

COACHING AT GIBS IMPACT REPORT:

Narratives of personal change

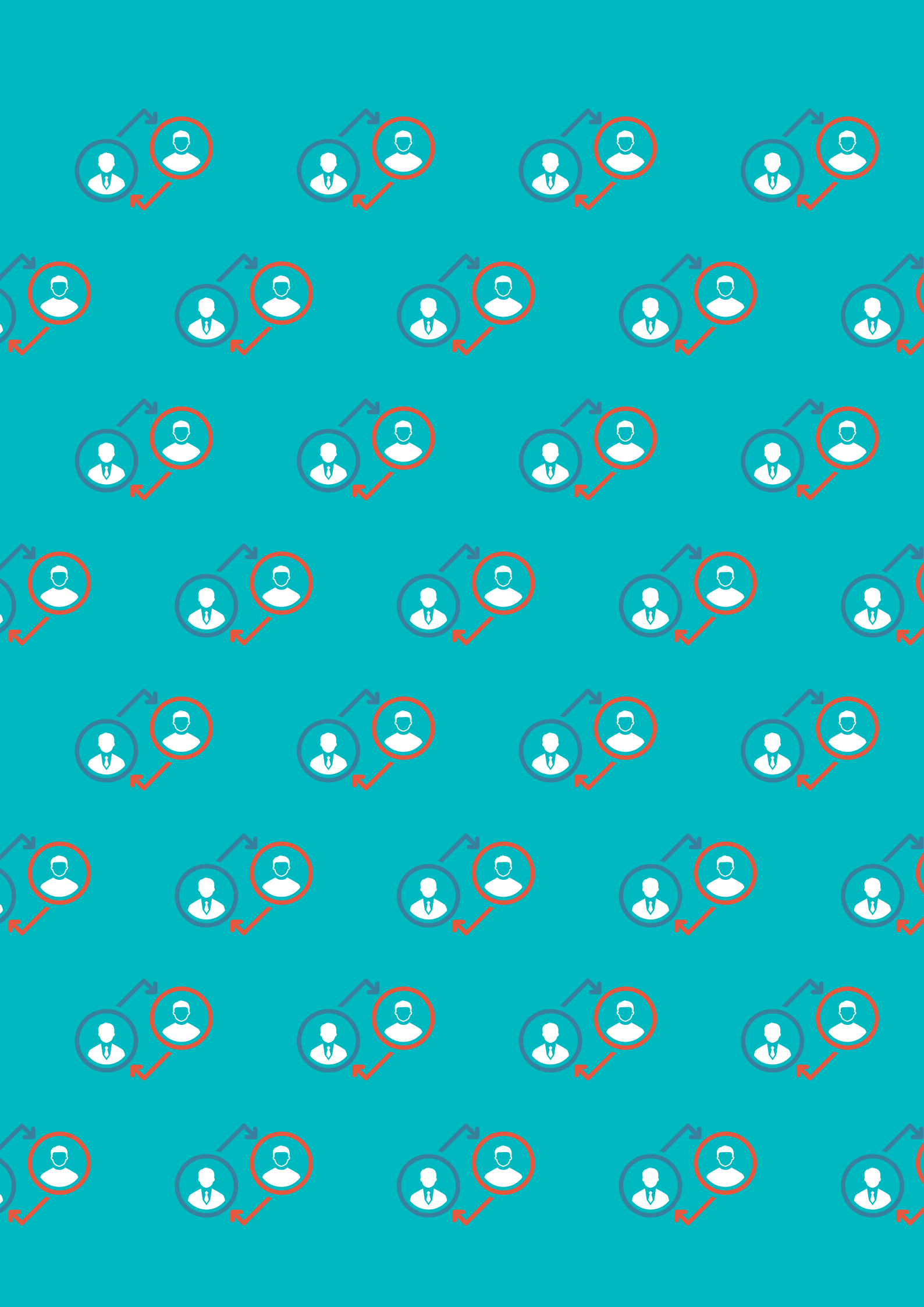
BY HANNAH BOTSIS

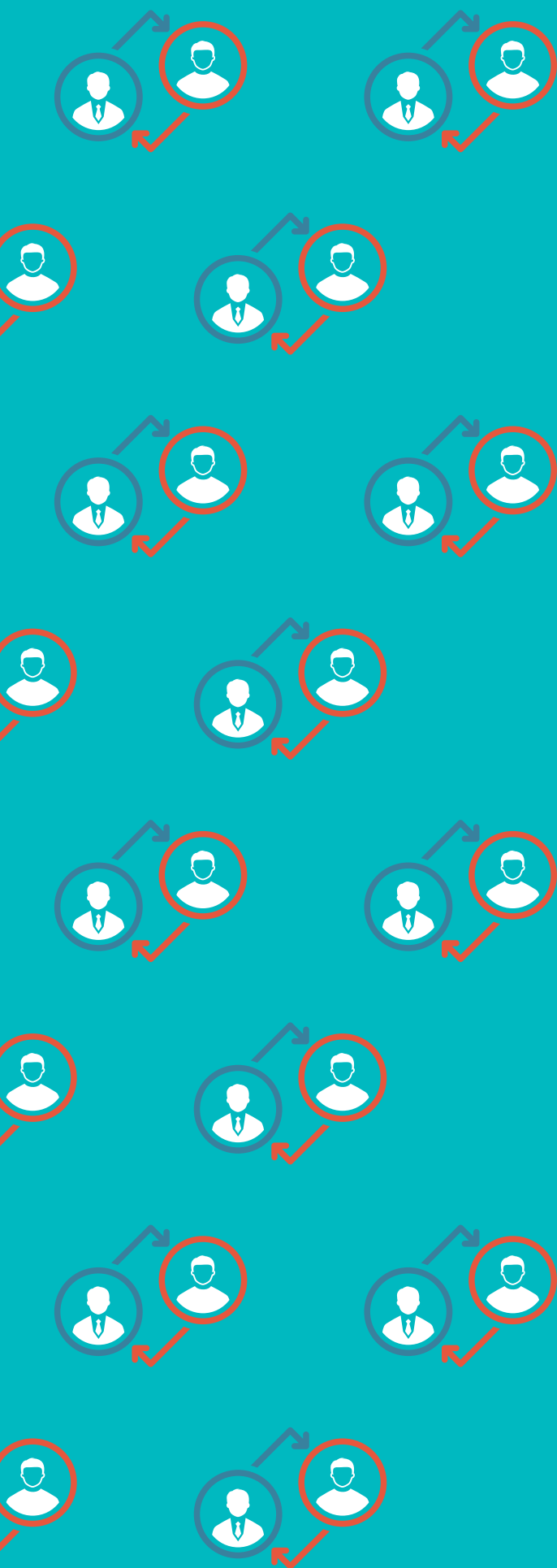


**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**

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Executive summary



Leadership and management education can no longer just be concerned with content, but needs to facilitate learning that is person-centred, alert to complexity, and that fosters authentic leadership. Coaching facilitates this upskilling of the workforce by being human-centred and insight-focused.

GIBS has been at the forefront of bringing coaching to business and to its programmes. The School has a decade-long track record in building these capabilities and capacities. Coaching at GIBS is located in the Personal and Applied Learning (PAL) department, which is a centre of excellence and a business unit that focuses on coaching and facilitation programmes to enhance learning across the School's offerings.

The objective of this report is to evaluate the personal impact of GIBS's coaching initiatives on delegates who have had coaching included in one of their programmes or who have attended one-on-one coaching through their workplace. The impact being assessed is at the level of the individual.

Delegates' narratives were used as evidence to measure against PAL's documented outcomes of *types of coaching* and the *personal learning journey*. A qualitative methodology was utilised, collecting personal narratives about the impact of coaching on individual delegates. Primary and secondary data sources were used, with data gleaned from the course

evaluations between 2017 and 2019. Additionally, qualitative deep-dive interviews were conducted with Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) class representatives, executive coaching delegates and GIBS staff in late 2019. Testimonials from executives involved in one-on-one coaching were also included. A thematic analysis was conducted of all available data, and resulted in the following themes:

- Personal insight
- Process capabilities and tools
- Team impact and cohesion
- Personal career impact
- Leader vulnerability

In terms of impact by *types of coaching*, individual coaching leveraged leadership capabilities, evidenced by narratives of personal insight, and the ability to use coaching tools going forward. Through group coaching, delegates experienced increased personal insight and team cohesion. Process capabilities and tools attained in the group session made coaching's impact more sustainable.

Concerning the impact of coaching on the *personal learning journey*, it was found that engaging in coaching processes led to personal insight, change and development in the participants' career, and the sustained application of learning.

1. Introduction

The changing nature of business emphasises the value of an authentic self who is able to work well in situations of complexity and diversity. It is imperative, both in the workplace and in business schools, to offer a learning modality that caters to these needs. Coaching is one such modality. In the workplace, the environment has shifted and there is an increased demand for coaching. Coaching has a big role to play in upskilling the workforce by being human-centred and insight-focused. Employees need to be self-reflexive and adaptive. In a world where technology is playing a bigger role, the way in which humans use technology and mediate their relationships is of increased importance, and a modern, future-oriented business school needs to be responsive to this context. Leadership and management education can no longer just be concerned with content, but needs to facilitate learning that is person-centred, alert to complexity, and that fosters authentic leadership with a clear sense of identity, where learning is turned into action.

GIBS is attuned to this business and pedagogical imperative, and has been at the forefront of bringing coaching to business and its programmes. The School started its coaching interventions early and has a decade-long track record in building these capabilities and capacities. Through trial and error and continuous reflection and learning, GIBS now boasts over 100 coaches and facilitators skilled in a variety of coaching approaches, also producing thought leadership and research.

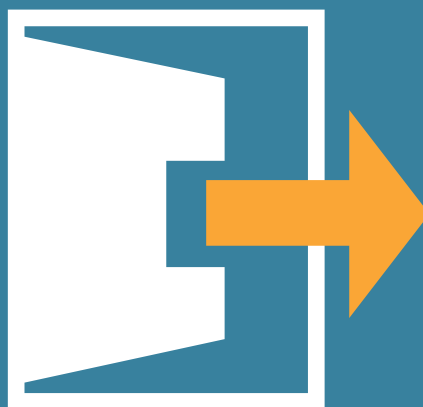
Coaching at GIBS is located in the PAL department, which is a centre of excellence and business unit that focuses on coaching and facilitation programmes to enhance learning across the School's offerings. PAL at GIBS offers qualifications in coaching as well as coaching processes as part of broader course offerings. The focus of this report is on the impact of the coaching component to deliver a meaningful experience that enhances the *personal learning journey* of GIBS students and clients. This report aims to use narrative evidence to communicate the impact of the coaching on delegates as individuals.

There are multiple forms of evidence that inform the rationale for the cross-cutting nature of coaching at GIBS. Firstly, at a macro socioeconomic level, the nature of skillsets required in the workplace is changing. Ratcheva and Leopold (2018) from the World Economic Forum emphasised that the fourth industrial revolution centres around “human skills” and less so on the “rise of machines”. It is vital that people feel empowered to understand themselves personally and professionally to maximise their impact in the workplace, whether as leaders, managers, or part of a broader team. In organisations, there is a shift from traditional performance management to a more coaching-infused approach to staff development.

At GIBS, coaching is used on Executive Education and Academic Programmes. The largest proportion of all kinds of coaching occurs in Custom Programmes as part of Executive Education, and on the longer Open Programmes. Although there is less of a proportion of coaching in Academic Programmes, most of these programmes include a coaching component.

The architecture of coaching at GIBS is threefold. There are individual coaching services (one-to-one coaching for executives), group and individual coaching as part of a leadership/management development programme (Personal Development Plan [PDP] coaching), and coaching as part of an Action Learning Project (ALP). All of these offerings can be included in Open Programmes, Custom Programmes, and Academic Programmes. Coaching is built into broader management education and leadership development programmes; as such, it is an additional learning modality that supports the learning outcomes of the programme. Coaching is used in most GIBS programmes delivering high personal and leadership impact. Individual executive coaching services (stand-alone, and not part of a broader learning programme) are delivered directly by PAL.

PAL holds the overarching process, which guides all coaching initiatives at GIBS and has multiple programme and process (capability) offerings, detailed in Table 1.



PROGRAMMES (BECOME A COACH, FACILITATOR OR MENTOR) - Coach education - Facilitation - Mentorship	PROCESSES (GET A COACH, FACILITATOR) - Executive coaching - Group coaching circles - GIBS team coaching - Facilitated processes - Learning advisory - Twenty-Plus
ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES WITH COACHING COMPONENT - MBA - PGDip - PhD Executive Education programmes with a coaching component include multiple Open Programmes and Custom Programmes at GIBS	COACHING TYPE - Individual (stand-alone, one-to-one) - Individual or group coaching on a programme (PDP coaching) - ALP on a programme - Individual Improvement Projects (IIPs), - Business Improvement Projects (BIPs), and - Strategic Improvement Projects (SIPs).

Table 1: Personal and Applied Learning coaching programmes and processes
The data drawn on in this impact report comes from evaluations of the coaching processes integrated into existing courses, not from qualifications in coaching itself.

2. Objectives of the impact study

The objective of this impact report is to assess the personal, group or team impact of coaching, and not the business impact of coaching. Owing to the available data from the course evaluations and the personal narratives supplied in interviews with individuals who have undergone executive education and stand-alone coaching, this report measures personal and team impact, as opposed to the return on investment (ROI) for action learning interventions. A separate report (see Thompson, 2020) has been commissioned on the ROI for ALPs specifically.

This report's objective is to evaluate the personal impact of coaching initiatives at GIBS on delegates who have had coaching included in one of their programmes or who have attended one-on-one coaching through their workplace. The impact being assessed is at the level of the individual. As such, it is a qualitative study drawing on personal narratives. The delegates' narratives will be used as evidence to measure against PAL's documented outcomes of *types of coaching* and the *personal learning journey*. Therefore, the impact of what is being measured is a personal assessment of the coaching process, in group or individual formats.



2.1 Types of coaching at GIBS



Individual coaching, including executive leadership programmes, comprises a set of focused sessions that aim to “leverage leadership capability and optimise performance”.

PDP group coaching focuses on personal and skills development in a team setting. It “is scalable” and “enhances social learning and leadership” through peer feedback.

ALP coaching, as a subset of group coaching, comprises a team project that addresses an “identified business challenge”, with the focus being on the “the practical application of learning”. There are three types of ALPs: IIPs, BIPs, and SIPs.

These processes can be included in open, customised and in-house programmes. The majority (55%) of Academic Programmes (MBA, PGDip, and PhD) include a group coaching component. Karl Hofmeyr, a professor of leadership and organisational behaviour at GIBS, notes that these programmes are largely about discipline-specific content and knowledge, but

that self-awareness, personal development and growth are equally important.

“We want students to be able to identify their strengths, weaknesses and blind spots” (K. Hofmeyr, personal communication, January 17, 2020).¹

There are four sessions of group coaching over the two-year period. On both the PGDip and MBA there is a theme of continuous feedback, with students undergoing assessments, personal feedback forms, 360s, Myers-Briggs assessments and insight colours. In the second year, students have their first group coaching session where they plan how to integrate their learning for personal growth during the year. A key part of the MBA is the syndicate group, and these coaching sessions also allow time for the syndicate to talk about how it is functioning as a group. The rubric in Table 2 will be used to assess the impact of the coaching sessions.

COACHING TYPE	STATED OUTCOME	IMPACT ACHIEVED?
Stand-alone individual coaching (often executive)	To “leverage leadership capability and optimise performance”.	Personal and professional development and learning for individuals that is focused on the individuals’ needs.
Individual and group coaching as part of a programme	Personal and leadership development, individually or in a group setting, as part of a leadership or management development programme. It “is scalable” and it “enhances social learning and leadership” through peer feedback.	Personal and professional development and learning focused on the individuals’ needs and on the programme’s learning needs, which is achieved through group process and interaction (in the case of group coaching).
ALPs	Addresses an “identified business challenge”, with the focus being on the “the practical application of learning” in a team setting.	Focuses on task outcomes of the work team: ROI and business results. Team learning and development, through the process of working on the business challenge. Might include personal learning and growth as part of working on the business challenge.

Table 2: Impact by coaching type

References

¹ Throughout this report, all of the indented text is quoted, with sections in bold for emphasis. The quotes have been edited for grammatical correctness, but their meaning has not been altered.

2.2 The personal learning journey

The personal learning journey at GIBS is threaded through these programmes and processes, and is defined by PAL (2019) as “combining individual coaching, group coaching, action learning coaching, facilitation and learning integration, for a relevant, impactful, integrated personal development process”. Personal learning journeys are the focus of individual and group coaching. Action learning coaching centres on business results and learning results, with personal learning as a by-product. This journey aims to include the outcomes outlined in Table 3, against which the impact of coaching will be assessed, using delegate narratives as evidence.



PERSONAL LEARNING JOURNEY IMPACT MEASUREMENT

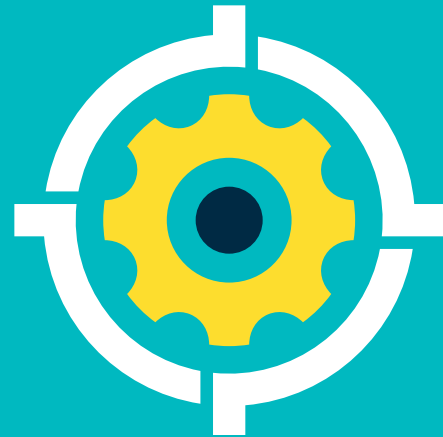
OUTCOME	DESIRED IMPACT	IMPACT ACHIEVED
Insight	Current reality understood and aspired future reality imagined.	To be assessed
Change and development	Learning leading to change/impact. Coaching, feedback, learning integration used as part of ongoing development.	To be assessed
Learning application and embedding	Sustained application of learning. Future expectations and results achieved.	To be assessed

Table 3: Personal learning journey impact

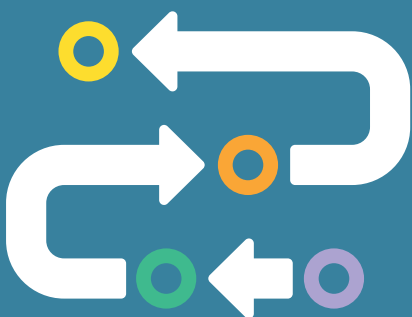
2.3 Scope

The scope of this impact study includes measuring the value and impact of coaching for individuals at GIBS against the outcomes of the *types of coaching* and the *personal learning journey*. Furthermore, this study aims to ascertain whether there were any areas of critique or recommendations for better practice. This study excludes measuring how and if the coaching component supports the overall programme learning outcomes. It also excludes measuring a ROI for ALPs.

The focus here is on qualitatively assessing the impact of individual stand-alone and group coaching processes. In both instances, the focus is on the growth and development of the individual through either one-on-one or group coaching processes. The relative emphasis in the ALPs is on the delivery of a project for a team or organisation, but a parallel output is learning and development as an individual through the

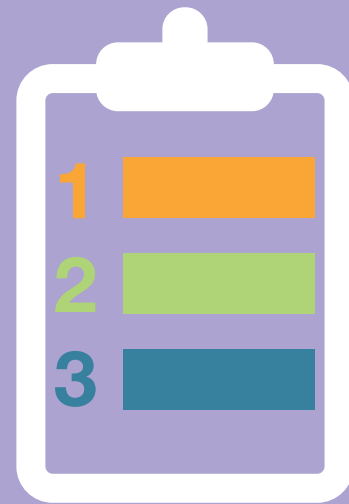


mechanism of the team project. In this instance, this report is concerned with the parallel output, not the success of the project itself. Moreover, the research's concern is with individual impacts, and not the coaching methodology per se. Thus, for all three forms of coaching, the emphasis will be on drawing out evidence about the personal impact of coaching activities.



3. Methodology

This report is based on a qualitative methodology concerned with collecting personal narratives about the impact of coaching on individual delegates. Both primary and secondary data sources were used, with data gleaned from the course evaluations' open comments section and course documentation from 2017 to 2019. Additionally, qualitative deep-dive interviews were conducted with MBA and PGDip class representatives, executive coaching delegates and GIBS staff in late 2019 to elaborate on themes flagged in the course evaluations. Data was drawn from programme-oriented coaching, but testimonials from executives involved in one-on-one coaching with professional associates, which were supplied by PAL, were also included.



3.1 Programme numbers

Table 4 details the number of programmes with a coaching component in 2019. There are five divisions: Academic Programmes, PhD programmes, Open Programmes, Custom Programmes, and the Enterprise Development Academy (EDA) programmes.

Divisions	Total # of programmes	Programmes with individual coaching	Programmes with group coaching (including ALP)	Total number of programmes with coaching	% programmes with coaching
Custom Programmes	85	25	53	56	66%
Open Programmes	72	7	14	14	19%
Academic Programmes	11	1	5	6	55%
EDA programmes	7	7	7	7	100%
PhD programmes	2	2	0	2	100%
Total	177	42	79	85	41%

Table 4: Programme numbers
 Table 4 refers to the number of programmes with coaching, but not the amount or proportion of coaching on programmes themselves. For instance, in Academic Programmes, there is very little coaching in proportion to the programme as a whole, while the proportion for Executive Education is much larger. Executive development's notion of coaching is very different from the coaching used in the rest of the School.

There are 85 **Custom Programmes**, of which 53 programmes have a group coaching component, including ALPs. There are 25 programmes with an individual coaching element in this stream. In total, 66% of Custom Programmes have a coaching component.

There are 72 **Open Programmes**, of which 14 programmes have a group coaching component. Seven programmes have an individual coaching component, which also have group coaching. In total, 19% of Open Programmes have a coaching component.

There are 11 **Academic Programmes**. Only one of these programmes, the full-time Postgraduate Diploma in Business Administration (FT PDBA), has an individual coaching component. There are six programmes with a group coaching component, including ALPs, and these are the FT PDBA, Programme for Management Development (PMD), Intensive PGDip, Intensive MBA, PGDip, and MBA. In total, there are six programmes with a coaching component, which translates to 55% of all Academic Programmes having a coaching component as part of their course offering.

In terms of the PAL division, in 2019 alone, 105 executives were individually coached (not part of a programme) through the PAL coaching department at GIBS.

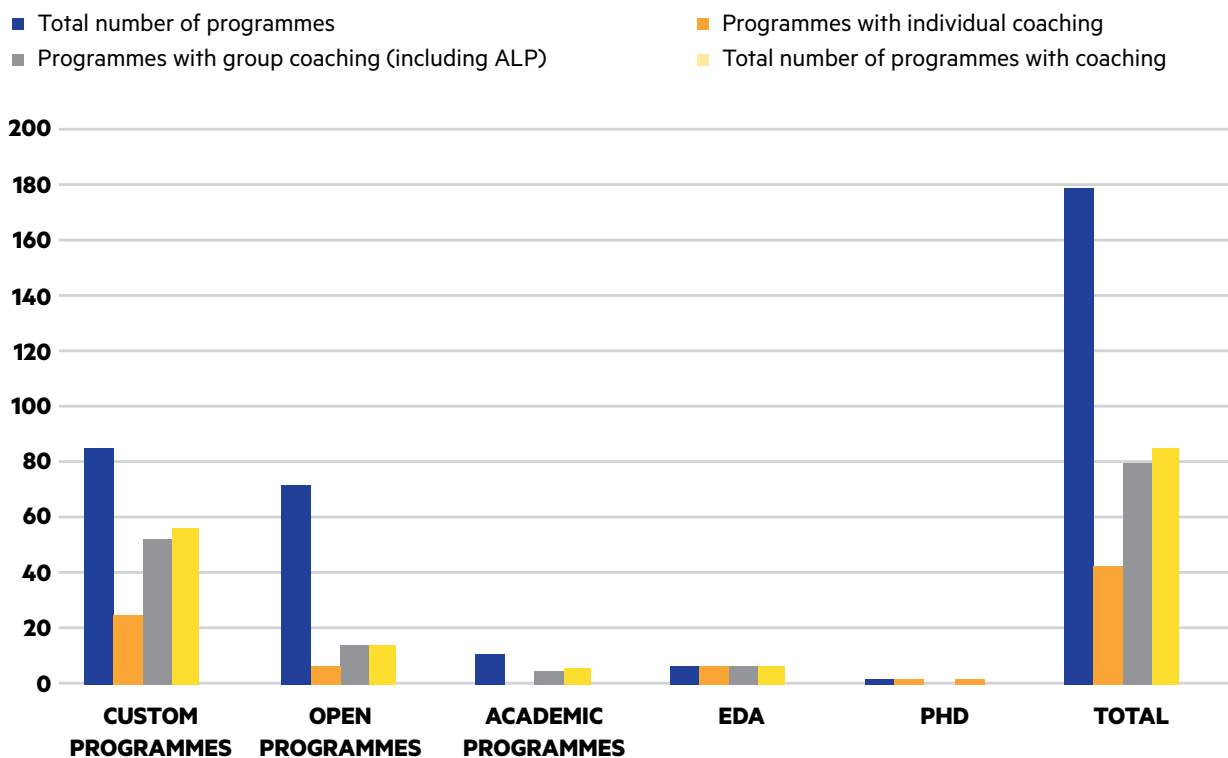


Figure 1: Programmes with coaching

3.2 Analysis

A thematic analysis of the comments section of course evaluations was conducted. This involved extracting all available narrative data into a spreadsheet that was filtered by coaching type – individual, PDP group, and ALP. The data was read and intuitive notes were taken, recording when repeated motifs occurred across comments (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These notes were then iteratively refined into five themes: personal insight, process capabilities and tools, team impact and cohesion, personal career development, and leader vulnerability.

The data was then coded by theme and filtered by coaching type to reveal the weighting of each theme by coaching type. This gave an overall assessment of which themes were most prevalent across the dataset, but also allowed for findings to be discussed at a more granular level. These findings were then measured against the “stated outcomes” of the types of coaching and the “desired impact” of the personal learning journey outlined in section two, “Objectives of the impact study”. The findings of this process will be discussed in the section that follows and the impact of the findings is presented in the discussion in section six.



management
growth quieter
empowering
heard potential
enabling not
unlock allows
performance
voices change
safe stretching

4 Findings

Five themes were identified in the personal narrative feedback of delegates. When looking purely at individual and group PDP coaching, the most prevalent theme was personal insight, closely followed by the process capabilities developed in the coaching process, and team impact and cohesion. However, when ALP coaching was included in the analysis, the order of these three themes shifted only marginally, with team impact and cohesion being the most prevalent, followed by personal insight, and process capabilities. In reading the findings, the emphasis is on how one makes meaning of these themes in relation to the delegates’ personal learning journey.

The themes will be introduced by providing a definition of the theme, followed by quotes from delegates demonstrating the content of the theme. In the discussion section, these themes will be measured against *coaching outcomes* and the desired impact of the *personal learning journey*.

4.1 Theme one: Personal insight



Personal insight came out strongly as an impact of coaching on delegates. Included here are accounts of personal growth, self-actualisation, reflection, and the transformative and inspirational nature of the coaching process. These narratives were not so much about personal career impact (as per theme four), but more about personal revelation, which empowered the individuals and allowed them to understand themselves better.

A repeated refrain among delegates was that the coaching sessions allowed time for valuable introspection. Delegates were able to see new facets of their identities, using phrases like:

“I managed to discover some things I did not know about myself.”

“I get such benefit from these deep and insightful sessions. Real personal growth takes place in this time.”

These moments of reflection were not always easy, but were appreciated for the personal change they brought about.

“I realise I need it as it is essential for one’s growth. It was valuable and overwhelming. Enabling us to know ourselves better.”

The results of this process were described in dramatic terms, with many personal revelations:

“I’ve had such a change in my outlook and everything I do; I’ll forever be grateful for the insights and lessons.”

“The session took me out of my comfort zone.”

While there were moments of discomfort, as one delegate pointed out, the nature of the discussion:

“Made it easy for me to talk about some tough challenges discovered through the assessment”.

Furthermore, one delegate mentioned that he/she was able to:

“Discover the fears I have and gave suggestions on how to deal with them. Her help gave me an insight of how to be positive in future”.

This personal work facilitated a proactive attitude towards one’s development:

“I have found [coaching] extremely valuable in helping me dig deep into my personal issues and how I can take charge and impact positively.”

The coaching was seen as an integral part of the process in unlocking individual potential:

“It has been a major catalyst in me rediscovering my own worth and working from that as a basis for development of self.”



4.2 Theme two: Process capabilities and tools

The actual capabilities and tools used in the process of coaching stood out in the evidence. Delegates lauded the coaching process for its innovative and powerful listening and questioning approach. Individuals spoke about provocative and difficult questions that lead to personal insight (theme one). The approach was seen as valuable because it inspired empathy and authenticity, where people's stories could be told in a non-threatening environment.

How to ask good questions was a pervasive sentiment in this theme. The delegates felt that the tools the coaches used extracted information well. For instance, one delegate said:

"The coach helped us to understand the concept of asking the right questions during coaching sessions. She also explored the concept of sharing authentic stories."

It was not only the content of the session, but the form of the session that was of value to the delegates.

"[The coach] offered herself to me as a thinking partner and our sessions mostly took on the format of her as the coach probing and guiding me to reach points of discovery of self and others through assisting me to answer questions and order my thoughts."

These sessions were not always comfortable, as this delegate highlighted:

"[It was] tough on us in a sense that they ask all these difficult questions that will enable us to think broader than our current circumstances and thinking."

Asking the right questions was seen as important, but so was listening. The active listening skills were seen as something that could be transferred to the team relationship.

"Learning to listen and getting clarification, while questioning. I'm going to use the models in my one-on-ones with my team. I enjoyed the practical and hands-on approach."

Listening was also not something limited to verbal communication, as one delegate pointed out:

"My coach listens very well to both my verbal and body language about my growth and development and always gives constructive feedback. I realised true benefits of reflection and to talk things through without fear of being judged."

The vulnerability required for these types of conversations was flagged by a number of participants. Moreover, an emphasis was placed on the need for empathy and authenticity in conversation:

"The courageous conversation skills were very useful. As always, remarkable and super insightful. I feel less anxious about courageous conversations. Amazing and inspirational."

"An authentic approach to coaching creates a safe space to share."

The delegates repeatedly commented on the "safe space" that was created in the coaching session. When sharing their experiences, they were pushed to "provide clarity and create a story", which "helped quieter voices be heard and ensuring everyone understood". The process of storytelling was seen in a positive light:

"Storytelling was quite meaningful to me. It helped me create human connections with my colleagues."

"[There was] an environment where we could be vulnerable yet safe. The benefits of trust as the first building block were visible thus reinforcing its effect. I realised for the first time that trust in the team is a strength and not a weakness."

One delegate summed up the sentiments, saying it was felt that:

"We certainly need coaches in our busy schedules and professional careers; to keep us relevant, focused and out of the comfort zone."

4.3 Theme three: Team impact and cohesion



One of the most prevalent themes across the dataset was the impact of coaching on team cohesion. To some degree, this is no surprise as most of the coaching at GIBS is of a group nature. This theme pertains to coaching's impact on teams and stories of improved cohesiveness through openness. For example, narratives under this theme spoke about the difference between coaching and performance management, and how the coaching space allowed for quieter voices in the team to be heard. Group coaching, in this instance, was seen as a safe space where storytelling is an impactful tool to facilitate connectedness. Unsurprisingly, under this theme, there was also a lot of talk of how coaching helped with the outcomes of ALPs.

Group coaching is described as “a small group of people meeting together in active participation on several occasions for the purpose of learning, including developing new capacities and skills. Participants learn through exchange and interaction with each other” (Thornton, 2010, p. 9). Individual learning remains the focus of group coaching, even though this occurs through group interaction. The group members become “assistant coaches” to each other, supporting growth through trust and empathy, and opportunities for learning can be multiplied by the number of individuals and relationships in the group and through collective wisdom and support (Florent-Treacy, 2009; Thornton, 2010; Ward, 2008). Group coaching provides a space where interpersonal dynamics can play out, boundaries are set, roles are adopted, and patterns of interaction are explored (Kets de Vries, 2005).

The group coaching definition mentioned above does not include a specific focus on cohesion, and the fact that it has been flagged as an unplanned by-product is a positive finding, and something that could be leveraged in future. One delegate highlighted the practical value of coaching:

“Coaching is a critical skill and practice. Done right, it can yield favourable results to drive team cohesiveness and high performance. Very engaging and good insight on how to listen to others.”

The same delegate mentioned:

“[It is important to] understand the difference between coaching and performance management”.

The general cohesiveness of the team was put down to the openness that was facilitated through frank and empathetic discussion. For instance, it was repeatedly noted that the sessions allowed for “discovery” and “introspection”.

“I was pleasantly surprised by the depth of the conversation in our team.”

“I feel closer to my colleagues and part of the broader team.”

Group coaching specifically was seen as a “valuable exercise”, and that “more time could have been allocated to it”. This sense of needing more time could be because of the emotional nature of many of the discussions, and that dealing with sensitive issues took time and understanding. Some delegates admitted to being nervous before the session because of the vulnerability required, but were pleasantly surprised:

“The session was emotional, but we got to understand one another.”

This understanding was facilitated by using the diverse team dynamics as a strength. As one participant stated:

“[The coach] managed to instil ground rules within the team dynamic in order for us to move forward. He managed to use our difficulties to coach us and to enlighten us about thinking deeper.”

Overall, it was felt that there was:

“A lot of value being in a group to leverage off other’s experiences.”

The delegates shared that they learnt about themselves with and through others. One participant explained:

“[The group coaching session] made you feel comfortable and want to share. It was great to be open in smaller groups and learn about others. I also learnt a lot about myself. It was an eye-opener.”

Learning from other individuals in this manner was found to be inspirational by the delegates.

“I am inspired. The group was able to open up more on personal upbringing, growth, career and social space. The coach made the environment neutral and relaxed. Wise. Insightful. Empathetic. Created high trust. Created safe space. Non-judging.”

The well-managed team dynamic was also helpful in facilitating good teamwork in practical ALPs, such as the BIP, which is a component on some courses. The delegates had the following to say on the matter:

“[The coaching session] managed to give the team direction and confidence... [The coach] made us think broadly about our BIP and anticipate potential questions from the panel, sponsors and stakeholders.”

“[The coaches asked] excellent provocative questions to ensure our team was clear on our common purpose for the BIP.”

MBA students explicitly stated that the value of the coaching sessions was about:

“Starting group discussions as opposed to personal insights. The sessions helped with group dynamics”.

Furthermore, a delegate noted that:

“Figuring out your role in the team is helpful.”

In this sense, the impact of the coaching was not necessarily aligned with its stated aim of personal growth and insight, but was still seen as being of value in other ways. For example, some of the key questions coming out of the process were: “what is your role in the team?”, “how are other team members viewing your contribution?”, and “how do you react to other team members not meeting targets?”. The sessions were seen as helpful because the delegates were able to:

“Focus on the syndicate and the dynamics in the syndicate. The coaches were there to facilitate discussions and ask pointed questions to motivate us, which added great value to our syndicate.”

Not only were the sessions motivating, they were also opportunities to work through tough emotional dynamics associated with group work.

“[The sessions allowed] a time of honest and open communication between the members of the syndicate. Issues that had been brewing were able to be dealt with. Syndicates can be highly temperamental, there are huge personalities and underlying issues.”

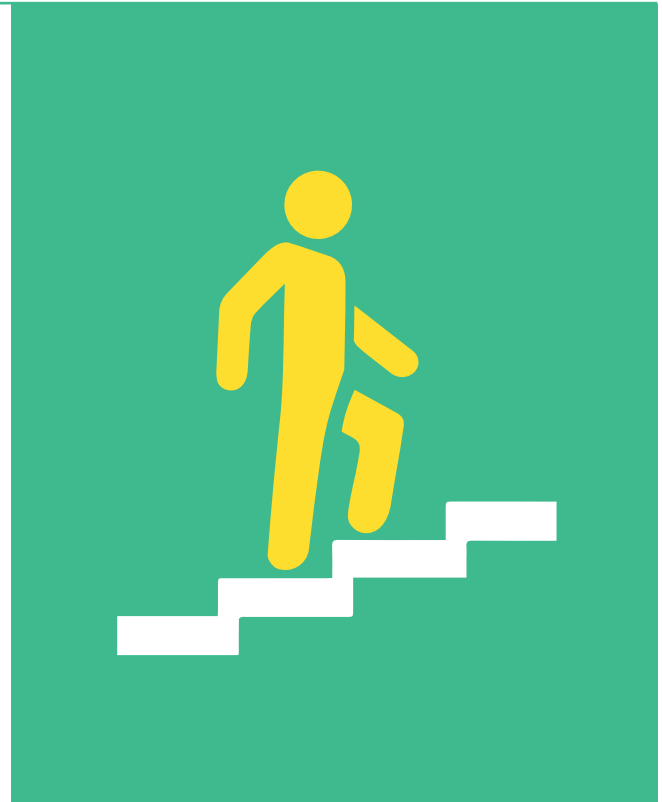
4.4 Theme four: Personal career impact

This theme is defined by narratives that focus on unlocking potential, empowering stories of being stretched leading to career growth, and enabling personal development within the organisation. The emphasis is on the impact of coaching to the delegates' career advancements. It is not surprising that under this theme the individual coaching sessions came to the fore. A participant on an executive development programme offered the following testimonial about her 10-month coaching process:

"I started coaching at the request of my line manager, he was new, and he felt that I needed some coaching just to get to a more mature management style. He thought that I could be eligible for promotion but that I needed some development. The first coaching session was with my line manager and he verbalised some of his key concerns, some of which were things like, low self-esteem and an abrasive manner with staff. So that's what we worked through in the next 10 sessions over the course of a year. The coach was amazing, she was able to make me talk, and I'm not a talkative person by nature. She managed to get the person to come up with the answers themselves – that was very effective. One of the key focus areas was improving the relationship with my line manager, and we talked through where the problems were and she encouraged me to come up with ideas of how to improve the relationship, and through her asking that question, and then asking deeper questions we got to strategies on how to improve the relationship. She would ask for my commitment to implement these strategies and the next time we'd meet, we'd discuss what I had done about my commitments and that was quite powerful, because you feel compelled to take action, which I did. And most certainly what we discussed and what I implemented had a significantly positive effect. By the end of the coaching process the feedback from my line manager was that he had seen a 180-degree turnaround in terms of what he was expecting. So he was really, really happy with the result and so was I. I am now on the top talent list for the organization. And my line manager is the one who put me on this list. Happy life, happy work, right? I think the process helped me at a satisfaction level, you know, a happier work environment, and as a result that had a positive personal impact."

The same delegate, who was part of an executive leadership programme, added:

"I have been very fortunate to receive a promotion. I am now the chief executive of risk [of] one of the newly created businesses in [the new] structure. I really appreciate the work we did last year since this is really



helping me. I think it was absolutely essential for me to understand the different components of my life, my personal priorities and what is important before I made this transition. For this I am truly thankful, not only does this benefit me, but it also benefits my family."

In this case, the coaching had a positive impact on the delegate's career growth, considering her life in a holistic fashion. Overall, the coaching sessions empowered the delegates to make decisions about their future and made them feel positive about their careers' future. This was not limited to one-on-one coaching. For instance, one PDP group delegate stated the following regarding the group discussion:

"I feel energised about my future with the dealership."

In the following personal narrative evaluating a group session, the delegate noted that:

“[Exposure to coaching] provided me with a platform to be able to unlock my added potential development areas, which will help me to grow as an individual and be able to grow my network. [The coach has] been great in guiding me, helping me identify the real development needs on my leadership journey. Allowed me to realise not being in control allows other people to grow.”

Focusing on the personal aspects of individuals’ identities improved the impact they could have in the professional environment. Coaching tailored to individual circumstances was seen as hugely valuable.

“[The coach] helped to channel in on some of the questions I had around developing myself, leadership

specifically and taking my role to the next level... I like the fact that the coaching was based on what matters the most to me; the challenges I am faced with on my leadership journey. That is very important to me. The session was personalised and focused at me as an individual. I believe this allowed me to make the most of our sessions together.”

Finally, the coaching was found to be relevant and of practical value, not just an abstract exercise, as one delegate shared:

“The coaching was relevant to the ongoing problems we are facing in our teams right now. The session provided a great opportunity to learn from each other and share winning strategies. It provided very practical tips to take away.”

4.5 Theme five: Leadership development and vulnerability

The final theme was not as prevalent as the first four, but warrants comment because it centres around a core rationale of coaching – improved leadership. Vulnerable leadership involved the stories of leaders who found that coaching had empowered them to be more vulnerable and lead using “softer” qualities. Coaching gave these leaders psychological insights into their teams and themselves, and made them feel more equipped as leaders. As one delegate stated:

“Leading from behind is the most valuable skill to learn.”

This idea of not always being a dominant leader was commented on, too. Being vulnerable and open to self-critique was seen as an important component of leadership. If one did not feel threatened, one tended to lead better. Delegates said that they were able to be:

“Open and approachable to understand the self without feeling threatened in the session. This was fruitful for an improved leadership style and focused on people’s strengths.”

Where it was commented on, delegates felt that coaching improved their leadership capacity. Below are some examples of what the delegates had to say.

“I have been enabled to make myself a better colleague and leader.”



“[Coaching] helped me realise how to approach my strengths and weaknesses to become a more effective leader.”

“Brilliant insight of psychological impacts that can elevate a leader to lead in a proper manner.”

“The coaching helped to channel in on some of the questions I had around developing myself, leadership specifically, and also taking my role to the next level.”

Critique

It would be remiss not to include some of the critique that was captured in the evaluations and interviews. While the general response was overwhelmingly positive, a few cursory, but pertinent issues were raised. These will be dealt with briefly below.

The issue of timing was mentioned – either it was felt that there was not enough time, or that the interventions happened at the wrong time in the general course’s structure. For instance, one class representative noted:

“Timing is important, in the broader programme... so that the difficult conversations happen earlier. By the time these conversations happen, the year is almost over.”

There was also a feeling that because group coaching only happened twice a year in some instances, it became a bit of a box-ticking exercise that students did not take seriously enough. To create more impact, delegates feel more frequent sessions were needed that did not take place in isolation.

While the stated aim of group coaching is individual growth and development, there was the feeling that perhaps the benefit of the



group sessions was too heavily weighted towards the benefit of the group, and not the individual. This may purely be a result of time and budgetary constraints, and because of the abbreviated nature of the coaching offering, the “quick win” might be group cohesion as opposed to deep personal work.

Discussion: Impact evaluation

Based on the themes and narratives presented above, the impact of coaching at GIBS can be evaluated by examining each coaching type against its stated outcome. The predominant themes from the evaluations and in-depth interviews centred around: 1) personal insights, 2) process capabilities and skills, and 3) team cohesion. Table 5 lists the stated outcome of each coaching type and the “impact achieved” is assessed in relation to the thematic findings. In doing so, the impact achieved in relation to the desired outcomes can be demonstrated.

It can be seen that, in terms of individual coaching, the stated outcome is that participants “leverage leadership capability and optimise performance”, which was achieved as evidenced by the

narratives focusing on personal insight, as was the ability to use these process capabilities and tools going forward. Leadership was only tangentially mentioned as an outcome of these coaching sessions; thus, the impact of the coaching initiative was on a personal level.

Group coaching appeared to be the most impactful form of coaching on offer. This could be due to it being the most predominant type of coaching out of the suite of offerings or because it is able to tackle multiple goals at once (Reid, 2012). As Reid (2012, p. 30) notes, a group can do “what an individual coach cannot, by providing transpersonal network, that reacts and responds as an interacting unit”. Furthermore, “in learning-group coaching, members come

together as relative strangers and the purpose is more explicitly self-directed learning of its members using the variety of individual goals in a cross-fertilising learning experience” (Reid, 2012, p. 31).

In this research’s data, delegates experienced increased personal insight as well as increased team cohesion. In addition, the process capabilities and tools attained in the group session make the impact more sustainable.

ALPs were more difficult to assess because they were not explicitly mentioned in many evaluations. Notably, working on an ALP as a group positively affected team cohesion. A separate report has been written on the ROI of ALPs (see Thompson, 2020).

COACHING TYPE	STATED OUTCOME	IMPACT ACHIEVED
Individual coaching	To “leverage leadership capability and optimise performance”.	Personal and professional development and learning for the individual that is focused on the individuals’ needs displayed through: - Increased personal insight (theme one), - Increased process capabilities and tools (theme two), and - Leadership only tangentially touched on (theme five).
PDP group	Personal and skills development in a team setting. It “is scalable” and it “enhances social learning and leadership” through peer feedback.	Personal and professional development and learning focused on the individuals’ needs and on the programme’s learning needs, achieved through group process and interaction. This was evidenced by: - Increased team cohesion (theme three), - Increased personal insight as a form of personal development (theme one), and - Increased process capabilities and tools demonstrate enhanced social learning and leadership (theme two).
ALPs	Addresses an “identified business challenge”, with the focus being on the “the practical application of learning”. Personal learning and reflection, and change in the individual. Greater knowledge of business unit (IIP). Personal learning and reflection, and changes in the individual. Greater knowledge of organisational function and teamwork (BIP). Personal learning and reflection and changes in the individual. Greater knowledge of the organisation’s strategic landscape and teamwork (SIP).	Outcomes of the work team: ROI and business results not part of this impact assessment. Team learning and development, through the process of working on the business challenge and personal learning and growth as part of working on the business challenge evidenced through: - Increased team cohesion (theme three), - Embedding learning (theme four), and - Personal insight (theme one).

Table 5: Impact by coaching type

The impact of coaching on delegates' personal learning journeys is presented in Table 6. Column one provides the expected outcome of the personal learning journey, column two outlines the impact of this outcome, and column three indicates where the evidence of this impact is drawn from in the thematic analysis.

Assessing the impact of coaching using the personal learning journey as a rubric is productive because it dovetails well with the emerging themes found in the data. Undoubtedly, personal insight was achieved (theme one); team cohesion lends itself towards positive change and development both personally and professionally (theme three); and learning is embedded in the transfer of process capabilities and tools (theme two).

PERSONAL LEARNING JOURNEY IMPACT MEASUREMENT		
OUTCOME	DESIRED IMPACT	IMPACT ACHIEVED
Insight	Current reality understood and aspired future reality imagined.	Personal insight (theme one)
Change and development	Learning leading to change/impact. Coaching, feedback, learning integration used as part of ongoing development.	Team cohesion (theme three) and personal insight (theme one)
Learning application and embedding	Sustained application of learning. Future expectations and results achieved.	Process capabilities and tools (theme two)

Table 6: Personal learning journey impact

The desired impact of the personal learning journey is threefold. First, does the delegate display insight into their current reality, and is their aspired future reality appropriate? In terms of the impact, it can be argued that insight is achieved. This was amply demonstrated by the narratives under theme one (personal insight). Delegates spoke of personal growth, self-actualisation, reflection, and the transformative and inspirational nature of the coaching process.

Second, has learning been sufficiently integrated to lead to change and development? Again, the answer is yes, as both themes three (team cohesion) and one (personal insight)

demonstrate that delegates saw value in learning from and with others, and that this type of vulnerability yielded positive results in terms of ongoing development.

Third, is there sustained application of learning to elevate future results? Theme two (process capabilities and tools) demonstrated that not only was the content of the coaching sessions valuable in terms of personal insight and group cohesion, but the process itself involved new skills, such as courageous conversations, storytelling and creating a safe space, which could be used beyond the isolated coaching experience. Delegates could use these tools in a sustained way in the future.

Conclusion

This report has shown that coaching at GIBS has had a deep, personal and lasting impact on its delegates. Using the personal learning journey as a rubric for measuring this impact has established that engaging in coaching processes leads to personal insight, change and development in one's career and the sustained application of learning. While there is always room for improvement, as noted in the critique section,

it is notable that the overwhelming majority of responses were positive. As stated in the introduction, there is both a business and pedagogical imperative to honing “softer” skills concerned with issues of identity, authenticity and reflexivity. GIBS's track-record in this regard is commendable and offers a comprehensive suite of processes tailored to individual and organisational needs.

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Gordon Institute of Business Science

University of Pretoria

26 Melville Road, Illovo, Johannesburg
P O Box 787602, Sandton, South Africa, 2146
011 771 4000 | Acumen@gibs.co.za