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FROM DIGITAL TRAINING TO BUSINESS ROUTINES: A COMMUNITY MENTORING FRAMEWORK FOR MICROENTERPRISES

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Abstract

Background: Digital training may create online accounts without establishing reliable order handling or owner independence. **Aims:** To develop a community mentoring framework connecting digital adoption with repeatable microenterprise routines. **Review Method:** Three official resources on enterprise digitalisation, cooperative development, and reusable education were read purposively. No enterprise data or intervention outcomes are reported. **Results and Conclusion:** The proposed sequence combines readiness diagnosis, one bounded experiment, record-based reflection, and independent repetition. Visibility, operational performance, and economic contribution are evaluated separately. Channel expansion is conditional on capacity and owner control. **Contribution:** The article specifies a mentoring sequence, an illustrative order exercise, decision rules, and proposed measures. Its effectiveness and local suitability require empirical assessment.

Keywords: microenterprises; digital readiness; community mentoring; business routines; operational capability.

1 INTRODUCTION

A microenterprise owner can finish a digital marketing workshop with several new accounts and still lack a reliable method for confirming orders. The resulting gap concerns the organisation of work. A channel that attracts enquiries may increase effort and error if stock, response time, and payment recording remain unclear. Community mentoring therefore needs an objective beyond account creation.

The OECD (2021) discusses the uneven digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises and their readiness constraints. For very small enterprises, the design problem can be expressed as a sequence: which routine must work before another channel is introduced? This article develops a mentoring framework organised around that question. Its contribution is an explicit link between bounded experiments, business records, and owner independence.

2 CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

A digital routine is a repeatable arrangement for receiving information, making a business decision, and recording its result. The arrangement can be simple: a consistent order record may matter more to a very small enterprise than a sophisticated promotional system. Digital readiness is therefore defined for a particular task and stage. It should not become a general judgement about the owner's competence or willingness to modernise.

The OECD (2021) supplies a broad digital transformation context, while the ILO (2002) offers a basis for considering collective organisational support. The proposed mentoring design uses these sources to ask how assistance could leave a business able to operate independently. It separates account possession from effective control and sales volume from contribution. These distinctions are analytical choices for programme design; the article does not establish a universal sequence or a standard return on training.

Table 1. Proposed operational definitions

Construct	Meaning in this article	Observable example
Routine readiness	Ability to complete the next operating task with an understandable record.	A fictional order can be processed from enquiry to fulfilment.
Owner control	The owner can use and recover the business account independently.	Owner demonstrates permitted access and identifies recovery responsibility.
Operational quality	Orders can be accepted, recorded, and fulfilled consistently.	Confirmed and cancelled orders remain distinguishable.
Economic contribution	Receipts considered alongside relevant direct selling costs.	A transparent calculation with its scope stated.

The definitions in Table 1 specify the analytical objects for this framework. They are proposed working definitions rather than established measurement scales. A future study should examine whether participants and assessors interpret them consistently before combining them into a score.

3 REVIEW APPROACH

The article uses three purposively selected official resources. The OECD enterprise report supplies a digitalisation context; the ILO cooperative recommendation offers an organisational reference for collective support; UNESCO's resource recommendation informs the design of adaptable learning materials (ILO, 2002; OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2019).

The analysis distinguishes a policy principle from a programme decision. For each source, its relevance to capability, support arrangements, or material access was identified. These domains were then translated into a proposed mentoring sequence. The selected sources are not a comprehensive literature review. No participating enterprise, observation record, interview transcript, or financial dataset was available. All business situations below are hypothetical illustrations.

Table 2. Documentary corpus and analytical role

Source	Type	Role in the synthesis	Inference limit
OECD 2021	Enterprise digitalisation report	Context for capability and readiness constraints.	Not evidence of effects on this proposed sample.
ILO 2002	Cooperative development recommendation	Basis for considering collective support arrangements.	Does not establish that group mentoring is superior.
UNESCO 2019	Open educational resource recommendation	Basis for adaptable teaching worksheets.	Does not validate the proposed order form.

The analysis proceeds from construct definition to a proposed sequence, followed by consideration of failure conditions and measurement choices. Source statements supply context; the sequence, tables, examples, and propositions are analytical proposals developed in this manuscript. No search-completeness count, independent coding agreement, or causal estimate is reported. References should be checked against the full original documents during author review.

4 INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The proposed diagnosis begins with four questions: Can the owner state what is available? Can an order be confirmed? Can money received be matched to an order? Can the owner identify the direct cost of fulfilling it? An inability to answer does not disqualify an enterprise from assistance. It identifies the routine to address first.

Mentors can use a fictional order exercise to avoid collecting customer data. The owner records the product, quantity, promised delivery, payment status, and person responsible. If the exercise exposes uncertainty about stock, mentoring starts with stock visibility rather than adding another promotional channel. Readiness is therefore task specific, not a permanent label attached to the entrepreneur.

Table 3. Proposed sequence and responsibilities

Stage	Task	Responsible role	Expected evidence
Diagnose	Trace one fictional order and identify the first unresolved step.	Mentor and owner	A defined operating bottleneck.
Experiment	Select one product and channel with limited scope.	Owner chooses capacity and stop conditions.	A reversible trial plan.
Reflect	Review complete records including cancellations and workload.	Owner assisted by mentor	An explanation of results and costs.
Repeat	Run the routine without mentor operation.	Owner	Evidence of independent use and account control.

Table 3 links each stage to a responsibility and an observable record. The sequence is intended to expose a missing connection, rather than imply that completing a form guarantees an outcome. Movement between stages may be iterative. Where an essential condition is absent, the appropriate decision is to repair that condition or narrow the scope before expansion.

5 OPERATING MECHANISMS

The next stage chooses one product, one channel, and a limited operating period. The owner defines capacity and the conditions for accepting an order. A simple record captures enquiries, confirmed orders, cancellations, fulfilment problems, and direct selling expenses. The experiment should remain small enough to reverse without committing to substantial advertising or new borrowing.

The mentor's role is to explain and observe the routine. Account ownership and recovery controls should remain with the business owner. A programme that leaves the mentor as the only person able to operate the account may create dependency. Independent repetition is therefore a distinct completion requirement, even when assisted sales activity appears promising.

Table 4. Mechanisms proposed for examination

Mechanism	Analytical function	Required condition
Bottleneck focus	Concentrates scarce learning time on the next operating problem.	Diagnosis is based on an observable task.
Bounded experimentation	Limits the consequences of an unsuitable channel.	Capacity, cost, and stop conditions are declared.
Record-based reflection	Allows attention and business value to be distinguished.	Incomplete and unsuccessful orders are retained.

Imagine a home producer receiving enquiries through an online catalogue. The owner can show product photographs but cannot consistently distinguish enquiries from paid orders. The proposed mentor begins with an order record containing product, quantity, promised date, payment status, and completion status. Promotion is held within current capacity until this record can be used reliably. No increase in revenue is assumed.

During a fictional trial review, more enquiries coincide with more cancelled orders and longer response times. A programme reporting only enquiry growth would call this progress. The framework instead asks whether the channel can be operated with acceptable workload and fulfilment quality. The owner may narrow the product range, change response arrangements, or stop the trial. These are examples of possible decisions, not observations from an enterprise study.

6 PROPOSITIONS FOR EMPIRICAL TESTING

The propositions below describe relationships that a future study could examine. Their numbering supports discussion and does not indicate a hierarchy of importance. They are not hypotheses tested by this manuscript, and no effect size or statistical significance is implied.

P1. Mentoring focused on a single operating bottleneck is more likely to produce independent routine adoption than simultaneous introduction of multiple digital tools.

P2. Higher online attention is more likely to translate into useful business outcomes when order handling and fulfilment capacity are established beforehand.

Table 5. Additional propositions and possible tests

ID	Proposed relationship	Possible observation
P3	Independent routine retention will be lower when mentors continue operating accounts for owners.	Observe who performs the task after support ends.
P4	Digital channel expansion will increase fulfilment problems when operating capacity is not considered.	Trace orders, workload, and unresolved commitments.
P5	Mentoring assessments will overstate value when cancelled orders and direct costs are omitted.	Compare complete and restricted outcome records.

A useful test would specify a plausible competing explanation and seek evidence that could weaken the proposed relationship. Comparison conditions, timing, and assistance received should be described before interpreting an observed difference. A finding inconsistent with a proposition would require revision of the framework, not reinterpretation of every outcome as support.

The appropriate unit of analysis may be a task episode, a decision, or a programme cycle. Future researchers should choose that unit explicitly and keep it consistent across measurement and interpretation. Repeated observations from the same person or organisation should not automatically be treated as independent evidence.

7 IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY

The pathway in Table 6 is a proposed pilot design rather than a record of completed implementation. It identifies who would perform each task and what evidence should be available before proceeding. Local organisers should adapt the sequence to their authority, resources, participant needs, and responsibilities.

Table 6. Staged implementation proposal

Stage	Proposed task	Responsible role	Evidence before proceeding
Select	Agree one business objective and preserve the existing sales route.	Owner	A stated objective and manageable scope.
Diagnose	Walk through a fictional order with the owner.	Mentor	One priority bottleneck rather than a tool shopping list.
Prepare	Create a simple reusable order and cost sheet.	Owner with mentor	Fields understood and usable without specialised software.
Trial	Operate one channel within declared capacity.	Owner	Complete records of enquiries, orders, failures, and effort.
Review	Decide whether to repeat, revise, or stop.	Owner; mentor advises	A reasoned decision based on the stated objective.

A pilot should begin with a bounded scope that can be reviewed without unnecessary cost or disruption. The coordinator should record deviations from the plan, including inaccessible activities, unavailable resources, and support that exceeded expectations. These records help explain why an apparently suitable design may work differently across settings.

Expansion should depend on a reasoned review of evidence and unresolved barriers. Completion of the pathway does not itself establish effectiveness. Stopping or revising a pilot can be appropriate when its objective cannot be reached under the available conditions.

8 EVALUATION AND MEASUREMENT

A future evaluation should distinguish a mentor-assisted observation from independent business operation. Cost definitions must be explained before comparisons are made. An owner may legitimately choose a simpler channel even when another generates more enquiries. Evaluation should report this decision and its reasons, rather than treating all discontinuation as failure. No financial threshold or required advertising expenditure is implied by the framework.

Table 7. Proposed indicators and interpretation limits

Dimension	Operational question	Potential evidence	Interpretation limit
Attention	Views and enquiries recorded separately from orders.	Platform record or owner log.	Attention does not establish sales or profit.
Order handling	Confirmed, paid, cancelled, and fulfilled orders distinguished.	Order record with stable identifiers.	Missing cancellations inflate apparent success.
Workload	Additional owner time and interrupted activities described.	Brief operating diary.	Recall error and seasonal changes matter.
Contribution	Receipts minus clearly scoped direct selling expenses.	Simple cost sheet and receipts where available.	This is not full accounting profit.
Independence	Owner performs the routine without mentor operation.	Observed task after support ends.	A demonstration may not show long-term retention.

Any evaluation involving people or identifiable records needs an appropriate protocol, permissions, and a locally relevant ethics determination before collection. This article reports no such collection. A future report should describe missing observations, participation barriers, and the conditions of assessment, rather than presenting completed cases as if they represented everyone intended to benefit.

9 DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

The framework changes the completion criterion for community business training. A programme is not considered successful merely because participants have new accounts or an online listing. The owner should be able to explain and operate a routine, understand its immediate costs, and decide whether it serves a business objective. This approach can make a decision to delay expansion a legitimate learning outcome rather than a programme failure.

The central trade-off concerns support intensity. Extensive mentoring can improve immediate task completion while concealing dependency. Minimal assistance may preserve independence but exclude owners who need more time or accessible instruction. A future study should record both support received and later unaided performance. It should also distinguish the experience of participants who complete mentoring from those who stop, including reasons related to caring duties, time, or unsuitable market conditions.

Economic effects are especially difficult to attribute. Demand, product quality, price, seasonality, and existing customer relationships can change during mentoring. A before-and-after sales comparison alone cannot isolate programme effects. The present proposal offers no standard revenue target and no claim that a digital route is always appropriate. Its narrower contribution is to make decisions about channel use more traceable and to identify where operational capacity constrains the value of training.

PROGRAMME IMPLICATIONS

For a training provider, the proposed design makes an operating record part of the teaching material rather than an administrative burden added afterwards. Mentors should explain why each field helps the owner make a decision. A form that is too elaborate may be abandoned, so a simpler record can be preferable if it preserves the distinctions needed for the selected objective. The programme should also make its exit arrangement explicit: who maintains materials, who can answer later questions, and when assisted operation ends.

The documentary basis is limited to a small purposive corpus of official resources. It supports a normative and analytical design, not an exhaustive account of the research literature. Additional peer-reviewed studies, local evidence, and critical author review are needed to assess novelty and refine the proposed constructs. Cross-setting applicability remains an open question.

10 CONCLUSION

Microenterprise digital mentoring should connect channel use to repeatable business routines. Readiness diagnosis, bounded experimentation, record-based reflection, and independent repetition provide a practical sequence. The framework remains untested and should be evaluated for owner workload, operating quality, economic outcomes, and unequal access before wider adoption.

PRIORITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The next research priority is to observe whether owners retain a routine after mentor operation ends. A feasibility pilot could first examine whether the order and cost records are understandable and sustainable. A later comparison should consider enterprise type, previous digital experience, and changing demand. Reporting should retain discontinuation and unsuccessful orders, because excluding them would present an incomplete picture. Improved record quality would be a useful intermediate outcome, but it would not by itself establish increased profit, resilience, or long-term business survival.

DECLARATIONS

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