



# THE PEOPLE FACTOR MAGAZINE

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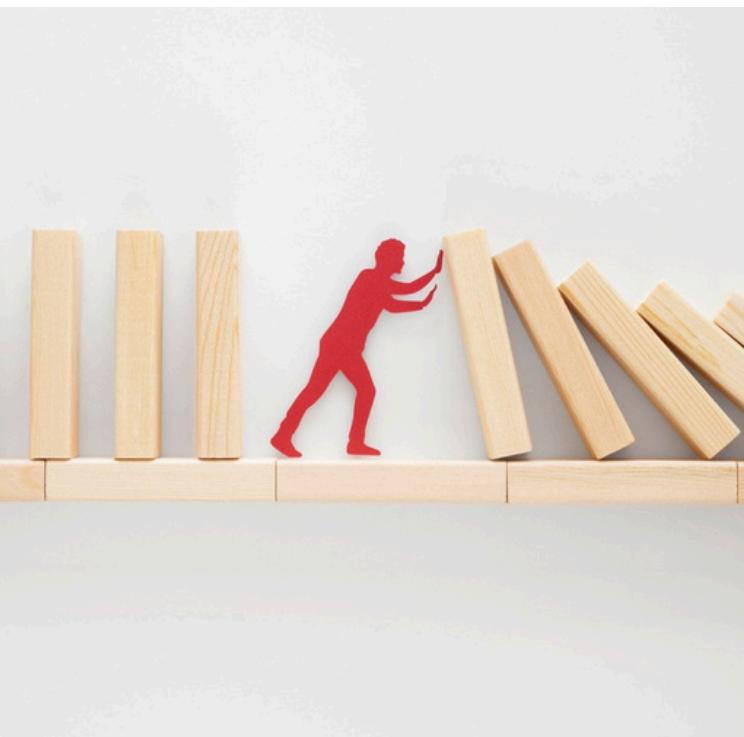
# THE PEOPLE FACTOR MAGAZINE

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## Breaking barriers and building careers: key lessons from the BPO industry

By Anusha Ramraj



August in South Africa is inevitably a month that calls for reflection and introspection on the options facing women for meaningful, career-long employment opportunities. As I reflect on my journey, I am pleased to share some of the key learnings that have shaped my path to leadership.

My entry into the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry wasn't planned. Despite having a university degree that gave me an advantage, I found myself – like many others – looking for available job opportunities. It was after a prolonged job search that I came across the job of a call centre agent and decided to take it on. Whether you join through an entry-level position or via a different path, I have always maintained that what matters the most is one's ambition to rise and succeed.

When I began my career in the BPO industry, there was little representation of women in the sector, let alone women of colour. Thankfully, this landscape has evolved significantly, and today, the sector offers tremendous potential for women looking to build meaningful careers.

### Embrace every opportunity

My advice to anyone starting out in their career is to be an active agent in your own future. With a background in law and a passion for business, I was determined to make my mark and, whenever possible, I would voice my goals and ambitions to managers and business leaders. But opportunities don't always come knocking, you must be prepared to seek them out or create them yourself.

If presented with a chance, you should embrace it – take a leap of faith into a new position, try working in different departments, volunteer for projects with unfamiliar and new teams, even if it's just a short-term project. If the opportunity you desire doesn't exist, create it by offering ideas to your manager, sharing insights, and taking on additional responsibilities. Every new task is a learning opportunity that might open unexpected doors.

## Strive for continuous growth

One way to create opportunities for yourself is to build the skills and capabilities that are required across the business that you're in. I backed myself and my ambition to climb the corporate ranks with a conscious decision to improve my knowledge base by seizing every chance to learn new skills, master emerging technology and tools, and to take on different roles.

Through determination and proactive learning, I successfully transitioned from my starting point as an outbound sales agent to my senior role today in the organisation. This was not an easy journey. It required considerable effort and countless hours of additional effort and study. To this day, I continue adding to my qualifications – currently working toward my Governance certification embracing my commitment to lifelong learning.

Take advantage of in-house training programs or company-sponsored education opportunities. Investigate what resources your organisation offers, and whenever there's a chance to enhance your skills, seize it – even if it means extra hours at day's end.

Remember that education extends beyond formal qualifications. Read widely. Choose topics that interest you – whether leadership, emerging technologies, or another subject – and become more informed. The internet provides endless opportunities to build expertise with minimal financial investment. Broadening your knowledge and developing additional skills is never something you'll regret – it's critical to continuously upskill yourself in an evolving corporate landscape.

## Find the people who will support you

One of my career's most valuable assets has been the people who have mentored and sponsored me. Connecting with the right individuals can profoundly impact your professional career. Seek out mentors that you admire, who have the skills that you aspire to develop, and who are willing to offer guidance and support to help you to grow. Find and join mentorship programmes and professional groups, build your networks and interact with others who have walked your desired path.

Equally important, is finding sponsors in your business, and be mindful that mentors and sponsors are not one and the same. They serve different functions. Sponsors advocate for you in business settings, recommend you for suitable opportunities and will frequently push you out of your comfort zone. A good sponsor may challenge you with uncomfortable truths about your performance and tell you things about yourself that are uncomfortable to hear. It is therefore crucial to remain open to critical feedback. Remind yourself that critical feedback offers you the chance to develop, both as a professional and as a person. I am grateful for the sponsors throughout my career who sometimes recognised potential in me that I didn't see myself, and who not only encouraged me to grow, but who pushed me to succeed in many new areas.



## Be prepared to break stereotypes

In any industry, there are stereotypes and biases in the workplace that must be navigated. By remaining humble, demonstrating perseverance and challenging gender-based limitations, we will create a more tolerant, open and diverse workplace.

I believe that one such stereotype that we need to abandon is the notion of work-life balance. I don't believe that there is a perfect recipe or flawless formula and, based on my own life experiences, I have found it challenging to strike that right balance. Rather, we should acknowledge that the two are inherently interconnected, with one occasionally taking priority over the other. Family might need to be prioritised when dealing with a sick child, while work may require more focus during major projects or when pursuing promotion opportunities.

For me, success comes from maintaining flexible priorities so that you can rise to the occasion where you need it. It's up to the individual to decide when to step back and when to lean in. Women must own their destiny.

### Show up for each other

Nothing disappoints me more than seeing women positioned as competitors. No! When we rise, we rise together. We can have our own dreams and aspirations and still celebrate the wins and successes of our colleagues and compatriots. We diminish ourselves when we fail to find joy and pride in the successes of others. By recognising and celebrating the achievements of the women in our networks and communities, we perpetuate the practice of lifting others as they rise, fostering an environment of encouragement.

We must also showcase, promote and encourage diversity in the industry, by assuming leadership roles, thereby increasing the visibility of women leaders. Participate in events, speak on panels, share your stories – I believe we have a responsibility to leverage our positions for the benefit of others. The more that young women see female role models in leadership positions, the more they will believe that such achievements are a possibility for them too.

### ***About Anusha Ramraj, Chief Financial Officer, CCI South Africa***

In her position as Chief Financial Officer at CCI South Africa, Anusha is responsible for all financial activities for the company. Having completed a Bachelor of Social Science majoring in Law, Anusha also holds several financial qualifications and is currently completing her Chartered Governance degree. During her career evolution, Anusha has leveraged her extensive legal and financial knowledge to create a holistic and effective approach to all financial activities.

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## Hindsight is Always Clearer than Foresight - Why Personality Assessments Matter

By Taegan Devar



You hire someone who seems like the perfect fit. They ace the interview, tick all the technical boxes, and have perhaps even proven themselves in previous roles. But not long after stepping into the position, cracks begin to show - and not in the areas you expected.

The struggle doesn't come from a lack of knowledge or technical skill. Instead, it shows up in subtler, but equally important ways: difficulty managing competing priorities, poor communication, resistance to feedback, defensiveness, passivity, or an inability to think strategically. You find yourself asking, what did I miss.

Too often, recruitment decisions focus heavily on technical ability while overlooking equally critical factors like emotional intelligence, leadership competence and, crucially, personality. This is particularly problematic when promoting people into leadership roles. Leadership is not just about doing the work — it's about guiding, influencing and empowering others to do the work.

In our work in organisational and people development, we consistently see individuals “thrown into the deep end” of leadership, with little preparation and few tools beyond what they’ve observed in others. And while we all like to think we’re good at judging character, unconscious biases and assumptions often cloud our view.

This is where personality assessments can make a real difference.

**What is personality?**

Imagine a city: The roads, bridges, on and off ramps determine the route you travel most days. They don’t change quickly or easily. These structures represent personality.

Cars, buses, taxis and pedestrians come along. Some days there is heavy traffic. Other days an emergency. You cannot always predict rush hour traffic or a lane closure. They represent behaviour and they vary daily.

But even though no two days of traffic flow are the same, the structure of the city remains constant and stable and influences long term traffic patterns aside from daily fluctuations.

Human beings are the same. Personality is our stable infrastructure that guides and influences behaviours over time. It’s a set of enduring characteristics that determine behavioural tendencies and how individuals typically interact with others, pursue goals, and derive meaning in life. This is the aspect of a person that is most useful to learn about when hiring. However, we typically focus on the behaviour rather than the personality.

## **Why is assessing personality important?**

Personality impacts how people lead, communicate, handle pressure and respond to others. While someone might appear to be a perfect hire on paper, a personality assessment can uncover deeper behavioural patterns that may not be immediately obvious.

For example, a candidate might appear confident and capable but may also struggle with perfectionism — potentially becoming a bottleneck in high-pressure environments. Knowing this upfront allows for better-informed hiring decisions and tailored development support. In this case, it could mean helping the individual build self-awareness, learn to delegate effectively, and detach self-worth from performance perfection.

We see the benefits of using personality assessments at PeopleSmart as well. Our team undergoes rigorous training in psychometric assessments and through that process, we often discover unexpected things about ourselves. I clearly remember completing a personality assessment and being surprised by the results. It revealed that I'm a "big ideas" person, which resonated, but it also highlighted how, under pressure, this strength can become a limitation, making me less practical when tackling challenges. That insight was a turning point. It made me more intentional about how I present ideas, ensuring they're not just visionary but also grounded and actionable. To this day, that learning continues to shape how I lead and engage with clients.

Not all personality assessments are created equal. Some organisations hesitate to use personality assessments, citing past negative experiences, cost concerns, or the belief that free online tests are "good enough." But not all assessments are created equal. Personality assessments should be supported by research and have appropriate norms for your country. This is a benchmark; after an individual takes the assessment, their score is compared to the distribution of scores from the norm group to interpret whether it is typical, above average, or below average.

Selecting the wrong tool can lead to inaccurate conclusions and potential harm. A valid personality assessment should measure what it claims to measure and be grounded in scientific research.

In many cases, personality assessments are best administered and debriefed by a trained psychologist or psychometrist to ensure accuracy and meaningful interpretation. While this may require investment, the return is significant: better hiring decisions, targeted leadership development and fewer costly missteps.

Understanding personality early in the recruitment or promotion process isn't a "nice to have" — it's a strategic advantage. When used correctly, personality assessments offer deep insights that help organisations select, develop, and support leaders more effectively — ensuring not just a good hire, but the right one.

Taegan Devar is an Industrial Psychologist and the Managing Director of Organisational Development company PeopleSmart ([www.peoplesmart.global](http://www.peoplesmart.global))

## INTERNAL

### Highlight

### Congratulations PROF AJAY JIVAN



Dr Ajay Jivan has been appointed as Professor of Practice in the School of Industrial Psychology and Human Resource Management of the North-West University. He will be involved in the training of undergraduate and postgraduate students in the School as well as in research such as the global CRANET survey.

Congratulations!

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## Artificial Intelligence and the human resource function: Delineating current realities

By Prof. Deseré Kokt

The exponential growth and development of Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) changed the fabric of modern organisations. This is evident in the rise of major tech companies that spend millions to enhance the computing power of AI systems. AI has become a pervasive force that contributed to the creation of a highly complex work environment, placing an emphasis on the continuous development of humans as the drivers of innovation. AI is distinctly human powered (Deloitte, 2024) and can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of organisations. As human capital remains the focus of human resource (HR) management it is imperative to consider the ways in which AI is likely to impact the HR function. The article will unpack the current realities.



Continuous and persistent technological advancement characterises human history. Technological development has also facilitated social development and change throughout the ages as humans had to adapt and adjust their behaviour and actions to new and improved ways of living and working. This also applies to the adoption of AI in the new world of work. AI is a disruptor, requiring individuals to learn new and advanced competencies to work in an integrated and augmented workplace (McRae, 2025). This can involve acquiring advanced digital skills, the ability to source solutions to persisting problems, and meeting customer demands in a professional and timeous manner. It also necessitates learning organisations where systems and processes evolve to enable the growth and development of employees. As new learning is an active process, employees need to be open and receptive to continuously updating their knowledge and skills.

AI systems can enhance the experiences of staff as well as HR professionals by automating daily HR operations, monitoring HR compliance and analysing employee feedback. It can also mitigate bias in hiring and performance reviews, personalise learning and development for individual employees, match candidates with job openings, automate onboarding processes and integrate performance management systems. The use of AI-driven analytics can provide deeper insights into employee performance and satisfaction, allowing HR managers to make

more informed decisions. There are also notable challenges to using AI namely the potential for job displacement and the ethical implications of relying on automated systems for decision-making (Rodgers, Murray, Stefanidis, Degbey & Tarba 2023). The effectiveness of AI in HR is contingent upon the quality of data used to train these systems, highlighting the need for robust data governance frameworks. AI can thus contribute to streamlining HR processes as well as mitigate time and cost constraints. By automating repetitive and administrative tasks, it can provide more time to HR professionals to focus on strategic activities and people issues.

McRae (2025) flagged employee loneliness as an organisational risk in the Future of Work Trends Report. Given a demanding work environment and mounting expectations employee well-being needs to be a constant concern for both organisations and individuals. Employee well-being incorporates an individual's emotional experiences, subjective assessments as well their personal situations. Employee well-being includes all areas work life, from safety, quality and emotional engagement to the nature of the job and the work environment. Although organisations need to support employee wellbeing, individuals also need to take responsibility for their own psychological and emotional well-being.

Loneliness and feelings of being overwhelmed can have implications for employee engagement which can impact the competitive advantage and long-term sustainability of organisations. The Gallup Report (McRae, 2025) notes that global engagement levels dropped to 21% in 2024, which is quite concerning given its importance. The report also flagged that manager engagement is only 27% which underscores the strains of the post-pandemic environment marked by shrinking budgets, increased competition, disrupted supply chains, shifting consumer expectations, and increased needs for flexible work arrangements to mention a few. Managing these challenges compels managers to be able and willing to face tough challenges as well as having the necessary hard and soft skills to accomplish the tasks. This also highlights the need for constant management training and development.

Another reality is increased workplace diversity. Considering the disruptive impacts of globalisations, digitalisation and virtualisation it is essential that soft skills development is prioritized for all employment levels. Individuals from different cultural and religious backgrounds need to interact to meet deadlines and advance organisational goals. There is thus a constant emphasis on intercultural understanding, the development of interpersonal and communication skills as well as skills related to teamwork and showing respect and consideration for individual differences (Deloitte, 2024).

The challenges of technological innovation and AI adoption are complex requiring concerted efforts from management and employees alike. Given the highly complex business environment this is no easy task. AI is the future, and its adoption is not a nice to have but a must have for organisations to compete in a highly competitive environment. HR professionals have a crucial role to play in paving the road to AI adoption and integration.

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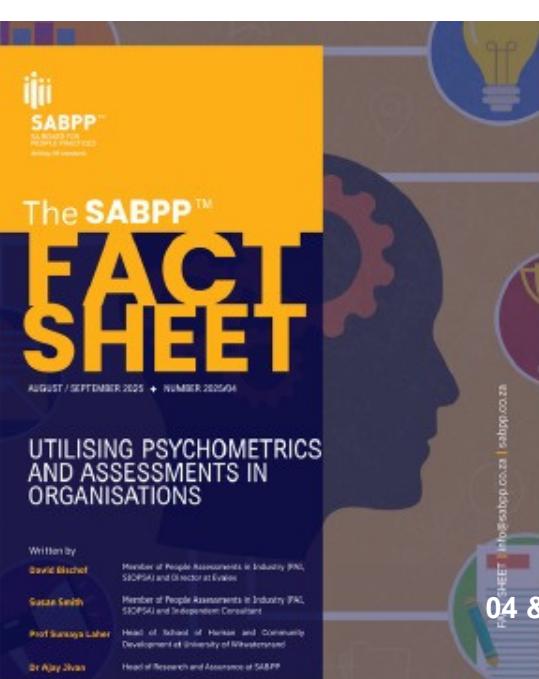
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## FACT SHEET AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2025

David Bischof, Susan Smith, Prof Sumaya Laher, Dr Ajay Jivan

In today's fast-changing workplace, the ability to make informed, strategic, and ethical decisions about talent and the wider workforce is more important than ever. Psychometric assessments can play a key role by offering data-driven insights into an organisation's talent and workforce, especially their capabilities and potential. However, one of the critical issues to be addressed is how organisations use assessments. In this Fact Sheet, we review the use of assessments. We examine the current assessment landscape, which is being transformed by legislative reform, technological advances, and the increasing concerns from stakeholders. The Fact Sheet begins with the People Practices and Governance System Standard (PPGS), which provides an enabling framework for good people and HRM practices within organisations. It then looks at organisational realities regarding the use of assessments and the different roles of the Health Professional Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and Assessment Standards South Africa (ASSA) in promoting good assessment practices.

Read more...





## ALISON REID

is the Director of Personal and Applied Learning, responsible for Coaching and Facilitation at GIBS. She is a coach holding a Master's degree in Executive Business Coaching and accredited with the ICF (International Coaching Federation), AoEC (Academy of Executive Coaching), IMCSA (Institute for Management Consultants) and (ISPSO) International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations. She is a practitioner, educator and researcher and believes coaching has the power to catalyse significant change for individuals and organisations.

BY ALISON REID

# The Business of Business Coaching

**The business coaching market is estimated to be worth \$9.4 billion (2017) and growing on average 5% per year. Something is certainly going right and it's got to do with how business coaching works and how it adds value to businesses.**

Commonly, the answer to the question: "What is business coaching?" tends to be that it's coaching applied to a business person or that a business commissions the coaching for an individual. While this might be true, we believe that business itself should have more than a background role in the coaching story. Corporate business, as a set of specific activities, with particular drivers and parameters of success, are also the dominant buyers of coaching and the relationship of the coaching world to business deserves to be better understood.

This article looks at business coaching through three business lenses. Firstly, as a result of being in demand, coaching is a growing and profitable 'business' itself. This helps it contribute positively to other

business coaching contributes significantly to business outcomes, enhancing business performance and results. It therefore makes good business sense to understand and use coaching in relevant ways. Coaching is a relatively new industry but difficult to ignore. It's here to stay because it's simply good business.

## Coaching as business

The success of business coaching is indicated by the uptake in organisations with 25%-40% of *Fortune 500* companies regularly using executive coaches. As early as 2003, the coaching market was worth \$1 billion worldwide and its growth is demonstrated by its worth at \$9.4 billion in 2017. It appears to be one of the fastest

growing industries in the world, just behind technology. At least by the metrics of growth, coaching seems effective at interfacing on a business level with its dominant buyers – corporate business.

**...business coaches work on the axis of individual and organisational need.**

businesses. Certainly, each individual coaching practitioner should be at least authentically proficient at running their own businesses, in order to be relevant to the business market they serve.

The second 'humanness', risks being irrelevant. While

lens is concerned with what business coaching fundamentally is and what it is typically 'busy' with. Lastly, but most importantly, there is solid evidence that

Even its position relative to technology suggests an important insight: it is human beings that create and use technology and technology that progresses fast but lacks coaching is fundamentally concerned with human beings, the industry's growth implies a level of business proficiency that allows it to be a business enabler.

## What is the business of business coaching?

At GIBS, we believe (as many do), that business coaching is about coaching individuals who work in organisations, where the coaching is designed to serve both the individual and the business. This is not merely a matter of finding a convenient overlap, but rather of amplifying both and significantly enhancing the alignment between both.

Where business coaching differs from 'life' coaching, is that it intends to focus on individual development within, and inclusive of, the business context of that individual's work life. Marc Kahn, author of *Coaching on the Axis* positions this well, explaining that business coaches work on the axis of individual and organisational need. Who an individual is fundamentally infuses that person's work role, and similarly, an individual's 'work roles' fundamentally affect their personal identity. Focusing on the nexus of the two (and mutual effect on each other) can bring positive results beyond a focus on either in isolation.

For example, if Tony is being coached on leadership themes, including how he inspires others, business coaching would also consider Tony's leadership development within the context of his organisation's leadership strategy. Perhaps Tony is focusing on using a personal strength as a relationship builder to



develop his ability to inspire. But his coaching may then also simultaneously work on 'driving business results through effective leadership', as a formal pillar of (let's say) his organisation's 'leadership charter'.

In the context of what business coaching is 'busy with', it's also useful to explore 'how' it does this, particularly in reference to other approaches. Many approaches could feasibly assist Tony in his leadership development and Tony's organisation in executing on their leadership charter. Coaching differs from other approaches like mentoring, teaching and consulting, in two distinctive ways. Firstly, coaching, at its essence, is a personal development endeavour. It works at the individual human being level. As we will explore later, this work can significantly impact organisations at the macro level, but the primary starting point for coaching is not to, for example, change organisational structure or formulate organisational strategy. The thinking, planning and execution of strategic insights and actions, of course, are driven by human beings and it's at the potency and performance of those individuals that

business coaching focuses its attention. Secondly, in coaching, the insights and action flow from the coachee. Not the

other way around. The coach plays a role in eliciting these but not delivering them. A mentor or teacher is usually responsible for sharing expertise and experience and the flow of this expertise is from expert to recipient (learner). A teacher, consultant or mentor delivers expertise but doesn't necessarily elicit it from others.

Business coaching is, therefore 'busy with' unlocking, eliciting and facilitating wisdom and potency in individuals. It does this in such a way that it can also improve what that individual is 'busy with' in their work roles and their businesses as a whole.

## **Business coaching helps businesses be good businesses**

This improvement is good for business. Coaching is popular and continues to be, despite softening of funds for training in harsher business times. This is a sign that it's a valuable tool in businesses. But why is this?

Coaching can certainly elevate personal well-being. There is substantial research on the benefits of coaching for individual outcomes like levels of happiness, fulfilment, resilience, work-life balance, relationships and self-confidence.

## **Coaching enhances personal outcomes**

A newly promoted equity candidate

was feeling the pressure of stepping into an executive role in a highly competitive retail environment. In addition to being one of the only women at that level, she had the pressure of the common 'impostor' syndrome plaguing many female leaders, exacerbated by the perceived crossed arms and sceptical glances from her predominantly male colleagues, who she felt, doubted her experience and ability. She needed to hold her own and not display her internalised 'junior' status, or allow it to affect her job. Through coaching, she had the space to access her own common sense voice of how to fulfil her role for the best benefit of the business. With hard work and by filtering the noise around generic invocations to 'be agile', 'be innovative', 'be strategic', her confidence and sense of satisfaction took a significant leap forward.

But does the positive influence on well-being extend to performance at work?

With the transition from command and control management styles of the past to an emphasis on managers empowering their subordinates, coaching also became a business tool for developing leaders' and managers' performance in their roles. Alongside this, studies began to document specific improvements in performance at the individual level. From this evidence, it's clear that coaching both improves performance directly, and also, more indirectly, boosts factors like productivity, goal-achievement, engagement and retention, managers' emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, team effectiveness, time management, people management capability and others. For example, the executive (from the story alongside) had identified critical inefficiencies in how a customer's data and account was being managed. Through her increased confidence in her own leadership perspective, she was able to have a series of difficult conversations with both internal

and external stakeholders which resulted in massive savings to the customer and which then eventually almost doubled the customer's business with her company. This story highlights the 'coaching on the axis' orientation of business coaching: improved confidence and satisfaction amplified specific (required) areas of leadership performance for her. As she fully stepped into her executive role, this, in turn, improved her sense of fulfilment and enhanced her personal identity as she increasingly saw herself as a legitimate leader.

## Coaching enables performance

An organisation felt that one of their managers was "too soft" on his team and did too much work for them, thereby preventing himself from doing enough of his own job. Through coaching, the manager stepped up, had to work out how to at times confront someone on his team and how to make the work land up on the right desk, giving him time to "be strategic". The organisation felt the manager had done extremely well and had "toughened up" (in their words). The manager's work performance and ability to confront others and delegate better was enhanced through, and alongside, his improvement in self-confidence.

The case for using coaching for improving individual and leadership effectiveness is therefore certainly compelling. In keeping with the notion that business coaching links both individual and organisational performance, we do see evidence from a wide range of studies, that coaching indeed improves overall organisational effectiveness. But is there a measure of the 'harder' effects of coaching on business?

The 'harder' case is certainly illustrated in the executive's story above which resulted in both savings and doubling of the customer's business with her company. But this case is also supported more formally in research where it seems that at least a few studies have linked ROI (return on investment) and measurable improvements in financial results, to coaching engagements (some report ROIs

of between five and six times the original investment).

There is much still to do in understanding how coaching enables business and GIBS is one of the institutions which are actively researching the 'state of play' of coaching and its impact on organisations. But what is available to us so far seems to indicate that using coaching in the right ways does help businesses to be better businesses.

## Coaching is linked to harder business results

A general manager of a region in emerging markets was being coached. He had started the regional offices and had appointed country managers in each region. His stated strategic objective was to grow the business by 'growing his people'. Through coaching conversations, he recognised that the key way to grow the business was to truly empower each country manager and to develop the country teams. This insight was present prior to coaching but it was through coaching that he specified clear roles that he as general manager needed to take to make the generic statement "grow my people" turn into tangible execution. He brought all the country managers together quarterly (over vast distances) and invested time, energy and money in developing the strategy collaboratively as a team. He used several best practices and assessments to enhance each person's growth and insight and appointed coaches for key country managers too. He became far better at prioritising his energy and time. Their initial plan was a target of \$20 million in two years and \$50 million in five years. In two years, in large part as a result of the actions above, the business turnover increased from \$10 million to \$100 million.

## Conclusion

It's worth remembering that while coaching can help drive business results, it also is an industry that, at its heart, is about heart. Coaching intends to keep our humanity intact, as we go about



the business of our businesses. Its aims to nurture the 'being' in human being. Having said that, business coaching is an industry that grew quickly because it links individual and organisational well-being and performance with the demonstrated ability to improve both. In addition to being implicitly about the individual human being, it can be said to be popular and growing because it's simply good business.

## GIBS launches its 3rd Coaching Landscape Index

GIBS is running a comprehensive series of three research surveys into the 'state of play' in coaching for three communities: coaches, coachees and corporate business Results, interpretations and 'how-guides' based on the findings will become available in three iterations through 2019. If you are interested in receiving the survey results, contact Moroka MokgokoM@gibs.co.za

CTA: Apply for GIBS Professional Business Coaching Programme here: <http://bit.ly/46ZYebn>

## Programme Information:

Start Date: 14 October 2025 – 13 November 2025

Block Dates:

Block 1 : 14, 15 & 16 October 2025

Block 2: 11, 12 & 13 November 2025

Cost per Delegate: R 68,558

“ Did you  
know? ”

## Strategic HR Management

Strategic HR Management is a systematic approach to developing and implementing HRM strategies, policies and plans aligned to the strategy of the organisation that enable the organisation to achieve its objective.

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## How Does Procrastination Impact Ethics in the Professional Environment, and What Are the Suggested Strategies to Solve This Problem?

By Vuyisile Nomvalo



### Introduction

In professional settings, procrastination is rarely questioned beyond its impact on productivity. Yet beneath the surface of delayed emails, postponed meetings, or unmade decisions lies a quiet erosion of ethical integrity. After more than three decades in HR, and now as a Professional Life Coach devoted to others success, I've seen how avoidance behaviours fray the fabric of trust, accountability, and culture within organizations.

This article is a call to reconsider procrastination not merely as a personal habit but as an ethical crossroads. When leaders delay hard conversations, when teams stall on responsibilities, and when decisions are shelved indefinitely, the result is not just inefficiency. It's the displacement of moral responsibility. Drawing on recent workplace research and neuroscience, we'll explore the roots of procrastination and introduce strategies to respond with presence and integrity.

## The Ethical Weight of Delay

Procrastination may be cloaked in good intentions, waiting for more data, for a better moment, for clarity. But within the workplace, delay isn't neutral.

- **Unspoken Harm:** Avoiding a conversation with a struggling employee or deferring action on misconduct doesn't resolve the issue, it enables it (Frontiers in Psychology, 2018).
- **Erosion of Values:** Every deferred responsibility quietly signals what's permissible. Over time, these delays rewrite the ethical code of a team.
- **Accountability Gaps:** As decisions are postponed, responsibility becomes diffuse, making it easier for individuals to justify inaction.

A systematic review by MDPI (2023) highlights how organizational structure, leadership style, and emotional factors contribute to workplace procrastination, often leading to **slow and invisible ethical drift** rather than intentional wrongdoing. **Metaphor:** Integrity is like a thread woven through the organizational fabric. Each procrastinated act tugs at that thread. Initially invisible, over time the entire weave begins to loosen, risking collapse.

## Psychological Drivers and the Brain's Role in Change

Procrastination is not a character flaw, it's a protective mechanism rooted in psychology.

- **Fear of Consequence:** Many professionals delay difficult tasks to avoid discomfort or conflict.
- **Decision Fatigue:** Exhausted leaders postpone decisions, not from laziness, but from depleted cognitive energy.
- **Perfectionism & Identity Protection:** "If I don't try, I can't fail." Delay preserves a fragile sense of competence.

According to a peer-reviewed study in the *International Journal of Progressive Research* (2024), procrastination negatively impacts not only leadership effectiveness but also overall team engagement, reinforcing the urgency for targeted intervention.

**Neuroplasticity**, the brain's capacity to rewire itself, offers hope. Research from the Kansas Lawyers Assistance Program (2023) illustrates how the prefrontal cortex, our center for reasoning and ethical judgment, is often overridden by emotional resistance in moments of stress. The good news: **intentional repetition** of integrity-driven actions rebuilds these cognitive pathways.

## Rewiring and Transformational Strategies:

- **Mindful Activation:** Meditation and breathing reduce emotional reactivity.
- **Micro-Decisions:** Small, values-based tasks build confidence and reduce inertia.
- **Trust Deficit:** Timely, values-aligned decisions sustain credibility.

Research from IOSR Journals (2022) reveals that consistent procrastination reduces decision quality and undermines ethical clarity within organizations, particularly among HR and Executive leadership.

Coaching interventions, including guided reflection, emotion coaching, and integrity rituals, can help shift leaders from paralysis to purposeful action.

## Positives of Procrastination

As I come closer to the end of this article and my thoughts for today, it is imperative that I give a balance to the discussing by highlighting the fact that, there are benefits or advantages of procrastination when done intentionally or mindfully.

- **Enhanced Creativity:** Delaying tasks allows for “diffuse thinking,” where the brain makes unexpected connections. Innovators like Steve Jobs were known to let ideas simmer before acting.
- **Better Decision-Making:** Waiting can help avoid rushed choices and allow time for reflection, research, and emotional clarity.
- **Efficiency Under Pressure:** Some thrive under deadlines, the urgency boosts focus and motivation.
- **Mental Recharge:** Stepping away from a task can reduce cognitive fatigue and improve performance later.
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- **Prioritization Clarity:** Delaying can reveal which tasks truly matter, helping professionals focus on high-impact work.
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## Conclusion: Choosing Ethical Presence Over Delay

In the workplace, procrastination isn't just about time, it's about the truth. Every deferred decision hides a message unintentionally. And when the truth is delayed, trust falters.

Yet change is possible. By recognizing the emotional and neurological roots of delay, we can reclaim the power to act ethically, courageously and consistently. The call is simple but urgent:

Let us stop postponing what matters. Let ethical presence become our legacy, one decision at a time.

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