1. Introduction

Working with female entrepreneurs has changed my life. They are well-organised, passionate, dynamic and extraordinarily hardworking. Lots of the women that I have worked with are also mums, so as well as having all of the above traits, women are also fantastic multi-taskers. Not only are they juggling their home lives but also trying to keep afloat their families and children.

Ali Golds (2014), Managing Director and Founder of Operation Enterprise and The Juno Project

The UK is one of few countries in the European Union which has witnessed an increase in the number of people in employment since the recession (Young, 2013). Between 2008 and 2011, women accounted for an unprecedented 80 per cent of the new self-employed. The statistical data showing the current trend of women’s entrepreneurship increasing, albeit slowly, could be viewed as a positive message and, as women are now contributing at least 25 per cent of self-employment in the UK, it is important that the business support provided for women entrepreneurs reflects this situation. This is particularly important considering that boosting women entrepreneurship could deliver approximately £60 billion extra to the UK economy (Women’s Business Council, 2015).

Gender differences in business development and entrepreneurial activity are well documented in the literature (e.g. Carter and Shaw, 2006; Fielden and Davidson, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2004). Yet, in the UK, women’s early stage entrepreneurial activity accounts for 49 per cent of that of men (Levie and Hart, 2009). In 2008, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report stated that in the UK the gap in fear of failure between men and women had widened, which may be inhibiting women from entering into self-employment. In order to help women entrepreneurs overcome barriers to success and provide the economy with this significant economic boost, it is important to examine the distinct features of
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women entrepreneurs so that we can understand why women are not equally represented in entrepreneurship. Business support is one way of promoting entrepreneurship and providing women entrepreneurs with the assistance and guidance necessary for success, as the World Economic Forum (2012: 5) states:

entrepreneurs are key drivers of economic and social progress. Rapidly growing entrepreneurial enterprises are often viewed as important sources of innovation productivity growth and employment (small and medium sized enterprises account for 97% of all jobs in emerging economies). Many governments are therefore trying to actively promote entrepreneurship through various forms of support.

Women entrepreneurship is viewed as ‘the way forward’, yet they remain an ‘untapped source’ of economic growth and development (Popescu and Enescu, 2012). Considering the current economic climate and the economic benefits that can be realized by increasing the numbers of women entrepreneurs, it is important to find appropriate methods of supporting women in business.

Coaching is a highly personalized intervention and as such holds huge potential for entrepreneurship development. Coaching, alongside mentoring, has become increasingly recognized as an important developmental tool, particularly in the United States and the UK (Bachkirova et al., 2011). The ability to learn and adapt quickly is becoming progressively more important, particularly in today’s rapidly evolving business environment, and targeted interventions such as coaching can enable individuals to adjust to major changes in the workplace (Jones, 2012). Coaching has the adaptability to support different individuals and different learning styles, so can be used to support more individuals within the organization than traditional forms of training (Jarvis, 2004). The development needs of individuals are diverse and the ‘one size fits all’ model of development is inappropriate, while coaching provides a flexible responsive development approach that can be tailored and delivered to individual needs.

Over recent years there has been an increasing trend, whereby individuals take greater responsibility for their own development (Parsloe and Rolph, 2004) and are demanding different forms of training and development. In doing this, individuals tend to be more motivated when training is relevant to their job and responsibilities (Jarvis, 2004) and coaching appears to provide employees with the
appropriate support they need in order to achieve their developmental aims (Whitmore, 2002). Coaching focuses on particular work issues and improving job performance, thus it can be tailored to relevant aspects of work, having the ability to connect short-term strategies to longer term plans for the individual and organization (Bachkirova et al., 2011). Coachees ideally receive direct advice, assistance and attention which fit with their own time schedules and objectives and, unlike one-off training activities, coaching can provide continuing support for personal development plans (Jarvis, 2004). Consequently, organizations are increasingly using coaching for a number of purposes, such as performance improvement, career development, management and leadership development, and organizational change (Ellinger et al., 2003; Goldsmith and Lyons, 2006; Hamlin et al., 2008; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; McLean et al., 2005). Coaching can be used in an entrepreneurial setting to customize development to help support entrepreneurs and is viewed as increasingly popular as a support structure. Coaching encourages entrepreneurs to put their own strategic vision into action and absorb advice from their coach (Audet and Couteret, 2012). Despite the perceived benefits of coaching for entrepreneurs, there is a lack of rigorous empirical research examining how and why coaching interventions are effective (Theeboom et al., 2013).

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The aim of this book is to provide an up-to-date review of current research and literature in women’s entrepreneurship and the role of coaching in an entrepreneurial setting. It looks at coaching through the lens of women’s entrepreneurship, providing theoretical background and debates, exploring the unique challenges of developing women entrepreneurs. The work is based on a two part longitudinal study (see Figure 1.1), which was developed over 10 years of research into women’s entrepreneurship and designed to examine the potential of coaching to develop women entrepreneurs’ entrepreneurial self-efficacy through learning and development. The first phase of the study was a needs analysis designed to examine what women entrepreneurs wanted in terms of support and to explore the potential of an e-coaching programme to develop their self-efficacy and self-confidence. The second phase of the study involved the
implementation and evaluation of an e-coaching programme called TEC (Tailored E-Coaching) for women entrepreneurs in the UK, specifically examining learning development with regard to entrepreneurial self-efficacy, general entrepreneurial attitudes and locus of control, compared to a control group who did not receive the coaching intervention. The first phase of the study is outlined below and the second phase of the study is described in chapter 6.

**THE FIRST PHASE OF THE STUDY**

The design of this study was based on Creswell and Clark’s (2011) sequential exploratory strategy. The research was conducted in two
stages, with an initial stage of qualitative data collection and analysis, followed by a stage of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The aim of this longitudinal study was to examine the potential of coaching to develop women entrepreneurs’ entrepreneurial self-efficacy through learning and development.

Research objective one – Conduct a needs analysis to ascertain women entrepreneurs’ requirements of business support provision.

Research objective two – To investigate the potential of an e-coaching programme for the provision of business support for the learning and development of women entrepreneurs.

Studies relating to women entrepreneurs and their experiences tend to focus on describing barriers and obstacles to success (Fielden and Davidson, 2010; Carter and Shaw, 2006; Carter et al., 2007). Despite the importance of such research, it is also important to examine the extent to which business support provision is meeting women’s needs and also what women expect from effective business support provision in terms of design and delivery. Examining what women entrepreneurs particularly want from business support and then designing entrepreneurship programmes based on this evidence may help to overcome the specific barriers faced by women entrepreneurs.

Gender-neutral development programmes are typically highly gendered and gendering, encouraging the adoption of particular versions of femininity and/or masculinity (Swan et al., 2009). Some entrepreneurship research suggests that stereotypes which associate entrepreneurs with traditionally masculine characteristics may in fact be responsible for reported low entrepreneurial intentions among women (Gupta and Bhawe, 2007). Women may be more strongly influenced by perceived skill deficiencies regarding entrepreneurship than their male counterparts (Bandura et al., 2001) and women entrepreneurs’ lack of confidence regarding entrepreneurial success may indeed be a barrier to their development. Studies examining coaching and mentoring in entrepreneurial settings conclude that these interventions can offer many advantages for the development of women entrepreneurs (Orser et al., 2012; Tillmar, 2007).
SUMMARY

The first phase of the study concurred with previous research that the main barriers faced by women entrepreneurs relate to accessing funding and finance, balancing domestic responsibilities and a lack of human and social capital (Becker-Blease and Sohl, 2007; Carter et al., 2007; DuRietz and Henrekson, 2000; Noor, 2004; Shelton, 2006; Still and Walker, 2006; Welker, 2004). In addition to barriers relating to human and social capital, studies have shown that women entrepreneurs tend to have lower entrepreneurial self-efficacy and lower entrepreneurial intentions than their male counterparts (Kirkwood, 2009; Wilson et al., 2007). This is concerning considering that belief in the ability to function effectively as an entrepreneur is key to perceiving that entrepreneurship is a feasible career option (Forbes, 2005).

REFERENCES


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