

# Skills, Practices, and Aspirations of Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Low-income Settings

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# Lecture Overview

## 1 PART I: Lecture

### *Business Practices and Training*

- Business Practices Around the World
- Classical MSME Training
- Extensions of the Classical Approach
- Measurement of Firm Performance
- Mechanisms
- Alternative Approaches

## 2 PART II: Paper

### *Curating Local Knowledge*

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# Business Practices Around the World

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- Bloom and van Reenen (2010, 2019): Business practices, motivation (Bloom, Mahajan, McKenzie, and Roberts, 2010; ?)

# Heterogeneity in Business Practices

- Bloom and van Reenen (2010): Heterogeneity (Bloom, Mahajan, McKenzie, and Roberts, 2010)

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# Business Practices and Performance

- Bloom and van Reenen (2019): Correlation with productivity (?)

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# Business Practices in Small Firms

Vast heterogeneity in business practices **also among small firms** (?McKenzie and Woodruff, 2017)..

- .. between countries
- .. between industries
- .. between firms

In cross-section, business practices **associated with higher sales and profits** (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2017)

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# Business Practices in Small Firms

McKenzie and Woodruff (2017) identify **set of XX best practices** most closely associated with business performance

- 4 major domains of business practices

- 1 Book-keeping and accounting
- 2 Financial planning
- 3 Inventory management and stock control
- 4 Marketing

→ Association with performance robust across industries and countries

→

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# Business Practices in Small Firms

McKenzie and Woodruff (2017) identify set of XX practices most closely associated with business performance

- Example practices:

- 1 e.g.,
- 2 e.g.,
- 3 e.g.,
- 4 e.g.,

Open questions

- Does adoption of "best practices" *cause* performance to increase?
- How can adoption of practices best be encouraged?

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# Classical MSME Training

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# History and Prevalence

- At least **USD 1 billion per year** (to 4-5 million entrepreneurs; ?)
- Classical training programs *precede* evidence that business practices vary and are predictive for productivity
- Examples:
  - Start and Improve Your Business (ILO)
  - Business Edge (IFC)
  - EMPRETEC Entrepreneurship Training Workshop (UNCTAD)

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# Typical Training Program

## Content

- Training is delivered by 600 local certified trainers and by a pool of approximately 60 international master trainers. All trainers are also entrepreneurs.
- Empretec Training Workshops offer different levels of instruction that include:
- 6-day courses (48 hours); 32-hour (usually spread over 4 days) for micro-entrepreneurs with low levels of literacy; Interactive coaching based on real business challenges of participants.

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# Typical Training Program

## Delivery



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# Impact on Performance

- First wave (Karlan and Valdivia, 2011, Bruhn and Zia, 2013; Giné and Mansuri, 2014; Field, et al., 2010; Bulte et al., 2017; Anderson, Chandy, and Zia, 2018) (?) (?) ? (Bruhn and Zia, 2013) (?) (Anderson, Chandy, and Zia, 2018)

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# Impact on Performance

- Econometric and implementation issues (McKenzie and Woodruff, 2014)

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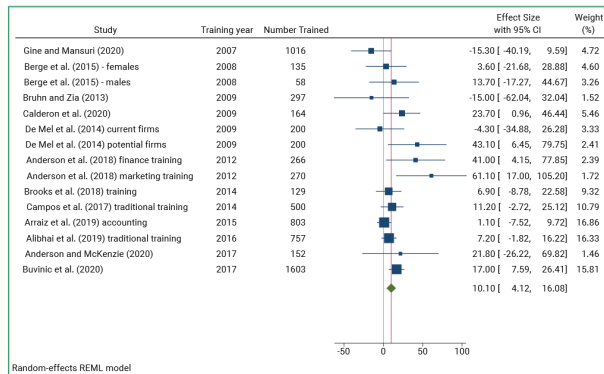
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# Impact on Performance

## Including more recent evaluations (see, ?)

**Figure 2** Estimates of the impact of business training on firm profits



Source: McKenzie (2020)

- Small positive impact on practice adoption, profits, and sales

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## Refinements of the classical model

- Targeting **specific subgroups** of the population
  - Alleviating **particularly severe constraints**  
→ Marginalized or disadvantaged groups (e.g., women, youth)
  - Maximizing **treatment impact** (or cost-effectiveness)  
→ Promising entrepreneurs (e.g., high-growth firms)
  - Plus: **Maximizing statistical power** through homogeneity
- Training of skills in **particular domains**
  - Alleviating **specific constraints**
  - Investigating mechanisms of treatment impact

# Targeted Training

## Female entrepreneurs

- Most common type of targeted training (potentially complementary to classical microfinance model)
- Example: Gender and Enterprise Together (GET Ahead, ILO; ??)
- ?

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# Targeted Training

## Young entrepreneurs

- Typically embedded as entrepreneurship programs in school and university
- Example: University final year course in Tunisia (?)
  - 
  -

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# Targeted Training

## High-growth businesses ("gazelles")



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# Training Specific Domains

Anderson, Chandy, and Zia (2018) assign 852 South African MSEs to distinct types of training:

- 1 Marketing/sales skills
- 2 Finance/accounting skills

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# Training Specific Domains

Anderson, Chandy, and Zia (2018) assign 852 South African businesses to two distinct trainings:

## 1 Marketing/sales skills

- 61% increase in profits
- "Growth focus" on higher sales, stock investments, and hiring  
→ Benefits new businesses (= less market exposure)

## 2 Finance/accounting skills

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# Training Specific Domains

Anderson, Chandy, and Zia (2018) assign 852 South African businesses to two distinct trainings:

## 1 Marketing/sales skills

- 61% increase in profits
- "Growth focus" on higher sales, stock investments, and hiring  
→ Benefits new businesses (= less market exposure)

## 2 Finance/accounting skills

- 41% increase in profits
- "Efficiency focus" on lower costs  
→ Benefits established businesses

→ Different "pathways to profits" (title of the paper)

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# Extensions of the Classical Approach

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# On-site Consulting



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# On-site Consulting

Consulting is intensive, tailored business advice

- Common interventions take 88 to 500 hours and more ()
  - Typically 2-4 hours, between twice weekly and monthly
- Typical price point between *USD 3,000 and 12,000 per firm* ()
- One-on-one or group-based

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# On-site Consulting

- Bloom, et al. (2013); Karlan et al. (2015); Bruhn, Karlan, and Schoar (2019)
- Large firms: (Bloom, Eifert, Aprajit, McKenzie, and Roberts, 2013); SMEs: (Bruhn, Karlan, and Schoar, 2018)
- (?) (?)

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# Multimedia delivery

## TV shows

- Examples: Ruka Juu in Tanzania (?) and El Mashroua in Egypt (?)
- ?

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## TV shows

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# Multimedia delivery

## Text messages

- (?) (?)

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# Complementary Constraints

- McKenzie cash JDE paper

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# Complementary Constraints

- McKenzie cash JDE paper

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# Measurement of Firm Performance

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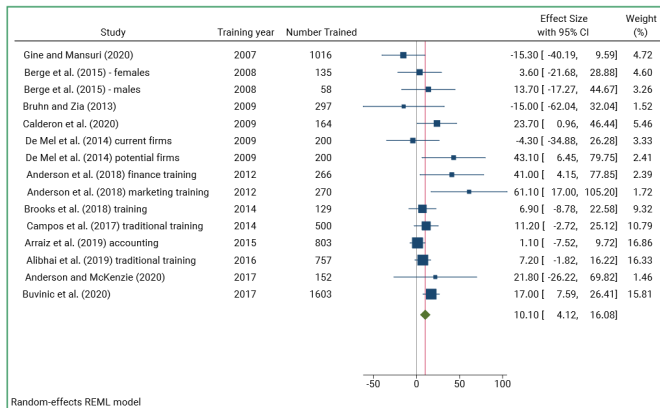
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# Imprecision of Outcome Measures

**Figure 2** Estimates of the impact of business training on firm profits



Source: McKenzie (2020)

- Extremely wide confidence intervals on impact estimates

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# Self-reports and aggregation

- Self-reports of aggregate (?)

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# Self-reports and aggregation

- Disaggregating quantities in self-reports (?)

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# Self-reports and aggregation

- Direct measures (?)

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# Sales vs. Profits

■ (?)

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# Sales vs. Profits

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# Mechanisms

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# Heterogeneity of Impact

Heterogeneity of treatment effects poorly understood across different approaches

- Potential constraints are manifold, and likely context-dependent
- Some more obvious constraints (already mentioned in passing):
  - **Credit constraints** (see, e.g., ) McKenzie cash paper
  - **Gender norms and constraints**
  - **Age-related network and knowledge/skill constraints**

→ More recent literature highlights **behavioral constraints**

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# Education and literacy

- Drexler, Fischer & Schoar (2014) (Drexler, Fischer, and Schoar, 2014)

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# Dynamic complementarities in skill acquisition

## Complementarities in skills



## Learning styles



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# Family Commitments

- Interesting; no beh const

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# Segregated Markets

- Missing economies of scale
- Interesting; not behavioral constraint

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# Aspirations



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# Local Relevance of Business Practices



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# Alternative Approaches

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# Rules of Thumb

- Drexler, Fischer & Schoar (2014) (Drexler, Fischer, and Schoar, 2014)

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# Rules of Thumb

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# Entrepreneurial mindset

■ (?)

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# Entrepreneurial mindset

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# Local Knowledge

- Cai and Szeidl (2019), Brooks et al. (2018), Lafortune et al. (2020), Seither (2020), Abebe et al. (2020)?

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# Role Models

- La Ferrara et al. (2012); Chong and La Ferrara (2009); Berg and Zia (2013); Riley (2018)

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Measurement of  
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Mechanisms

**Alternative  
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# Questions

Any questions?

.. before we move on to our paper?

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# Curating Local Knowledge

## Experimental Evidence from Small Retailers in Indonesia

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<sup>1</sup>Tilburg University

<sup>2</sup>UC Berkeley, CEGA

<sup>3</sup>The World Bank

March 04, 2021



# Paper Overview

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*Business Practices and Training*

## 2 PART II: Paper

*Curating Local Knowledge*

- Motivation
- Our Approach
- Data and Design
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion

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# Motivation

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# Background

- Micro and small firms (MSEs) are typically the main **source of employment** in the developing world
- In **Indonesia**, MSEs represent ..
  - .. 99% of all firms
  - .. 94.5% of employment
- Understanding the factors fostering efficiency and growth of MSEs is an important research and policy goal

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# A Growing Focus on Management

- **Classroom Training:** Field, et al. (2010); Karlan & Valdivia (2011); Bruhn & Zia (2013); McKenzie & Woodruff (2014, 2017); Bulte et al. (2017); Anderson, Chandy & Zia (2018); Lafortune et al. (2018)
- **Consulting:** Bloom, et al. (2013); Karlan et al (2015); Bruhn, Karlan & Schoar (2019)
- **Mobilizing Peer Knowledge:**
  - Brooks et al. (2018) → Local mentors (market information)
  - Cai & Szeidl (2018) → Business meetings
  - Abebe et al. (2019) → Management experience matching

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# Our Approach

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# Harnessing Cross-Firm Heterogeneity

## Some stylized facts about business practices in small firms

- Vast heterogeneity in business practices and performance across similar businesses (?)
- Variation in practices accounts for more than 20% of variation in productivity within the same firm in the US (?)
  - Research has largely overlooked this heterogeneity in program design and implementation

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# Harnessing Cross-Firm Heterogeneity

Some stylized facts about business practices in small firms

- Vast heterogeneity in business practices and performance across similar businesses (?)
- Variation in practices accounts for more than 20% of variation in productivity within the same firm in the US (?)
  - Research has largely overlooked this heterogeneity in program design and implementation

We **make productive use of this heterogeneity** in our research design:

- Use cross-firm variation to identify **practices associated with business performance**
- **Curation** of local best practices
- Test different **modes of delivery**, and their cost-effectiveness

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# Selecting Local Best Practices

- Detailed **qualitative interviews** with local business peers:
  - Understand and codify their practices (record-keeping, financial planning, stocking-up, marketing, and joint decision-making)
  - Identify implementation norms and beliefs regarding each practice (e.g. whether they are complicated, necessary, etc.)
  - Document locally relevant tips and rule of thumbs
- Baseline **quantitative survey**
  - Measure practices and outcomes
  - Quantitative association of business practices with profits and sales

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# Disseminating Knowledge

## Basic information intervention

- Handbook

- Pure information: Which practices, how to adopt, and why?

## Two complementary behavioral interventions:

- Movie

- Psychological and emotional involvement → social learning is possible through observing the successful experience of similar others.
  - Bernard, et al. (2014); La Ferrara et al. (2012); Chong and La Ferrara (2009); Berg and Zia (2013).

- On-site Assistance

- Hands-on involvement → social learning is possible through own experience, with a small nudge (Kolb, 1984).
  - Facilitated by local lay person

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# Research Questions

## Characterization of local best practices

- Which practices are associated with high profits?
- How do successful businesses implement them?

## Adoption of best practices

- Do retailers adopt these practices once peer best practices are aggregated and made common knowledge?
- If so, does the type of experiential involvement matter?

## Impact on business performance

- Does firm profitability increase?
- If so, what are the channels?

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# Data and Design

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# Sample

- Listing of 2042 small retail businesses from 29 sub-districts ("kelurahan") in urban Jakarta
- Selection criteria for firm listing:
  - At least  $4m^2$  in size
  - At least two different product categories on offer
  - At least 30 meters distance to next business in sample → to minimize spillovers
- Random sample of 1301 from the list
- Randomization to treatment arms stratified by
  - Gender
  - Firm space ( $4-6m^2$ ,  $6-10m^2$ , 10 and above  $m^2$ )
  - Composite score of business practices above or below median
  - Sub-district

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# Experimental Design

## Three types of information delivery:

- 1 **Handbook** with best practices and implementation tips
- 2 **Movie** with successful peers
- 3 **On-site assistance** with practice adoption

→ Movie, assistance exclusively based on handbook

## Five experimental groups

- 1 **Handbook** only (N=260)
- 2 **Handbook** + invitation to **movie** screening (N=260)
- 3 **Handbook** + offer of two **assistance** visits (N=260)
- 4 **Handbook** + **movie** + **assistance** (N=260)
- 5 Control (N=261)

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# Timeline

- 1 September 2015: **Qualitative** Interviews
- 2 January 2016: **Firm listing** (→ survey instrument)
- 3 Feb-Apr 2016: **Baseline** survey
- 4 Oct-Nov 2016: **Interventions**
- 5 Apr-May 2017: **Midline** survey
- 6 Apr-May 2018: **Endline** survey

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# Typical Business in the Sample



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# Best-practices Handbook



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## Why you should try these best practices in your shop

*Evidence from a large-scale study  
on Jakarta-based retailers*



### RECORD-KEEPING

Shop owners who keep business records report 28% higher monthly sales and 26% higher monthly profits than those who do not keep business records.

Shop owners who track their customers' debts report 40% higher monthly sales and 36% higher monthly profits than those who do not track their customers' debts.



### STOCK-UP SCHEDULING

Shops that maintain stock-up schedules earn 26% more in monthly sales and 25% more in profits than those that do not maintain stock-up schedules of their primary products.

Shops that stock up daily rather than weekly earn 48% more in monthly sales and 37% more in monthly profits.

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# Handbook Content



## A step-by-step guide to record-keeping

### Step 1: Separating household and business finances

The best way to start keeping records is by establishing a clear separation between your personal and business finances. We do not mean this in the strictest sense of keeping your business cash away from your personal life completely, rather we advise you to not lose sight of your cash flow.

The most convenient and effective way to separate your personal and business finances is by **physically separating the funds into two different cash boxes, purses, or drawers. Label them clearly**; use one compartment for business purposes and another for personal.

Use only your business compartment to follow this handbook from this point forward. Make sure that money in your business compartment is used only for business purposes. Be meticulous about it - this is the first step to get your finances organized!

There is an activity at the end of this section that requires an additional compartment. If you have one more cash box, purse, or drawer available, please reserve it for this activity (**record-keeping, extra step**).

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# Movie with Successful Peers



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# Implementation Assistance for Business Practices



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# Results

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# Summary Statistics

	Control	HB only	HB & MOV	HB & HELP	HB & HELP & Business Practices
	N = 261	N = 260	N = 260	N = 260	N = 260
<b>Firm Owner Characteristics</b>					
Gender (Male=1)	0.28	0.3	0.29	0.3	0.3
Age	45.22	45.27	45.28	45.16	45.16
Education (Years)	9.1	9.52	9.36	9.42	9.42
Risk Preference (0 - 10 "Perfectly Risk-Seeking")	3.74	3.76	3.88	3.6	3.6
Time Preference (0 - 10 "Perfect Patience")	5.19	5.07	5.21	5.25	5.25
<b>Firm Characteristics</b>					
Firm Age (Years)	12.76	13.77	14.03	13.98	13.98
Family Member Is Business Partner	0.56	0.6	0.63	0.59	0.59
Total Number of Workers	2.03	2.05	1.9	1.99	1.99
Business Has Tax ID	0.2	0.21	0.2	0.15	0.15
Total Sales Last Month (USD PPP)	4454.37	4730.64	4840.55	4761.4	4761.4
Total Profits Last Month (USD PPP)	889.58	961.1	926.78	825.25	825.25
Applied for Bus Loan in Last 12 Months	0.2	0.17	0.15	0.22	0.22
Obtained Bus Loan in Last 12 Months	0.18	0.15	0.14	0.18	0.18

# Movie: Take Up and Assessment

	(1)	(2)
	HB & MOV	HB & MOV & HELP
	(A)	(B)
	N=260	N=260
<b>Attendance</b>		
Business Owner or Partner Attended Film Screening	0.52	0.49
<b>Evaluation (1-4 Scale):</b>		
Has Learned Something New	3.34	3.21
Feels Inspired	3.31	3.30
Feels Hopeful	3.60	3.42
Feels Bored	0.83	0.97

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# Assistance: Take Up and Assessment

	(1)	(2)
	HB & HELP	HB & MOV, & HELP
	(A)	(B)
	N=260	N=260

## Attendance

Business Owner or Partner Attended 1st Session	0.77	0.78
Business Owner or Partner Attended 2nd Session	0.68	0.68

## Evaluation (1-4 Scale)

Has Learned Something New	2.88	2.89
Feels Inspired	2.76	2.83
Feels Hopeful	2.88	2.97
Feels Bored	0.59	0.43

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# Impact on Business Practices

## Aggregate Scores

	Record Keeping (1)	Planning (2)	Stocking-up (3)	Marketing (4)
Assigned Handbook	0.025 (0.209)	0.027 (0.273)	-0.007 (0.694)	-0.011 (0.694)
Assigned Handbook & Movie	0.057*** (0.009)	0.043 (0.107)	0.038 (0.117)	0.040 (0.166)
Assigned Handbook & Assistance	0.065*** (0.004)	0.034 (0.166)	0.011 (0.664)	0.039 (0.166)
Assigned All Three	0.054*** (0.009)	0.068*** (0.009)	0.053** (0.020)	0.061** (0.032)
R-squared	0.204	0.192	0.187	0.150
Sample Size	2205	2204	2205	2205
Dependent Variable Mean of Control	0.196	0.402	0.471	0.250
Dependent Variable SD of Control	0.252	0.310	0.270	0.320
F-tests (p-value):				
Book = Book & Mov	0.069	0.487	0.014	0.028
Book = Book & Assistance	0.025	0.754	0.304	0.030
Book = All Three	0.096	0.073	0.001	0.002

Joint  
Decision  
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(5)

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(0.011  
(0.694)

Motivation 0.040

Our Approach (0.217)

Data and Design 0.037

Results (0.239)

Discussion 0.059\*

Conclusion (0.094)

Conclusion

0.120

2205

0.269

0.420

0.300

0.348

0.082

# Business Profits

	Profits last month (win 5%) (1)	Profits last month (IHS) (2)
Assigned Handbook	-91.307 (78.400)	-0.067 (0.088)
Assigned Handbook & Movie	110.378 (86.841)	0.055 (0.092)
Assigned Handbook & Assistance	310.455*** (89.488)	0.261*** (0.096)
Assigned All Three	191.088** (84.662)	0.199** (0.094)
R-squared	0.179	0.211

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# Business Sales

	ITT Sales last month (win 5%) (1)	TOT Sales last month (win 5%) (2)
Assigned Handbook	-396.976 (314.252)	-417.198 -417.198
Assigned Handbook & Movie	335.489 (337.881)	601.221 (606.634)
Assigned Handbook & Assistance	836.755** (372.924)	1031.692** (457.015)
Assigned All Three	807.462** (358.384)	1558.326** (696.317)

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# Other Outcomes

- No significant impacts on:
  - Business expenses
  - Size of the shop
  - Number of employees
  - Number of customers
  - Business credit

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# Efficiency Gains?

Impact on business practices → **efficiency practices:**

- Adjust stocks based on product profitability
- Negotiate lower prices with suppliers
- Consult with former customers
- Offer discounts
- Make joint decisions
- Review performance to identify ways to improve
- Make anticipated budget for upcoming costs

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# Efficiency Gains?

Impact on business practices → **efficiency practices**:

- Adjust stocks based on product profitability
- Negotiate lower prices with suppliers
- Consult with former customers
- Offer discounts
- Make joint decisions
- Review performance to identify ways to improve
- Make anticipated budget for upcoming costs
  - **Non-record-keeping practices**
  - **Stocking up and marketing practices** appear to drive performance effects (causal-mediation analysis)
  - Variance in profits among treated firms does not converge
  - **Efficiency gains**

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# Business Knowledge or Aspirations?

Impact on practice adoption and business performance may work through ..

- .. acquisition of **business knowledge** and/or
- .. strengthening of **business aspirations**

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# Business Knowledge or Aspirations?

Impact on practice adoption and business performance may work through ..

- .. acquisition of **business knowledge** and/or
- .. strengthening of **business aspirations**

We directly measure **business aspirations** ..

- .. at baseline, midline, and endline
- .. for short (one year) and long ("ideal business") time horizons
- .. for various dimensions of potential business expansion
  - Sales on a normal day
  - Physical size
  - Customers on a normal day
  - Employees

→ **No impact on aspirations**

→ Performance likely driven by increase in **business knowledge**

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# Business Stealing?

Do treated businesses improve performance at the expense of the control?

- Sales and profits of **control businesses do not decrease** from baseline to endline (roughly equal)
- Sales and profits of control businesses **closer to treated shops do not decrease by more** than those further away
  - **No evidence for business stealing**

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# Cost-Effectiveness

## Small costs (per firm):

- Cost Handbook alone: USD 100
- Cost Handbook & Movie: USD 125
- Cost Handbook & Assistance: USD 125
- Cost Handbook & Movie & Assistance: USD 150

## Substantial Benefits

- Up to USD 330 per month in profits
- Adoption of top practices by retailers

Research design likely **scalable and portable**

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# Takeaways

- Curating local knowledge has value for business growth
- Information alone does not have impact, only combined with behavioral interventions
- Mechanism likely knowledge-based, not aspirations-based
- Behavioral interventions are inexpensive and scalable
  - Attractive for policy

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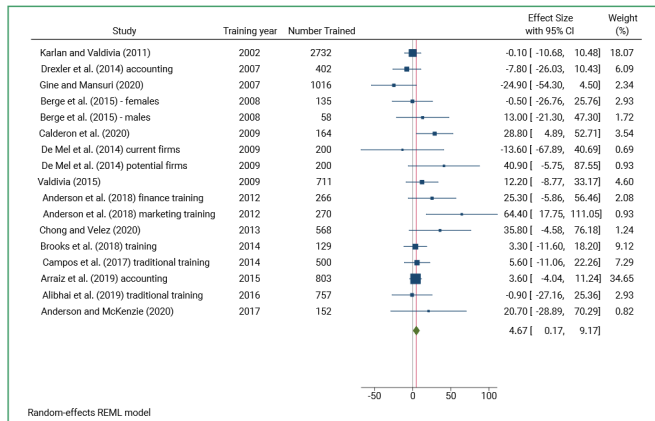
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# Evidence of Impact

**Figure 1** Estimates of the impact of business training on firm sales



Source: McKenzie (2020)

- Small positive impact on sales (back to ► profits)

References

APPENDIX