

Soft Skills Training for Entrepreneurship and Workforce Development

WHAT ARE WE LEARNING ABOUT EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION AT SCALE?

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Soft-skills training—specifically Personal Initiative (PI) Training—has shown promising effects on business outcomes for entrepreneurs. Yet, results vary by context and gender, and implementation could significantly shape effectiveness, so a better understanding of the mechanisms behind the intervention could help implementers deploy it more successfully. Similarly, as efforts to scale these programs grow, so do the challenges: selecting and retaining the right trainers, adapting content for digital formats, and sustaining participant engagement across diverse settings.

This review discusses some practical elements that might require special attention when implementing soft skills and PI training: curriculum design, participant targeting, alignment with constraints, training dosage, reinforcement mechanisms, and trainer selection. Each of these factors could affect both cost and impact—but to what degree remains an open question. Moving from isolated successes to broad, lasting impact will require models that function within real-world constraints, such as limited or uncertain funding, staff turnover, and uneven digital access. Tackling these issues will demand more evidence and creative solutions—like AI-supported delivery, new engagement strategies to reduce attrition in asynchronous formats, and funding structures that allow capable local partners to retain skilled staff.

I. Introduction

[IPA's Best Bets report](#) identifies soft skills training as a promising intervention with robust evidence suggesting its effectiveness in boosting business profits and sales. The term soft skills training is used to encompass a variety of programs designed to develop a diverse range of non-technical abilities, attitudes, and behaviors that enable people to navigate social and professional settings effectively and to improve intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Some recent impact evaluations have shown the potential of these type of trainings, including Personal Initiative (PI) training, which fosters an entrepreneurial mindset; the Self-Empowerment and Equity for Change Initiative (SEE Change), which promotes personal agency, emotional regulation and goal setting; and the Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) program, which nurtures entrepreneurial spirit and self-esteem. However, a significant knowledge gap remains on the implementation side. Gaining deeper insights into this aspect could help organizations design more cost-effective and sustainable training models.

Though the term soft skills training is broad, this document focuses on PI training. This focus stems from the extensive evidence behind its [widespread implementation across various contexts](#). PI training has demonstrated significant potential in improving business outcomes, but the intervention has been more effective in certain contexts than others. After promising results in [Uganda](#), a study in [Togo](#) showed one of the largest and more [sustained long-term effects](#)² of PI training. However, results were less pronounced in [Jamaica](#) and [Ethiopia](#). These findings underscore the need for additional research to better

understand the conditions under which PI training can be effectively deployed—and to identify the key ingredients that make it successful. At the same time, the challenges around the scaling of PI training could be relevant for the broader soft-skill training field, particularly in developing scalable models and identifying key components necessary for success.

Effectively delivering PI training and fostering mindset shifts involves more than just transferring knowledge. It requires a strategic approach rooted in psychological principles, where choices like trainer selection, duration, and incorporating practice and mentoring are carefully aligned with the intervention's core mechanisms to ensure both effectiveness and cost-efficiency. In this document, we explore key implementation factors we have identified that are essential for delivering effective PI training, along with pivotal questions that could influence the development of a scalable program. We also highlight areas where further research and collaboration could prove beneficial in addressing these questions. These insights are informed by a combination of evidence from diverse studies and valuable contributions from implementing partners with direct field experience.⁴

This document is also a call to action, inviting researchers, practitioners, and funders to join forces, leveraging existing evidence while addressing critical gaps. By pooling resources and insights, we can refine the design of soft skills training programs, enhance their effectiveness, and expand their reach to more entrepreneurs seeking to improve their businesses, as well as organizations looking for scalable, evidence-based training solutions.

PI training is a psychological entrepreneurship training developed by Prof. Michael Frese, Prof. Michael Gielnik, and their team at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg.³ It is based on action principles, which Glaub et al. (2016) describe as practical, easy-to-grasp rules of thumb that guide entrepreneurs to demonstrate more personal initiative. These principles focus on goal-setting, information gathering, planning, and feedback, aligning with the three core components of PI: self-starting, proactive/future orientation, and overcoming barriers/persistence. According to [Glaub et al. \(2014\)](#), PI training is meant to transmit action principles, through learning by doing, which will help participants to increase their personal initiative behavior, leading them to actively pursue entrepreneurial tasks (develop new ideas, identify and harness new opportunities before competitors, prepare for future opportunities or problems, overcome barriers, etc.), which in turn lead to business growth and success.

II. Results from Personal Initiative Training in Different Settings

The table presents an overview of various PI training interventions across different countries, highlighting their characteristics, outcomes, and associated costs. The results consistently show that PI training leads to significant business improvements, including increased profits, higher sales, and greater employment generation, often surpassing Traditional Business Training. Notably, PI training in Togo led to sustained long-term profit growth, especially among men, as a result of capital accumulation.

Implementation costs vary, with PI training in Togo costing around USD 756 per participant but recovering its costs within a year, while in Jamaica it was significantly cheaper at USD 212 per participant but did not have a lasting impact. Differences in program structure, follow-up visits, and target populations might influence both the effectiveness and sustainability of outcomes, making PI training a promising yet context-dependent entrepreneurship intervention.

Country	Intervention	Characteristics of the intervention	Sample	Main result	Cost
Togo	PI Training vs Traditional Business Training Follow-up visits	36 hours of classroom instruction over 4 weeks and 3-hour follow-up visits/ month for 4 months (for both groups)	1,500 microenterprises	PI training led to a 30 percent profit increase, surpassing the 11 percent gain from Traditional Business Training, with the USD 750 cost per participant recovered in under a year. Firms also borrowed more and employed more workers.	PI training cost per participant was USD 756. It led to an average increase in monthly profits of USD 60 over the first 2 years. The program was highly cost-effective, as it recuperated its costs in about a year.
Togo (Seven-year follow-up)	PI Training vs Traditional Business Training Follow-up visits	36 hours of classroom instruction over 4 weeks and 3-hour follow-up visits/ month for 4 months (for both groups)	1,500 microenterprises	PI training led to long-term lasting effects, with profits increasing by USD 91 per month, exceeding the two-year impact. Men's gains grow over time through capital accumulation and self-efficacy; women's remain flat or decline due to limited capital build-up.	PI training cost per participant was USD 756.
Uganda	PI Training	3-day program	100 small business owners	PI training enhanced entrepreneurial skills and success, resulting in higher sales, more employees, and improved personal initiative.	No information.
Ethiopia	Two RCTs: 1) PI Training and Traditional Business Training 2) Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT) program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PI: 40 hours over 10 half days. Traditional Training: 40 hours over 10 half days. DOT: 30-hour course offered over 15 to 20 days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st RCT: 2,000 women entrepreneurs 2nd RCT: 800 women entrepreneurs 	The first RCT found no evidence of impacts on business performance. In the second RCT, the trained group saw a 30 percent profit boost over the comparison group, with notable increases in personal initiative and self-efficacy. Results suggested better results for trainers with business experience.	The training cost per participant was USD 30 per person. It did not include follow-up visits, a factor contributing to the higher cost in Togo.
Jamaica	PI Training + Traditional Business Training vs Intensive PI Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combined PI + Traditional: 40 hours over 10 days Intensive PI: 40 hours over 10 days 	945 entrepreneurs	Intensive PI training yielded short-term business improvements, with a 0.28 standard deviation increase in profit and sales metrics after three months, mainly among men, but these effects faded after a year.	The training cost for each participant was approximately USD 212.

III. Implementation Considerations

Key Factors Identified

Decisions—such as selecting the right type of trainer, determining the training duration, and how to incorporate elements like practice, reinforcement, and mentoring—not only influence the cost of the intervention but can also impact its effectiveness if they are not aligned with the mechanisms behind the training's success. After reviewing the evidence on PI training and similar interventions, and speaking with several implementing organizations involved in entrepreneurship training, we identified key areas where additional evidence could help improve the cost-effectiveness of this and similar soft skills programs.

Methodology and Curriculum Design

An important aspect of successful implementation is a deep understanding of the curriculum principles and methodology behind the training. Delivering PI training effectively and fostering mindset shifts is a complex task that goes beyond simply sharing knowledge. It requires a methodology grounded in psychological principles, with careful attention to how these principles are applied. For example, as described in [Glaub et al. \(2014\)](#), during the program, participants engage in a hands-on exercise, the 'personal project,' where they apply all facets of the PI methodology to advance their businesses, working in small groups with their peers. This process begins with defining a PI goal (like identifying a new business opportunity), followed by reflecting on where and how to gather valuable information (like where to gather the resources they need); then participants formulate an action plan and consider how to incorporate feedback and monitoring during its implementation.

This approach, which promotes the immediate application of concepts to a real project, aims to enhance learning and increase the likelihood of integrating the training's content into their business practices. Additionally, feedback, both positive and negative, seems to play a crucial role in improving actions and guiding individuals toward their goals. Throughout the process, trainers and peers provide feedback aimed at enhancing performance and learning from mistakes.

A better understanding of the level of interactions with trainers (and peers) required for the methodology to be effective might allow for more scalable versions of the training that might require less dedicated trainer attention, lowering the cost of reaching more people.

Optimizing Business Training by Targeting the Right Participants

[Ubfal \(2024\)](#)⁵ highlights that business training's effectiveness highly depends on the target population's characteristics, with varying impacts across different groups. PI Training has been promising for micro and small enterprises, showing positive results for both men and women ([Campos et.al \(2017\)](#), [Alibhai et al. \(2019\)](#)); however, the long-term follow-up study in Togo shows that while the two-year outcomes were similar for both, the effects for male entrepreneurs were stronger after seven years, while the effects on female participants were smaller and no longer significant. ([Campos et.al \(2024\)](#)).



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There is still some room for learning about how to identify participants who will benefit most from training. This could involve targeting based on observable characteristics like age, gender, and firm size. For example, the [BRAC team](#) conducts surveys in selected areas and utilizes existing networks to identify potential learners. Another approach is to account for unobservable characteristics that may influence participation and outcomes. This can be done through self-selection strategies, such as advertising training programs online—like CREA’s approach in Mexico [Davies et al. \(2023\)](#)—or by choosing how much of the cost to charge participants, which could affect who signs up for and attends the training, as discussed in [Maffioli et.al \(2020\)](#).

A promising area of research can be found in [Bryan et al. \(2024\)](#), which uses machine learning to identify the psychometric variables⁶ most predictive of performance (high vs low-performing participants). While the study focuses on credit allocation rather than training, its insights are still relevant, highlighting the potential of leveraging individual characteristics and machine learning tools to improve participant targeting in training programs in future research.

Aligning PI Training with Entrepreneurial Needs and Addressing Binding Constraints

As noted by [Fischer and Karlan \(2015\)](#), a key consideration for targeting is that businesses face a variety of obstacles, and it is often difficult to determine which of these can be effectively addressed through training. This suggests that different entrepreneurs may benefit from different types of training programs, each tailored to address specific challenges. For instance, in South Africa, [Anderson et al. \(2016\)](#) show that both marketing and accounting training programs improved firm performance relative to businesses that did not receive any training, but trainees used different pathways to increase profits. Less seasoned entrepreneurs tended to do better when they received marketing training, as it encouraged them to look beyond their existing business context and develop new perspectives on products, customers, distributors, and suppliers. More established firms, on the other hand, benefited more from finance and accounting skills to reduce costs and increase efficiencies in their business. These findings suggest that Traditional Business Training may be particularly valuable for entrepreneurs facing constraints not addressed by PI training.

A combination of PI training and more traditional content may therefore be appropriate in some cases, depending on the entrepreneur’s stage and specific needs. The current evidence is mixed. For instance, [Ubfal et al. \(2019\)](#) found that 40 hours of intensive PI training in Jamaica improved short-term business outcomes, particularly for men. However, a combined approach—20 hours each of PI and Traditional Business Training—showed no significant effects. The authors suggest that introducing too many concepts may dilute the impact of PI training. In contrast, preliminary findings from a study in [Mozambique](#) (working paper not yet available) suggest that pairing PI training with agricultural extension services can improve program effectiveness by promoting both improved practices and an entrepreneurial mindset. Finally, while PI training has been shown to improve many business practices ([Campos et.al 2017](#), [Ubfal et.al 2019](#)), it is also possible that there may be specific practices that it is less effective in addressing. A better understanding of the potential synergies—or lack thereof—between PI training and Traditional Business Training might allow policymakers and practitioners to design a curriculum that maximizes impact across different types of entrepreneurs.

Similarly, gaining a deeper understanding of the mechanisms that drive the effectiveness of PI training—and how they align with the specific needs of entrepreneurs—can help identify the types of entrepreneurs and contexts where it has the greatest impact. This understanding can also shed light on which complementary interventions might create more favorable conditions for PI training’s success. For example, [Campos et al. \(2024\)](#) suggest that the sustained long-term impacts for men are driven by increased capital and greater confidence in managing their businesses. Men were also more likely to access credit when needed, further fueling business growth. In contrast, similar patterns were not observed among women, pointing to persistent barriers. These gender differences highlight the potential value of targeted support for women, such as improved access to capital or entry into higher-return sectors. Similarly, this could also mean that PI training might be more effective in contexts in which entrepreneurs are able to find sources of financing, or if it’s complemented by cash grants or loans as a complementary intervention.



Finding the Right Training Length to Maximize Effectiveness

Finding the right balance in the duration of the training could be important for the cost-effectiveness of the intervention; longer training programs will be more costly and might risk increasing participant dropout, whereas making the program too short might fail to have the intended effect on the desired psychological outcomes. For instance, as noted above, [Ubfal et al. \(2019\)](#) found that intensive PI training was more effective than a split approach combining PI and Traditional Business Training. While researchers hypothesized that Traditional Business Training potentially diluted the impact of PI training by introducing too many concepts, it could also be that the training “dosage” was insufficient to affect psychological outcomes through the soft skills component. On the other hand, extending the training could imply greater time demands on entrepreneurs, with potential implications for both costs and dropout rates

Reinforcement Through Follow-Ups and Engagement Strategies

One of the most effective implementations of PI training took place in Togo, where trainers delivered 36 hours of training over four weeks and conducted 3-hour follow-up visits to participants’ businesses for four months after the training. [Ubfal et al. \(2019\)](#) suggest that these follow-ups may explain why Togo’s PI program had long-lasting effects, in contrast to the shorter-term results seen in Jamaica. These visits were designed to reinforce key concepts from the training and support participants in developing, reflecting on, and refining action plans to help them achieve their business goals. This approach helps translate training into real-world actions that might include some good business practices, even if those practices were not explicitly covered in the course. This raises an important

question about whether follow-up visits should be considered part of the core training methodology, despite their cost.

However, it is also possible that the close interaction with trainers during these visits affected outcomes through other channels, like potentially providing additional business knowledge, either from the trainers’ entrepreneurial experience or exposure to best practices from other businesses. These visits may also serve as a behavioral nudge or introduce a sense of accountability, encouraging participants to follow through on their action plans and apply what they learned. For example, in India ([Field et al. \(2016\)](#)), women who attended business training alongside a friend showed increased loan demand, business activity, and household income. The researchers suggest that peer effects may work by raising participants’ ambition or holding them more accountable to their goals—particularly in programs that emphasize personalized planning and goal-setting over purely informational content.

A better understanding of why these reinforcement activities matter might help implementers consider alternative engagement strategies of varying intensity employed by other training organizations, such as peer mentoring, role models, or engagement through social media or SMS. For example, some forms of mentorship may be more cost-effective than in-person follow-up visits—such as video or message-based mentoring or role models. An example is found in Uganda ([Riley \(2024\)](#)), where students who watched a film featuring a female role model performed better on exams, and girls were more likely to stay in school—showing that even indirect exposure can influence outcomes.

Still, more evidence is needed on whether following up with participants or other forms of personalized interaction are required for the training to have a sustained effect.

Identifying Effective Trainers

In most studied instances of PI training, the curriculum developers⁷ used a train-the-trainer model to train local trainers, relying on established local partners for logistical support. Important questions remain about how to identify the most effective trainers. Research from Ethiopia ([Alibhai et al. 2019](#)) highlights the potential influence of trainers on program outcomes. In one of the study's two evaluations, no significant results were observed, which researchers attributed to implementation challenges and emphasized the trainers' pivotal role. The study found that trainers with prior entrepreneurial experience were positively associated with better psychological outcomes for students, while no such link was found with trainers' years of education or cognitive ability. The authors suggest that a shared identity between trainer and trainee is key to effectively teaching psychological skills.

This idea is supported by other studies emphasizing the importance of identity and relatability in behavior change. For example, while focused on mentoring rather than soft skills training, a study in Uganda ([Germann et al. 2024](#)) found that female entrepreneurs paired with female mentors achieved greater business success. Similarly, a study with farmers in Malawi ([BenYishay and Mobarak 2014](#)) found that the social identity of the communicator significantly affects learning and adoption. Farmers were more persuaded by communicators who shared similar agricultural conditions and constraints, suggesting that perceived similarity enhances credibility.

A better understanding of the key characteristics of effective trainers could help implementers select the right candidates. For instance, in Togo, trainers were chosen based on their backgrounds in entrepreneurship, business coaching, and motivational skills. Yet, even with clear criteria, finding enough qualified trainers, especially in specific contexts like rural areas, can remain a challenge.

Given the importance of trainer quality, exploring alternatives that rely less on a large pool of highly skilled trainers, such as online courses or video-based training, might offer a viable solution. Additional options may include providing highly detailed trainer guides and incorporating AI-based platforms to offer personalized support to trainers or directly giving feedback to trainees. These approaches can help maintain quality while reducing reliance on a large pool of highly skilled trainers.



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IV. Scaling Considerations:

Key Factors Identified

Even once we have a clearer understanding of what constitutes effective design and implementation of the intervention, additional factors may need consideration when scaling. These include ensuring the intervention's effectiveness as it becomes more challenging to find high-quality trainers and identifying implementing partners equipped to sustainably deliver the training at scale.

Maintaining Effectiveness at Scale

Trainer Quality: High-quality trainers are essential for the success of PI training programs, especially when scaling interventions. Identifying good trainers requires clear recruitment strategies, such as targeting specific profiles or using filtering mechanisms like post-training assessments. Organizations must define trainer profiles, offer competitive compensation, and build capacity to train new trainers, potentially through master trainers.

A major challenge is the need for a large pool of qualified trainers and organizations to hire them. Ensuring quality is especially difficult when training is outsourced, such as through government procurement. Governments should establish minimum standards for training providers, such as requiring certified trainers, as seen in the International Labor Organization (ILO) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) programs.

Even though the ILO Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) program is more focused on technical rather than soft skills, its certification process could be a good example to maintain trainer quality across different types of training programs. Its trainer certification process involves selecting candidates based on experience in business development, adult education, or entrepreneurship. Partner organizations typically identify candidates, but independent trainers can also apply. Candidates attend a Training of Trainers (ToT) workshop to earn a Trainer Certificate of Competence, allowing them to train independently. To remain certified, trainers must conduct at least one Training of Entrepreneurs cycle every three years. Master Trainers undergo additional training to certify new trainers. While Certified Trainers focus on training entrepreneurs,

Master Trainers lead ToT programs, assess trainer performance, and ensure quality control. They also contribute to training material development and program marketing.

The ILO has a [public database of certified trainers](#) for their Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) and GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise programs, accessible to different implementing organizations to hire qualified individuals.

However, even with these measures, it might be hard to identify many harder-to-observe characteristics that could make a trainer more effective, like their ability to provide helpful feedback or motivate participants.

Finally, another option to retain a certain level of quality at scale could be developing a more easy-to-replicate or standardized and shorter version of the training program. This could help local organizations more easily replicate and deliver the program. However, ensuring proper implementation and adapting the program to maintain its impact would remain a critical challenge.

Digitalization of the Training: One way to reduce dependency on finding high-quality trainers is to develop an asynchronous version of the intervention using pre-recorded lessons from top-tier trainers. However, as discussed in the previous section about the methodology, it is important to assess how much the effectiveness of the training relies on interactions—both between participants and trainers, and among participants themselves—to enable more scalable training versions that demand less dedicated trainer attention; whether for providing feedback to participants or encouraging them to apply the lessons from the training. This, in turn, could reduce the cost of reaching more people.

Alternatively, other methods could be developed to substitute for direct interactivity, such as training chatbots to provide feedback or leveraging WhatsApp groups to promote interaction, as seen in [Asiedu et al. 2023](#). Similarly, interactions with others may offer additional benefits—such as the transfer of effective business practices—which could also be reinforced through complementary strategies like

SMS reminders that reiterate key course concepts and encourage participants to apply them in their businesses.

Additionally, it is important to take into consideration ways to increase engagement with asynchronous training programs, since they tend to have low completion rates.⁸ For instance, in Ethiopia (Cassidy et al., 2024), a smartphone app delivering slightly more advanced content than traditional in-person training saw an encouraging initial uptake of 75 percent. However, only 22 percent of participants completed the full curriculum, compared to a 71 percent completion rate for the in-person version. These low completion rates highlight the challenges of digital delivery. The same study also underscores the critical role of in-person information sessions for initial take-up, teaching participants to download, log in, and use the app; without these sessions, they had found that initial take-up was close to zero. Understanding these barriers—whether they relate to motivation, digital literacy, or competing demands—can inform more cost-effective strategies to improve retention without compromising impact.

Digital delivery of PI training has the potential to increase reach, reduce costs, and offer more consistent quality. However, its cost and participant engagement might vary with context and the delivery format. For example, in Mexico and Guatemala (Davies et al. 2023), an asynchronous version of PI and Traditional Business Training—delivered through pre-recorded modules—achieved very low engagement, with only 11 percent of firms completing at least one module. In contrast, the same study's live Zoom sessions had similar completion rates to in-person programs and helped reach harder-to-access participants. However, because sessions were delivered live, they still relied heavily on trainer time and did not result in significant cost savings. Meanwhile, in Ethiopia (Cassidy et al., 2024), app-based training delivered asynchronously cost USD 278 per participant (54 percent of the in-person cost), but had low completion rates—22 percent compared to 71 percent for in-person training, despite similar initial take-up. These findings suggest that while digital delivery can be more scalable and cost-effective, participant engagement remains a critical challenge, particularly for asynchronous formats.



Identifying Implementation Partners with the Right Capabilities

Trainer Availability: Finding and retaining quality trainers could be a major challenge for scaling training programs. Organizations must have the ability to identify, hire, and train suitable candidates. The train-the-trainer model can help to ensure the quality of the trainers by ensuring that all trainers receive standardized training on the core content and effective delivery methods. However, one challenge with this model is that local implementing organizations may not be able to retain newly trained trainers, losing the capacity to deliver future interventions if, for example, they only get funding to do one-off training for a project. Some organizations, like [Community Media Trust in South Africa](#), have built internal capacity by employing in-house trainers and partnering with experts on PI training to train master trainers.

Similarly, if training were to be offered through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions or schools, it could make it easier to retain trainers and ensure a steady influx of new students every year. An example of this approach is the Student Training for Entrepreneurial Promotion (STEP) training program, which focuses on fostering an entrepreneurial mindset among students and individuals who have yet to start a business, as described in [Frese et.al. 2016](#).

Another approach is to develop a market of qualified trainers that organizations can hire as needed. The Ministry of Labor in Peru, for example, hires local organizations to deliver the Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) training from the ILO by requiring certified trainers on staff ([ILO, 2021](#)). However, achieving a critical mass of certified trainers in a given area could be challenging, affecting competition in government procurement processes.

Sustainability of Funding: The availability of sustainable sources of funding for entrepreneurship training more generally might determine whether there will be specialized organizations that are able to continuously offer training programs, as opposed to doing one-off interventions as part of a particular project. For example, in a country where the government gives entrepreneurs vouchers for training programs, it might make sense for a training provider to have qualified trainers on staff who can offer that training. On the other hand, in the cases where training interventions are funded by World Bank programs with a limited time frame, those qualified trainers might move on to other projects or lines of work after the training.

It might be hard to find implementing organizations for training programs that require qualified and experienced trainers if there is no market to sustain them (either from donor/government funding or from entrepreneur demand). Alternatively, schools or TVET institutions, with more permanent staff and a continuous flow of new students, might find it easier to retain this capacity, though the program would need to be adapted to that particular type of student.

Exploring alternative funding models—including private sector contributions, philanthropic support, or entrepreneurs directly financing their participation—could further enhance the sustainability and reach of these training initiatives.

Technical Expertise: PI and overall soft skills training programs seem more challenging to deliver than Traditional Business Training due to the specialized curriculum and the need for trainers with specific skills. Successful implementation often requires not only local organizations but also international expertise to adapt the curriculum and train local trainers, as seen in World Bank pilot programs of PI Training in Togo and Mozambique.

To expand the impact of these programs, international organizations could partner with local implementers to build long-term capacity, reducing the need for ongoing external support. Alternatively, international organizations might expand their operations to directly implement training, though this would require developing new delivery mechanisms and capabilities. Additionally, the success of PI training may inspire other organizations with similar expertise to create and scale their own soft skills training programs based on psychological principles.



V. What's Next: The Path Forward

To effectively explore the potential of PI training, there's a pressing need to produce more evidence that addresses the existing gaps and to establish a clear model to scale up the training. Answering the remaining questions will allow a more effective future implementation of the program.

The development, piloting, and rigorous evaluation of more scalable versions of PI training could facilitate the replication of the promising effects observed in earlier studies at a larger scale. As the path to scale followed by Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) demonstrates, it can take many attempts to identify and address potential problems and find the model or models that are more likely to work when implemented by different types of organizations (Banerjee et.al. [2016](#)).

As part of the Best Bets initiative, IPA will continue fostering collaborations between researchers and implementing organizations to identify scalable versions of the training. This effort will also focus on addressing key questions to ensure the training remains impactful as it scales.

¹ The inaction-action gap, also commonly referred to as the intention-action gap or value-action gap, is the discrepancy between what people intend to do (or say they value) and what they actually do.

² A [seven-year follow-up](#) of the Togo study found lasting PI training effects, with profits increasing by USD 91 per month—exceeding the two-year impact.

³ [PI Training website](#)

⁴ We reviewed key studies on Personal Initiative (PI) training, including those conducted in Uganda (Glaub et al., 2014), Jamaica (Ubfal et al., 2019), Ethiopia (Alibhai et al., 2019), Togo (Campos et al., 2017), and Mexico (Davies et al., 2023). Additionally, we consulted materials and insights from organizations with experience in delivering training to entrepreneurs (e.g., Doorways, Technoserve, SEE Change, ILO) to better understand the challenges of implementing soft skills and broader training programs.

⁵ In his literature review, Ubfal emphasizes the importance of precise targeting for different interventions. For instance, he references Bardasi et al. (2021), who observed that business training in Tanzania had stronger effects on more experienced women entrepreneurs, indicating that experience could be a valuable criterion for targeting.

⁶ Psychometric variables refer to measurable psychological traits—such as personality characteristics, attitudes, motivations, cognitive abilities, or mind-sets that can be captured with standardized questionnaires or tests.

⁷ Doorways and Move are nonprofit organizations spin off from Leuphana University with the mission of scaling the implementation of training programs and making them accessible to a broader range of partners. These organizations are typically responsible for adapting the PI curricula to diverse global contexts and implementing the train-the-trainer model.

⁸ Experience with asynchronous learning on MOOC platforms like Coursera reveals extremely high drop-out rates, around 90 percent, in developed countries (Rivard, 2013).

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