

Maharishi Institute

SNAPSHOT	
Organization(s)	Maharishi Institute
Project Name	N/A
Location	South Africa
Date(s) of Implementation	August 1, 2015 – December 31, 2016
Funding Amount	USD 850,000
Partner(s) / Funder(s)	The Rockefeller Foundation’s Digital Jobs Africa (DJA) Initiative
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Trained	Total: 872 Women: N/A Men: N/A
Number of Youth Beneficiaries Employed	Total: 772 Women: N/A Men: N/A
Type(s) of Digital Work	Online Outsourcing – Microwork
Source of Metrics	Internal monitoring & evaluation

ABOUT MAHARISHI INSTITUTE

Maharishi Institute offers unemployed youth in South Africa the opportunity to be trained for the BPO and IT sectors and to place them in jobs in the BPO and IT sectors thereafter. Maharishi implements a one-year program designed to be a longer term, sustainable solution to building youth’s resilience and improving their employability. The program comprises of the following:

- Induction
- Call center training
- Soft skills training
- Call-center simulation and campaign training
- Nine months of placement in a call center with regular training interventions

In addition to the year-long program, Maharishi runs the Impact Sourcing Academy (ISA). The ISA takes place over 2-3 weeks and is designed to meet employers’ immediate needs regarding the hiring of youth. Maharishi Institute decided to replicate the Impact Sourcing Academy in Kwazulu-Natal (KZN), one of South Africa’s largest provinces. KZN has a youth unemployment rate of over 60% and a growing BPO sector.¹ KZN offered an opportunity for Maharishi to expand operations in a high-potential area.

Maharishi implemented the ISA program through the DJA grant over periods of 2-3 weeks. However, the duration of the program was determined by the client's needs. Therefore, in selected cases the program was longer than three weeks.

The ISA provided beneficiaries the soft and technical skills required for a smooth transition into the workplace. This included training on handling objections, workplace readiness, and necessary on-the-job

¹¹ Statistics SA (2017). *Quarterly Labor Force Survey: Quarter 2 2017*. South Africa: Statistics South Africa.

skills. After the 2-3 week training, youth were placed with organizations who had shown an interest in Maharishi’s model and were actively pursuing impact investing. The training, combined with appropriate placement matching, aimed to improve client satisfaction and reduce staff turnover for employers.

Maharishi Institute developed National Qualification Framework (NQF) 2, NQF 3 and NQF 4 accredited training material during the grant period and received provisional accreditation for each program level. This meant that beneficiaries received an accredited qualification that strengthened their employability and increased their employment options after the program.

PROJECT DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

Program Design	Supply-Side Components		Demand-Side Components	
	Training & Skills Development	✓	Improving Access to Finance for SMEs	×
	Employment & Intermediation Services	✓	Capacity Building & Information Provision	×
	Subsidized Employment	×	Targeted Sector-Specific Approaches	✓

RECRUITMENT

Maharishi Institute targets bottom of the pyramid, unemployed youth from the local communities in which it operates. To advertise its program, Maharishi uses radio, word of mouth and online advertising through its online portal.

Maharishi used the following selection criteria for their recruits:

- Minimum of a matric certificate²
- Basic communication and comprehension skills, tested through the interview
- Basic literacy, tested through the interview

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

It was difficult to gain buy-in from employers in KZN. In Johannesburg, the BPO sector is more established, with several organizations providing a similar service to that of Maharishi Institute. As such, there is an existing demand for impact sourcing. However, impact sourcing was less prevalent in KZN - Maharishi Institute at the forefront of creating and growing the demand for impact sourcing. Many potential partners did not initially see the benefits of hiring trained youth from Maharishi, and needed to be persuaded that the program delivered improved client satisfaction and reduced staff turnover.

BENEFICIARY EXPERIENCES

Maharishi Institute trainers report receiving positive feedback on an ad-hoc basis from beneficiaries. Most youth beneficiaries valued what they were taught and felt that they were better prepared for the

² The Matric Certificate is the school-leaving certificate in South Africa.

workplace because of the training. Due to the soft skills training, female beneficiaries reported on feeling more resilient to challenges in the workplace. Being more prepared helped beneficiaries feel more confident and thus present themselves better in the workplace.

Maharishi Institute noted the importance of communicating with beneficiaries around the content of the program, what types of jobs they can expect after the program and the approximate wage they will earn from these jobs. This is particularly important to ensure that youth's expectations are met and that they do not become despondent post-training. Where youth's expectations are not met, they have a false sense of hope and disappointment, which has the potential to lead to individuals discontinuing the job search and thus creating a cycle of despondency.

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES³



During the grant period, 772 youth were trained and placed in employment opportunities and a further 100 were in the process of being recruited and trained when the grant period came to an end, bringing the total number of beneficiaries to 872 youth.

Beneficiaries were placed in call center employment opportunities upon completion of the training. At least 75% of the trainees placed were retained for at least three months after completing the program. Beneficiaries, both men and women, reported being more confidence and more resilient to challenges and barriers in the workplace.

KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Lack of communication skills was reported as the main reason the beneficiaries were unable to secure employment opportunities.** Beneficiaries often struggled to effectively communicate their skills and experience with potential employers. The ISA was key to overcoming this barrier and enabling the youth's employability.
- 2. Lack of resilience is a major challenge for youth seeking and remaining in digital employment.** Many marginalized youth are not taught how to cope with workplace challenges, such as time management and conflict with team members. As a result, they leave their jobs when they are faced with challenges. ISA helped to overcome this challenge by training youth on the likely challenges they may experience and mechanisms through which to manage these challenges.

³ Typically, Maharishi Institute tracks learners post-placement through their networks with employers which have been established over time. However, this wasn't prioritized for the DJA grant given the timing of the grant (approximately one year in duration) in relation to the time required to establish employer networks, train the youth and allow for sufficient time between the training and the follow up with learners. Instead, the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) focused on the individuals during their training.

3. **Lack of previous experience is a big considerable barrier challenge for youth seeking first time employment.** By placing beneficiaries in call center jobs, Maharishi Institute addressed the youths' need for relevant work experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Communication skills are a fundamental part of training and should be incorporated into all digital jobs programs.** Communication skills training gives beneficiaries the tools to effectively sell themselves and their skills in an interview and adequately present themselves in the workplace.
2. **Training organizations need to be clear with youth around what they should expect from the program.** Program staff should clearly communicate information on the content of the training, placement opportunities, types of jobs that they will be placed in, and their earning potential.
3. **It is valuable to secure a major client before setting up in a new region.** Successfully expanding into any new area is enabled by having buy-in and support from one organization which marks the way for other organizations.
4. **The training accreditation process is arduous but it is essential to give a student a valuable qualification and long-term career opportunity.** Offering higher-level education opportunities beyond just work-based training is essential to make beneficiaries resilient and to get them beyond being the 'working poor'. These transferable skills are a far more attractive proposition to the beneficiary and potential employers and has been found to align with improved retention, performance, and focus.
5. **Programs which include training and work experience yield the best results in terms of youth's future employability.** Including work experience as part of a training program provides youth with first-time work experience which is frequently noted as being a key barrier to the youth's employment. These types of programs thus facilitate youth's entry in the labor market by overcoming this barrier. Additionally, work experience gives youth a safe space to grow their skillset and confidence, which are key determinants of future employability.
6. **Holistically developing students is critical as it makes a major difference in customer service ethic, as well as harmony in the call centre environment.** As a result, digital jobs programs should incorporate both soft skills and technical training components.
7. **The right kinds of partners, and in Maharishi Institute's case, particularly existing BPOs, are critical to scaling and growth.** Partnerships also ensure decent work opportunities, and can help to implement benchmark global quality standards.