HBOB GAME Virtual Mentoring Project

Project Highlights:

The study intended to examine the impact of virtual mentoring on non tech women entrepreneurs.

We designed a milestone based mentoring structure to enable standardisation across the board keeping in mind potential scaling.

At the time of on-boarding 4 entrepreneurs submitted business plans, with mentoring support, 42 of them submitted business plans.

August 2020 to June 2021

4 cohorts

36 mentors and 92 mentees

4 Business Plans at start

42 submitted post mentoring

20 mentees completed the goal setting process

Average growth of 676% revenue projected by 2021-22

Questions we set out to answer:

- What could be the impact of virtual mentoring on women entrepreneurs working in non-technology domains? Are there any direct and measurable outcomes of virtual mentoring?

    Virtual mentoring has positive impact on outcomes

- Are there aspects of the mentor's profile that are more successful than others? such as entrepreneurial experience, professional coaching experience?

    Mentor's profile has minimal impact on outcomes

Who were the mentees?

Mentees were mobilized by GAME and their partners DeAsra and inducted in 4 cohorts.

92 mentees, mostly from Bangalore & Western India

Food & Beverage, Clothing & Accessories and Lifestyle, Wellness, Education, and allied areas

Revenue Range:
Min- 0
Max – 42 Lakhs
Median - 2.4 Lakhs

Who were the mentors?

The mentors who signed up came from varied backgrounds. Outreach for mentors was through professional networks and social media. 63% were women and 34% men.

They volunteered their time and were not compensated in any way.

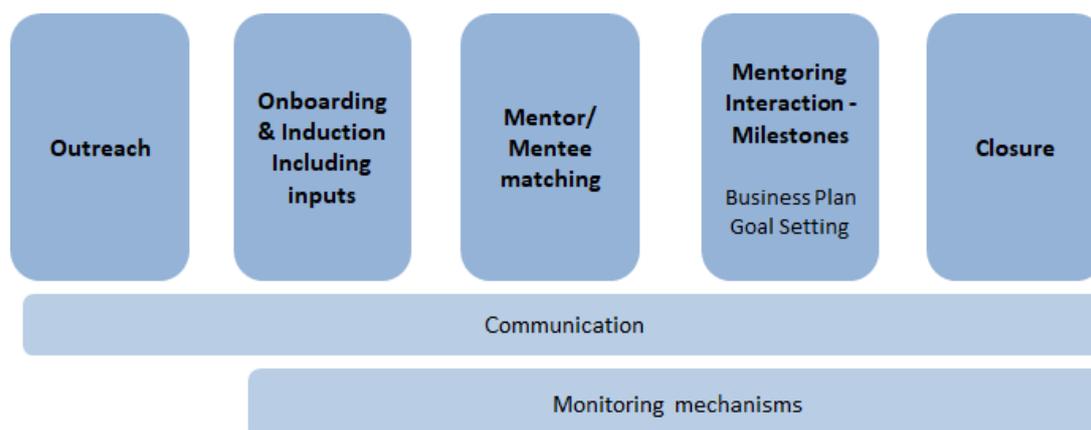Several mentors spoke regional languages and were able to mentor in those as well.

Background of Mentors

22.22%
25.00%
25.00%
27.78%
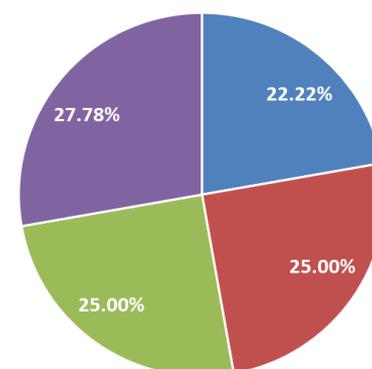
■ Coaches ■ Entrepreneurs ■ Corporate ■ Consultant

How did the process work?

The design was to induct both mentors and mentees through separate orientation processes. After matching based on any constraint or preference, they were then connected to each other on email for them to take the meetings forward at mutual convenience. The task before them was to work towards milestones using the mentoring conversation structure and philosophy laid out in the orientation and the mentor toolbox sessions.

Outreach

Onboarding & Induction Including inputs

Mentor/ Mentee matching

Mentoring Interaction - Milestones

Business Plan Goal Setting

Closure

Communication

Monitoring mechanisms

What were the inputs?

- At onboarding, mentors were given a mentoring handbook, detailing our structure and philosophy of mentoring and the outputs expected in the process.
- Through the programme, toolbox sessions presented as webinars and videos were made available providing inputs on holding effective mentoring conversations and working with the business plan template.
- Open Houses were conducted to stay connected and be a sounding board for mentors.

What were the outputs?

Cohort	Business Plans submitted	Goal setting submitted
1	13	11
2	11	4
3	6	2
4	13	3

(*Output: by cohort*)

•The milestones for the project were Business plans and Goal setting to be submitted by the mentees after working with their mentors.

•The business plan was in 2 parts - business background including target customers and financial details including set-up costs and projections up to FY 21-22.

What was the outcome?

- Business growth projected by mentees indicated their confidence and their resilience during Covid times.
- Entrepreneurs pivoted businesses to respond to business challenges brought on either by Covid or due to inherent issues.
- Entrepreneurs reported renewed focus on different avenues of business that were perhaps dormant or yet undiscovered.

| Revenue shift	Lower in 20-21 than at start	Up to 100% increase	100+ to 500%	Above 500%
Revenue at start v/s actual Revenue in 20-21	4	5	12	8

(*29 of the 42 business plans submitted had relevant data to extract above*)

"I had a good mentoring experience. I was working with one plan for marketing. My mentor guided me to market in multiple ways. I have not been able to do much because of the COVID crisis. Now I am looking forward to implementing all ideas and guidance that I got from my mentor". **Participant Mentee**

"I never knew I was capable of all these things. My confidence levels have increased to approach people whom I do not know to expand my business". **Participant Mentee**

Challenges & successes

- Challenges were encountered in onboarding entrepreneurs into the program. GAME reported an exceedingly long and not always fruitful process of mobilization. The yield of each mobilization round was about 5%.

- Mentor onboarding was much smoother than expected. A lot more volunteers than we needed signed up through our social media campaigns.
- COVID was an ever-present challenge, affecting mentees businesses, their families and themselves. A couple of our mentors too were affected. In both cases, this led to dropouts.
- 50 mentees did not reach the first milestone of submitting business plan. This could be attributed to: covid related pressures, lack of connect with mentor and unsuitability of mentoring for their needs at the time.
- Evaluation interviews elicited the interest of some mentees who dropped out to restart mentoring, or complete their business plans
- What contributed to the success was the process of mentoring, the structured milestone-based design, and the ease of virtual meetings.
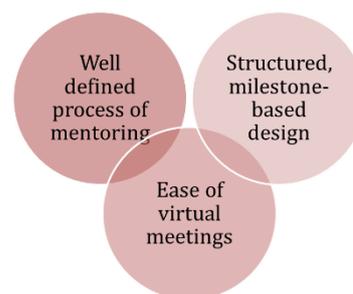
Learnings

- Entrepreneur engagement is higher when they are already part of the ecosystem.
- Mentor outreach yields better results through professional social media and networks.
- The background, experience or personality traits of the mentor have minimal impact on completion of project objectives.
- Some form of technology platform for monitoring and tracking would be essential to scale.
- Monitoring and tracking without a customised technology platform are a challenge.

- Clear expectations in terms of project outcomes, processes and timelines work well.
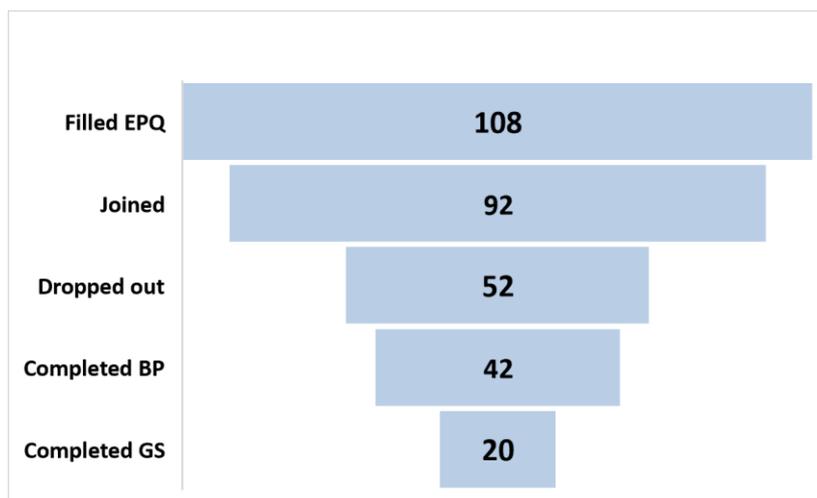
(Participant Pipeline from filling of profile questionnaire to completion of 2ⁿᵈ milestone)

Recommended essentials for future initiatives:

Given the challenges in managing mentee engagement, and the need to be responsive to their needs, we recommend the following:

- Clear and clustered mentee intake criteria.
- Identify separate anchor organisation for mentees and mentors.
- Set up peer learning platforms.
- Have a pool of experts on standby.
- Define mentoring and train potential mentors accordingly.
- Technology platform customised for mentoring backing the process.

Areas requiring further study:

- Paid v/s unpaid mentoring.
- Freemium model for mentoring support.
- Structured inputs for entrepreneurs in areas such as finance, basics of technology and marketing, along with mentoring.