



RESEARCH REPORT

Mentoring in Enterprises Digital Technology Adoption: The Mentors' Perspective

Enterprises Go Digital Department,
Techo Startup Center



2026

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This work is a product of the Policy Research Office in the Enterprises Go Digital Department of Techo Startup Center, with financial support from the Ministry of Economy and Finance. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of Techo Startup Center or the Ministry of Economy and Finance.

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Foreword

As Cambodia advances toward its goal of building a vibrant digital economy and society, the digital adoption of micro, small, and medium enterprises has become increasingly pivotal. Enterprises embracing digital technologies can unlock new opportunities for growth, efficiency, and resilience, particularly in the context of evolving geopolitical tensions and geoeconomic fragmentation. Despite the importance of digital adoption, many enterprises continue to face persistent challenges, including limited capabilities, financial constraints, and the complexities inherent in adopting digital technologies. In response to these challenges, mentorship has proven to be a vital mechanism for supporting enterprises in their digital adoption journey. Nevertheless, a substantial body of prior studies predominantly focused on enterprise owners' and startup founders' perspectives on their journey to adopt digital technology, while the voices and perspectives of mentors have remained largely unheard.

Therefore, this report, **“Mentoring in Enterprises Digital Technology Adoption: The Mentors’ Perspective”** fills the gaps in the previous studies and highlights the perspectives and experiences of mentors, providing valuable insights into the obstacles encountered by enterprise owners in digital adoption and the constraints faced by mentors themselves in providing guidance or mentorship to enterprise owners. A grasp of these dynamics allows for the systematic identification of critical pain points and the refinement of mentorship practices. Effective mentors thus become more than technical advisors; they are strategic advisors and change managers who help navigate the inevitable resistance and anxiety of digital adoption. The research results also reinforce the vision of the **Enterprise Go Digital Program**, implemented by **Techo Startup Center**, designed to promote digital adoption of enterprises across all levels and across all sectors. The research underscores that digital adoption among enterprises is not a one-time intervention, but a continuous process that requires sustained, coordinated support. Moving forward, sustained investments and support in mentorship, capacity building, and digital



infrastructure will be essential to fostering enterprise growth, strengthening competitiveness, and ensuring that digital transformation translates into meaningful and inclusive economic outcomes for Cambodia.

As we look ahead, the insights from this report will be instrumental in shaping the future of mentorship, aligning it to build a vibrant digital economy and society. I encourage policymakers, development partners, ecosystem builders, and entrepreneurs themselves to draw upon these findings and help strengthen the support mechanisms that will enable Cambodia’s enterprises to not only survive but thrive in the digital age. By strengthening the mentors who guide our enterprises, we ultimately strengthen the foundation of our economy and drive innovation across all sectors.

Phnom Penh, February 23rd 2026
Executive Director, Techo Startup Center

Dr. Taing Ngunly

Contents

1	Background of Research
2	Research Motivation
3	Research Goal and Objectives
4	Research Methodology
5	Mentors' Demographic Profile
6	The Roles of Mentors
7	Predominant Mentoring Approaches
8	Critical Challenges and Adaptive Solutions
9	Perceived Impact of Mentorship on Retail Enterprises
10	Perspectives on Digital Solution Providers
11	Received Support for Enhancing Mentorship Effectiveness
12	Perspectives on Training Curriculum Design
13	Conclusion
14	Recommendations

1 Background of Research

Enterprises play a crucial role in Cambodia's economic development by promoting economic activities, generating job opportunities, and reducing poverty. The annual report by the former Ministry of Industry and Handicraft - now known as the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology, and Innovation – also reveals that micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) created over 70% of total employment and contributed to 58% of national GDP in 2018 (Chhea, 2019).

In 2022, Cambodia was home to **753,670 enterprises** that employed **nearly 3 million people** (2,980,569) and generated a combined annual revenue of **USD 50.7 billion**. (National Institute of Statistics, 2023). Cambodia's innovation capabilities are limited, although they have been developed at the expected level for countries with similar income levels. Moreover, **Cambodia ranked 101st among 132 countries in the Global Innovation Index 2023**.

Digital technology adoption in enterprises has a strong relationship with the digital economy as advanced science and technology create new business models, changing the production process, consumption, and distribution of goods and services, as well as gradually changing the way people work to expand the digital product base and digital services, to modernize the production, and to increase productivity and economic efficiency in response to technological advances (RGC, 2021).

The Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035 aims to **establish and cultivate a thriving digital economy and society**. One of the key pillars of this policy framework is facilitating "digital businesses" by promoting digital adoption within enterprises, fostering an ecosystem for entrepreneurship, and aligning with regional and global trends in the digital value chain.

The Enterprises Go Digital Program (EGD Program) is a part of implementing strategic priorities laid out in the "Digital Business" pillar implemented by Techo Startup Center (TSC). EGD Program is a common framework that facilitates the design and implementation of projects related to the digital transformation of enterprises in order to promote the development of Cambodia's digital sector.

The digitalization of enterprises in Cambodia has **the potential to create new industries, generate employment opportunities, and drive sustainable economic growth**. Therefore, all stakeholders in the ecosystem must engage and collaborate actively to help businesses adopt digital technologies for their maximum benefit.



DIGITAL BUSINESS

2 Research Motivation

Previous studies recognized a shared obstacle: **a significant gap in knowledge and skills** among enterprise owners and their employees regarding the utilization and integration of digital technologies. It is **essential to provide enterprise owners with insights and specific skills to initiate their journey** toward digital adoption within their companies. Mentors can offer feedback, reassurance, and encouragement to help entrepreneurs address challenges and navigate the complexities of launching and expanding a business (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2020).

In the context of digitalization and globalization, entrepreneurial ventures are situated within a more complex and dynamic business environment. As a result, **the necessity for mentoring becomes increasingly critical**. Mentors play an essential role in helping entrepreneurs adjust to the constantly changing business landscape, allowing them to develop relevant strategies and build strong networks that facilitate the growth of their businesses (Raharjo et al., 2023). Therefore, **mentoring is crucial** for providing entrepreneurs with the necessary tools and viewpoints to succeed amid the complexities of modern entrepreneurial activities.

Previous research studies conducted by Ek (2017), Kem et al. (2019), and Phong et al. (2025) commonly found that **startup founders recognized the value of mentorship** while there was a shortage of experienced or high-quality mentors available. However, it is worth mentioning that those studies focused on startups, tech startups, or the ecosystem as a whole. These were the results reported by founders and other actors in the ecosystem, particularly incubators/accelerators.

Therefore, a notable gap in research studies pertaining to Cambodia was mentoring within entrepreneurship development. More specifically, there has been an **insufficient exploration of how mentors perceive and support entrepreneurs in adopting digital technologies**. Moreover, while the experiences and perspectives of enterprise owners and startup founders have been documented, **the voices of mentors remain largely unheard**. To address this imbalance, it would be incredibly valuable to initiate research that captures the insights and experiences of mentors, shedding light on their crucial role in fostering entrepreneurial growth and innovation.



3 Research Goal and Objective



In order to achieve this goal, this research has the following objectives:

- Delineate the roles and responsibilities of mentors in facilitating digital technology adoption among enterprises
- Explore mentors' strategies for adopting digital technology among enterprises
- Understand mentors' challenges in mentoring enterprises to adopt digital technology.

The significance of this research lies in its **exploration of mentors' pivotal role** in facilitating enterprise digital technology adoption. As enterprises increasingly recognize the need to integrate digital technologies for competitive advantage, understanding the mentoring dynamics from **mentors' perspective becomes crucial.**

Therefore, this research produces two research significances as below:

- Help organizations enhance their mentoring programs and better support both mentors and enterprise owners as mentees in navigating digital adoption
- Partially inform policymakers and organizational leaders in designing strategies that leverage mentoring as a tool for digital technology adoption.

4 Research Methodology



Mentors

are the target participants for this research. The key criterion for selection is that these mentors have **provided guidance or mentorship to enterprise owners** either individually or through various support programs. In addition, the research team carefully selected mentors from as diverse sources as possible to ensure comprehensive coverage of various aspects of businesses adopting digital technology, ultimately leading to high validity and reliability of the data.

Research Approach

This qualitative research employed **in-depth interviews (IDIs)** to gather data from the selected participants.

Sample Size & Sampling

This research included **a sample of 30 mentors** from various mentoring sources. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were employed to enlist target mentors for this research.

Tool & Field Work

The data collection team used an interview guide developed by the research team as their primary tool. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, the guide and overall methodology were pilot-tested. The duration of the **data collection period was one month.**

Data Analysis & Management

Each interview was transcribed using Microsoft Word. After that, **each transcript was uploaded into QSR NVivo version 12 for analysis,** utilizing inductive coding and thematic analysis to investigate the raw textual data, aiding in the identification of categories, concepts or themes.

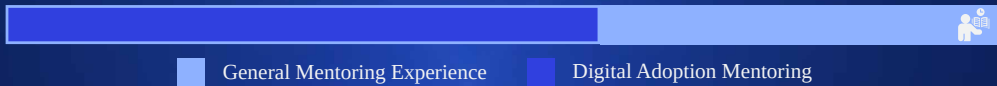
5 Mentors' Demographic Profile

“ The research engaged **30 mentors** with diverse backgrounds, all of whom **had direct experience guiding retail enterprises** through digital adoption processes.

Gender & Age

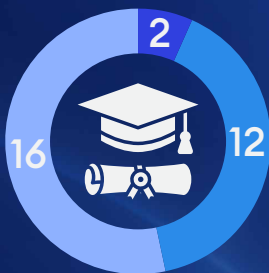


General Mentoring Experience Vs Digital Adoption Mentoring



Mentors are equipped with an average of **6 years** of General Mentoring Experience, with an average of **4 years** of mentoring on Digital Adoption.

Educational Qualification & Non-Mentoring Roles



- PhD degree
- Master's Degree
- Bachelor's Degree

- Full-Time Employee**
Creates content and specializes in design and digital marketing.
- Business Owner**
Owns and operates businesses in IT, automotive services, hospitality, and recreation.
- Certified Trainer & Coach**
Delivers corporate training and personal coaching services.
- Freelancer**
Offers freelance expertise in design, event hosting, and digital marketing.
- University Lecturer**
Instructs university students in technology-focused subjects.

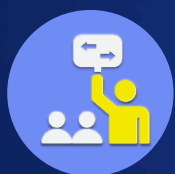
6 The Roles of Mentors

“**Mentors** take on **multifaceted roles**, offering holistic support that extends beyond technical implementation.



Assessment and Diagnostic

Identify the root cause of mentees' business issues by first uncovering gaps in their digital skills and then bridging the critical understanding between their core business objectives and the required technology solutions.



Knowledge Transfer and Skill Building

Equip mentees with the necessary skills and knowledge by designing targeted training sessions to meet mentees' specific needs, ensuring a clear understanding of digital concepts, and actively sharing best practices while using insightful questions to solidify their learning and application.



Strategic Transformation Partner

Ensure the guidance is impactful by offering targeted consultations, advising on decision-making for digital solution packages, raising balanced awareness on digital adoption, and building a clear, convincing case to facilitate mentees' informed choices.



Interpersonal and Motivational Support

Demonstrate commitment to being a good listener, providing ongoing encouragement to sustain momentum, and offering dedicated support to mentees long after the initial sessions have concluded.

7 Predominant Mentoring Approaches



Mentors use a **blend of approaches** to support and guide retail enterprises throughout their digital adoption journey.

● External Research and Contextualization

Conduct desk research on prevailing enterprise challenges while first seeking to understand the target mentees, then focus on matching relevant case studies to their specific situations, and finally explore the critical parameters of budget, resources, and requirements before any engagement begins.

● Diagnostic and Solution Design

Begin by listening intently to gain a clear understanding of the mentee's business situation and goals, looking at the overall context and challenges to accurately gauge digital adoption needs; from there, mentors explain the operational process to identify system-critical areas, assess the mentee's digital skill gaps, and ensure they comprehend the fundamental importance and benefits of the proposed digital transformation.

● Hands-On Execution and Capability Building

Execute practical implementation and training by providing step-by-step guidance from the starting point, matching technical support and digital platform resources directly to business owners' needs, and delivering training sessions that blend essential theory with hands-on, repetitive practice.

● Trust-Based Advocacy and Resource Networking

Cultivate interpersonal relationship building by fostering a trusted one-on-one mentorship, strategically expanding the mentee's professional network, and demonstrating commitment by proactively identifying and providing access to high-value digital solutions available free of charge.

● Follow-Up, Review, and Iteration

Improve mentoring outcomes by actively listening to structured feedback after each session and by continuously sharing relevant information and materials to ensure sustained progress.

8 Challenges and Adaptive Solutions

Mentee-Centric

● Change Readiness and Resilience

Mentees are often unclear about the root cause of their business issues, face significant adaptation hurdles in transforming from old-school methods, and commonly exhibit a lack of patience, resilience, and commitment necessary for the digital transition.

A key solution is to encourage mentees to understand multiple digital tools, showcase the concrete benefits of digital adoption, share motivating success stories, and foster a mindset of learning from mistakes.

● Knowledge and Skill Gaps

Mentees often exhibit a wide variance in foundational capacity, coupled with very low digital readiness and limited technological knowledge, a situation that is compounded by an unfamiliarity with key terminology, which can render even suitable solutions perceived as overly complex.

The solution is to guide mentees in expanding their own business knowledge to better understand their needs, personalize lessons part-by-part across business operations, provide guidance rooted in practical experience, and facilitate hands-on practice sessions or demos of relevant digital solutions.

● Internal Resource/Capacity Constraints

Mentees typically operate with a very small team that lacks skilled digital technology staff and face a critical limitation of budget, often rendering them unable to afford the very solutions they need.

The solution is to provide continuous support and resources, recommend digital solutions available free of charge, and foster a joint effort that combines this leadership commitment with mentors' direct technical guidance.

Mentor-Centric

Mentors have incomplete knowledge of mentees' business, constrained time allocation due to their other full-time jobs, a lack of digital and tech training, and a lack of directly relevant industry experiences.

The comprehensive solution is to seek enhanced guidance and knowledge from a broader mentor network, commit to long-term mentoring sessions, identify each mentee's unique business situation to apply tailored solutions, and establish a protocol that encourages mentees to contact their mentor with urgent needs.

Ecosystem Barriers

Ecosystem's challenge combines a critical lack of digital infrastructure, like a reliable internet connection, with the rapid growth of AI, which paradoxically increases reliance on these tools despite systemic barriers, further complicated by the fragmentation caused by different mobile operating systems in devices used for mentoring and a persistent lack of collaboration with other institutions regarding comprehensive mentor training.

A comprehensive solution is to encourage mentees to use fiber optic internet, create a dedicated connection space where mentors and mentees can collaboratively explore challenges and digital solutions, use various digital devices to dynamically showcase practical examples of digital tools, and expand collaboration with several stakeholders in the ecosystem.

“**Mentors** encountered significant challenges and developed **practical, adaptable, and effective solutions** to overcome them.

9 Perceived Impact of Mentorship on Retail Enterprises

“**Mentors** observed **both tangible and intangible impacts** for enterprises that were guided.

● Digital Maturity

The primary impact of mentoring is that it enables mentees' strategic ability to use digital services, directly helps them expand their business, and leaves the business fully ready to advance its digital adoption to the next level.

● Business Growth

The significant impact of the mentoring intervention is that it helps mentees achieve rapid success in boosting sales, directly enables business expansion, and successfully increases their overall market reach.

● Operational Transformation and Leadership Development

A core impact of strategic mentoring is that it changes mentees' strategies and mindset in business operations, improves their commitment, and enables them to identify root causes within their operations to implement digital solutions effectively.

● Efficiency and External Validation

The tangible impact of this mentorship is that it saves mentees both time and money, culminating in their successful achievement of winning a professional award under mentors' guidance.

10 Perspectives on Digital Solution Providers (DSPs)



Nuanced views have been shared by the **Mentors** toward technology vendors.



Market Volatility and Systemic Stagnation

DSPs show positive numerical growth, yet they suffer from high attrition and a low survival rate; furthermore, while a sufficient number of local providers exist, they face constraints from limited development budgets, deprioritization by business owners, and critically low demand for comprehensive A-to-Z solutions.



Geographic Concentration

Local DSPs maintain a sufficient total number, but they demonstrate critically insufficient market outreach due to heavy geographic concentration in Phnom Penh and a lack of presence in other areas.



Supply-Demand Misalignment

The market exhibits significant gaps, including a critical shortage of providers offering end-to-end holistic solutions, a broad need for diversification and expanded outreach, persistent demand for tools tailored to specific business operations, and a recurring failure of some providers to meet customer expectations.



Structural Limitation

Cambodian DSPs operate under a dual constraint as they face narrow specialization, with most providers offering only one or two specific services, while also maintaining a continued dependency by outsourcing their core digital solutions from international partners.



Capacity Ceiling

The capacity landscape presents a mixed picture in which local providers possess a fair and sufficient foundational ability to develop digital solutions, yet they have not achieved high-capacity operations; furthermore, local software offerings remain limited, and some agencies face scalability constraints when handling heavy client loads.

11 Received Support for Enhancing Mentorship Effectiveness



A range of resources including **institutions and programs** have provided **Mentors** with various forms of support to strengthen their mentoring ability and skills.



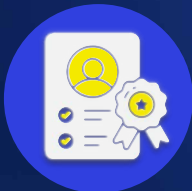
Formal Training & Structured Learning Resources

Most mentors participated in training, workshops, and online conferences both domestically and internationally as part of their capacity-building efforts. These sessions included external and work-place provided mentorship.



Institutional & Programmatic Support

Mentors received extensive support from a variety of institutions and programs, especially their workplaces along with other institutional support from Incubators, Accelerators, Entrepreneurial Support Organizations, and Development Partners. These institutions and programs offered both capacity-building training and financial assistance.



Self-Directed Learning & Personal Experiences

Mentors also engaged in self-support, self-learning, and personal investment to enhance their mentoring skills. These efforts were primarily based on their own experiences and educational background, driving growth of their mentorship capacity.

12 Perspectives on Training Curriculum Design

“**Mentors** have shared a range of perspectives on the training curriculum to **enhance capability building and personal growth** in digital adoption.

● Needs-Based & Contextual Curriculum Design

A thorough training needs assessment is required to ensure the program identifies and addresses participants' core issues, pain points, and business situations. Based on this assessment, topics can then be classified and built according to specific business context, type, size, and challenges.

● Practical & Experiential Learning Approaches

Hands-on activities are needed in the sessions to bridge the gap between learning and real-world application. Therefore, interactive and entertaining approaches are utilized to keep content short, focused, and grounded in practice.

● Trainer & Mentor Quality

Trainers and mentors are expected to hold relevant licenses, qualifications, or practical experience in running a business and using digital tools. This enables them to grasp the context and importance of digitalization and deliver accurate, comprehensive insights to mentees.

● Training Structure, Process & Support Mechanism

A longer training duration is deemed essential to allow sufficient time for both theory and practice, as well as close monitoring of each participant's progress. This intensive approach is to be supported by visible result measurements taken during training and continuous follow-up conducted afterwards.

● Motivation, Mindset & Behavioral Change

Mentees or participants are primarily inspired by success stories shared by their mentors. This inspiration is then reinforced by training that emphasizes strategic content to effectively enhance and motivate their mindsets or behaviors.

● Mentoring Models & Engagement Methods

A clearly separated training curriculum, developed by involving mentees in the design stage, is needed to produce tailored learning solutions that ensure practical and comprehensive sessions. Mentoring is then delivered one-on-one or in groups to address specific business challenges and create effective communication matches for comfort and impact.

● Quality Assurance & Continuous Improvement

A quality-focused training session is needed to emphasize depth over quantity, be led by experienced mentors, and engage participants aligned with the curriculum. These sessions must be continually refined through feedback from previous mentees and mentors to ensure lasting effectiveness.

13 Conclusion

This research sets out to investigate the critical but often overlooked role of mentors in the digital technology adoption process for retail enterprises, explicitly from the mentors' perspective. The findings paint a clear picture: **the modern digital adoption mentor is more than a technical expert**, serving as a strategic partner who drives transformation through assessment, skill building, knowledge transfer, and motivational support. Operating at the nexus of technology, business strategy, and human psychology, they are pivotal to transformation, helping mentees enhance digital maturity, grow their business, optimize operations, develop leadership, and gain tangible recognition.

The research concludes that effective mentorship for retail enterprises relies on contextual research, analysis, implementation, advocacy, and iterative engagement tailored to each enterprise's needs and digital maturity. During mentorship, mentors primarily face challenges related to digital readiness and resilience, skill and knowledge gaps, internal capacity constraints, and ecosystem barriers. **These challenges highlight the central issue of "Digital Ecosystem Gaps"**, reflecting the deficiencies in capacity, skills, and resources within the digital landscape of retail enterprises.

This research affirms the value of mentorship, demonstrating that its core benefits include **accelerating technology adoption, cultivating long-term internal capability, and ensuring strategic alignment within retail enterprises.**

Mentors' assessments of technology vendors in Cambodia identifies significant **"Market and Operational constraints"**, highlighting critical gaps in geographical reach, narrow specialization, limited operational capacity, and systemic market deficiencies that constrain the delivery of comprehensive and scalable digital solutions. Consequently, **mentors have assumed a pivotal role as client advocates**, addressing these gaps and enabling the development of a functional and sustainable digital ecosystem for enterprises.

Furthermore, mentors' emphasis on an effective digital adoption curriculum **highlights the need for it to be tailored to real business needs and delivered through hands-on, practical learning by experienced mentors.** It should strike a balance between developing practical skills and fostering mindset and behavioral growth, supported by a clear structure, continuous feedback, and ongoing improvement. Depth, relevance, and sustained support are essential to ensure that learning translates into meaningful and lasting business impact.

14 Recommendations

“ Based on the key findings and conclusion of this research, the following recommendations are proposed for three key stakeholder groups: mentors themselves, enterprises, and DSPs.

● Recommendations for Mentors

- 1 Institutionalize Structured Diagnostic Protocols:** Utilizing standardized assessment tools and evidence-based frameworks to systematically identify enterprise-specific digital readiness gaps, resource constraints, and strategic priorities.
- 2 Promote Contextually Adaptive and Resource-Sensitive Approaches:** Prioritizing interventions that are cognizant of enterprise-specific financial, human, and technological capacities.
- 3 Enable Behavioral and Mindset Transformation:** Guiding mentees through structured activities to build resilience, adaptability, and a digital mindset for transforming traditional operational practices.

● Recommendations for Enterprises

- 1 Proactively Engage in Digital Mentorship Initiatives:** Encouraging retail enterprises to actively involve or participate in formal mentorship programs to accelerate digital readiness, enhance managerial capability, and reduce barriers associated with technology apprehension.
- 2 Enhance Internal Competencies:** Building robust internal leadership, streamlined processes, and adaptive skill frameworks to sustain digital progress, reduce technological barriers, and enhance long-term organizational resilience.
- 3 Drive Sustained Learning and Development:** Embracing iterative learning, reflective practice, and active collaboration with mentors to refine digital practices, optimize operational outcomes, and maximize long-term strategic development.

● Recommendations for DSPs

- 1 Adopt a "Solution-and-Success" Model:** Shifting from a feature-centric sales pitch to a value-centric partnership model to generate deeper client trust and long-term engagement.
- 2 Forge Strategic Mentorship Alliances:** Recognizing mentors as key implementation partners to leverage their on-the-ground insights for improving product usability and customer success.
- 3 Improve Enterprises' Accessibility and Adaptability:** Designing adaptable solutions that enable enterprises of all digital maturity and readiness levels to effectively adopt and benefit from digital tools.

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