payments is required.

Recommendations

Business schools and colleges offering business skills should consider incorporating the behavioural courses within a skills development course. The study provoked review in aspects of entrepreneurial education, curriculum context, behaviour in training, entrepreneurship of SMEs, exposure to entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial competencies, and possible review of the curriculum. It is therefore recommended that:

i. Due to its importance, entrepreneurial education should be incorporated in developing students' entrepreneurial attitudes, abilities, and skills, which can aid in starting and sustaining successful businesses.

ii. The curriculum should be thoroughly contextualized, encapsulating national, local, and institutional factors to optimally yield the desired outcome.

iii. Behavioral courses should be integrated into business skills training to help consolidating entrepreneurial performance by addressing areas such as self-confidence, self-esteem, and business skills, particularly for women.

iv. Entrepreneurship training should be significantly adapted to focus on improving the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in South Africa)

v. Business schools and colleges should expose students to entrepreneurship systematically and effectively, providing real-world experiences and opportunities to interact with entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial companies.

vi. Business training institutions should develop specific entrepreneurial competencies to positively influence the success of a business, emphasizing the importance of entrepreneurial education in fostering these competencies.

vii. Business schools and colleges should evaluate, diversify, and refine existing curriculum forms, establishing a bilateral relationship with real entrepreneurs and providing opportunities for students to gain real-world experience in running a business.

Areas of Future Research

Some areas of future research that aim to improve stakeholder engagement practices, enhance participation, and ensure the success of research projects by integrating diverse stakeholder perspectives are:

i. **Standardization of Stakeholder Engagement**: A future study could investigate the way standardization can support stakeholder engagement in research projects, particularly in complex topics like smart cities and resilience. Another study
could be to examine the integration of standardization into research projects to foster stakeholder engagement and its impact on project outcomes.

ii. **Enhancing Stakeholder Participation:** A study may be embarked on to developing methodologies for comprehensive stakeholder engagement that include both internal and external stakeholders, particularly in projects involving public and local communities. Another study may be undertaken to investigating the importance of internal stakeholders for project success and the influence of external stakeholders on projects.

iii. **Stakeholder Management in Research Projects:** A study on the role of stakeholder engagement in ensuring the success of research projects, particularly in collaborative projects involving multiple stakeholders should be undertaken. There may be a study to examine the processes for stakeholder identification, analysis, and engagement strategies in research projects.

iv. **Future of Stakeholder Engagement:** A future study should be to investigate the evolution of stakeholder engagement practices to meet emerging challenges, such as climate change and water resources, and the need for more inclusive societies. Another study to develop strategic approaches to stakeholder engagement that integrate diverse stakeholder feedback and input into corporate operations.

v. **Stakeholder Engagement in Prioritizing Future Research Needs:** A study to identify methods used to engage stakeholders in identifying and prioritizing research needs, including the use of consistent terminology and definitions is recommended. Also, another to evaluating the experiences of Evidence-based Practice Centers (EPCs) in engaging stakeholders to identify research gaps and prioritize future research needs.

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