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IMPACTS OF THE BRAZIL MORE PRODUCTIVITY PROGRAM ON MICRO AND SMALL ENTERPRISES IN THE SOUTHERN REGION

IMPACTOS DO PROGRAMA BRASIL MAIS PRODUTIVIDADE NAS MICRO E PEQUENAS EMPRESAS DA REGIÃO SUL

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: To identify the main solutions implemented by micro and small enterprises participating in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program in Southern Brazil during Cycles 1, 2, and 3 to enhance their competitiveness and productivity.

Method/approach: A descriptive study with a quali-quantitative approach, using data collected from Sebrae's managerial reports. Companies from the agriculture, commerce,

industry, and services sectors were analyzed, totaling 5,788 companies served. The analysis focused on the solutions implemented to address problems identified by the Local Innovation Agents (ALI) and the variation in productivity indicators.

Main findings: There was an average increase of 41.10% in the productivity of the analyzed companies, with Santa Catarina state standing out for the highest positive variation in innovation indicators. The solutions implemented were mostly of low complexity, such as the adoption of management tools and digital marketing strategies, which significantly impacted companies' revenue and operational efficiency.

Theoretical, practical/social contributions: This study contributes by demonstrating the effectiveness of quick and low-cost interventions in improving the productivity of micro and small enterprises, especially in a post-pandemic economic recovery context. The findings provide practical insights for managers and policymakers on how to leverage innovation and efficient management to promote regional economic development.

Originality/relevance: The study is relevant as it explores the practical application of innovative methodologies and management strategies in small businesses, highlighting the importance of programs like Brasil Mais Produtividade for the competitiveness and sustainability of these enterprises.

Keywords: Productivity. Microenterprises. Innovation. Business management.

RESUMO

Objetivo: Identificar as principais soluções implementadas por micro e pequenas empresas participantes do Programa Brasil Mais Produtividade na Região Sul do Brasil, durante os Ciclos 1, 2 e 3, para melhorar sua competitividade e produtividade.

Método/abordagem: Pesquisa descritiva com abordagem qualitativa, utilizando dados coletados de relatórios gerenciais do Sebrae. Foram analisadas empresas dos setores de agropecuária, comércio, indústria e serviços, totalizando 5.788 empresas atendidas. A análise focou nas soluções implementadas para problemas identificados pelos Agentes Locais de Inovação (ALI) e na variação dos indicadores de produtividade.

Principais Resultados: Houve um aumento médio de 41,10% na produtividade das empresas analisadas, com destaque para o estado de Santa Catarina, que apresentou a maior variação positiva nos indicadores de inovação. As soluções implementadas foram, em sua maioria, de baixa complexidade, como a adoção de ferramentas de gestão e estratégias de marketing digital, o que resultou em um impacto significativo no faturamento e na eficiência operacional das empresas.

Contribuições teóricas/práticas/sociais: Este estudo contribui ao demonstrar a eficácia de intervenções rápidas e de baixo custo na melhoria da produtividade de micro e pequenas empresas, especialmente em um contexto de recuperação econômica pós-pandemia. As descobertas oferecem insights práticos para gestores e formuladores de políticas sobre como alavancar a inovação e a gestão eficiente para promover o desenvolvimento econômico regional.

Originalidade/relevância: O estudo é relevante ao explorar a aplicação prática de metodologias inovadoras e estratégias de gestão em pequenas empresas, destacando a

importância de programas como o Brasil Mais Produtividade para a competitividade e sustentabilidade desses negócios.

Palavras-chave: Produtividade. Microempresas. Inovação. Gestão empresarial.

1 INTRODUCTION

Generally speaking, businesses play a relevant role in society. From an economic perspective, they contribute to job and income generation; in the social field, through economic development, they promote greater access to education and instruction, expanding opportunities for the population; and, from an entrepreneurial standpoint, they stimulate creation, innovation, and the emergence of new ventures. In this context, microenterprises (MEs) and small enterprises (EPPs) occupy a strategic position, although they face specific limitations. Due to lower financial capacity, these organizations have restrictions regarding market insertion, which directly impacts their budget and operations intensity. Thus, their communication, processes, and strategies demand differentiated approaches to ensure competitiveness and sustainability.

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led countries worldwide to adopt restrictive measures, such as social distancing and isolation, affecting small businesses even more intensely (Guerreiro & Vilela, 2021). Faced with this scenario, many companies needed to adopt new strategies to maintain competitiveness and ensure their own survival, intensifying the search for innovation in processes and management models (Silvetrim et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2023).

Aiming to support this business segment, the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (Sebrae), in partnership with the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq) and the then Ministry of Economy (ME), created the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program. The initiative aims to elevate the productivity and competitiveness of companies through quick, low-cost, and high-impact improvements (Brasil, 2022).

The program offers individualized monitoring carried out by a Local Innovation Agent (ALI), who, using specific methodology and tools, assists the business owner over a four-month cycle in identifying a problem, defining and implementing a solution, and evaluating its effects. At the end of the process, a productivity indicator is calculated considering gross revenue, variable costs, and the number of employed persons.

Thus, the main objective of this study is to identify the main solutions implemented by companies participating in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program in Southern Brazil during Cycles 1, 2, and 3. Specific objectives include: (i) presenting the program and its methodology; (ii) comparing the evolution of the companies served regarding the productivity indicator and the dimensions of the Innovation Radar; and (iii) relating the implemented solutions to the improvement of these indicators.

The study is organized into five sections: introduction, theoretical framework, methodological aspects, presentation and discussion of results, and finally, final considerations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The context of productivity in micro and small enterprises (MSEs) is intrinsically linked to their economic relevance, since they represent a significant fraction of the global economy,

contributing to job creation and regional development. According to the OECD, productivity is defined as the efficiency with which inputs are transformed into products and services, serving as a key economic performance indicator that can be influenced by aspects such as organizational management and innovation (Stefanovitz & Nagano, 2013).

In this sense, it is crucial to observe the structural challenges that MSEs face, such as inadequate management capacity, difficulty in implementing digitalization, and financial and human resource restrictions. These obstacles limit innovation capacity and, consequently, company productivity (Indrawati et al., 2020). Furthermore, MSEs play an integral role in regional economic development, acting as engines of innovation and sources of economic diversity (Usman et al., 2018).

Innovation plays a central role in the competitiveness of MSEs. According to the Oslo Manual, innovation can be classified into several categories, and it is fundamental to distinguish between incremental and radical innovation (Santos & Silva, 2016). While incremental innovation refers to continuous improvements in existing products or processes, radical innovation involves significant transformations that can completely change the market (Seebode et al., 2012). For small businesses, this distinction is vital, as the capacity to innovate can translate into competitive advantage.

However, the literature points out several barriers to innovation, such as lack of financing, resistance to change, and a shortage of managerial competencies (Botelho et al., 2015). Thus, promoting an innovation culture is essential for these companies to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive environment.

Open innovation is a concept that stands out as a viable strategy for MSEs, especially when considering the adoption of low-complexity solutions. According to Chesbrough, open innovation allows small businesses to incorporate external practices to drive their development (Andries & Faems, 2013). This suggests that MSEs can integrate knowledge and resources from external sources, such as universities and research centers, which is particularly relevant in contexts of resource scarcity (Linaza et al., 2025). Moreover, organizational learning and knowledge transfer play crucial roles in this process, allowing MSEs to leverage external insights to improve their operations and products (Silva, 2020).

Innovation management and productivity tools are essential components for the effectiveness of MSEs. The literature suggests that MSEs can greatly benefit from systematic innovation management processes, which include methodologies such as Balanced Scorecard (BSC), Customer Relationship Management (CRM), and process mapping (Motta et al., 2016). Digital transformation also emerges as a critical lever, enabling MSEs to improve operational efficiency and competitiveness (Maehler et al., 2009). The technological maturity of organizations is a decisive factor, as companies that invest in digital technologies tend to achieve significant gains in productivity (Machado et al., 2023).

Productivity programs and interventions for MSEs offer a practical dimension in this context. The implementation of programs like Brasil Mais aims to accelerate productivity through direct interventions that consider the specificities of MSEs (McGuier et al., 2024). These programs, which frequently utilize Local Innovation Agents (ALIs) as facilitators, aim to foster innovation and productive efficiency (Bahador & Ibrahim, 2021).

The literature highlights the efficacy of similar programs in international contexts, emphasizing the importance of adapting best practices to local realities (Petta et al., 2017; Buchele et al., 2017). Furthermore, the Innovation Radar concept can be integrated, providing a strategic framework to monitor and foster innovation in MSEs (Dinkowski & Pertile, 2019).

The analysis of challenges and opportunities for MSEs in terms of productivity must be contextualized within the specificities of the environment in which they operate. Research identifies that common obstacles include lack of access to financing, deficiencies in managerial skills, and the absence of a robust support ecosystem (Motta et al., 2016; Abouzeedan et al., 2013).

This situation is further complicated in scenarios such as the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, which demanded rapid adaptation by MSEs to new business models and market demands (Bahador & Ibrahim, 2021). Therefore, understanding these factors is fundamental to designing strategies that encourage sustainable and resilient innovations.

Regarding the ability of MSEs to compete in a globalized market, the literature suggests that companies focusing on sustainable innovations and the integration of new technologies achieve better results in terms of competitiveness (Santos & Silva, 2016). However, for MSEs to reach this level, it is essential that there is synergy among innovation, efficient management, and access to collaboration networks (Usman et al., 2018). These elements collaborate so that MSEs not only survive but also thrive, contributing to a more inclusive and sustainable economic development.

In summary, strengthening the innovation capacity and productivity of MSEs requires a multifaceted approach ranging from understanding existing barriers to implementing specific programs that promote digital transformation and Open Innovation. From a solid theoretical base, it is possible to develop practical interventions that not only boost productivity but also ensure a more competitive ecosystem for MSEs in the future.

3 METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

The study is characterized by a quali-quantitative approach. For Knechtel (2014), quali-quantitative research interprets quantitative information through numerical symbols and qualitative data via observation, participatory interaction, and the interpretation of subjects' discourse. Regarding its nature, the research is characterized as applied, since it aims to generate knowledge for practical application directed at solving specific problems, involving local truths and interests (Gerhardt & Silveira, 2009).

Although the main basis of this research is quantitative—derived from Sebrae managerial reports—the study also incorporated qualitative elements. Qualitative data were obtained through documentary analysis of ALI reports, especially the narrative descriptions of prioritized problems and the justifications for implemented solutions.

These narratives were organized into thematic categories (marketing, management, processes, and prototyping), allowing triangulation with quantitative productivity data and Innovation Radar indicators. The integration between the two approaches made it possible to understand not only how much companies evolved, but how this evolution occurred within the intervention context.

Regarding its objectives, this is a descriptive research. According to Trivínõs (2015), descriptive research requires the investigator to gather a series of information about what they wish to study, such that this type of study intends to describe the facts and phenomena of a given reality. Regarding procedures, the study is characterized as a survey research.

Fonseca (2002) points out that this type of research is used in exploratory and descriptive studies and that surveys can be of two types: sample or population. For the present study, the population adopted consisted of companies participating in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program based on the definition of analysis categories presented below.

The data originating the analyses were obtained through Sebrae internal managerial reports provided by the Santa Catarina State Management, regarding Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program carried out between November 2020 and October 2021 in the states of Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul—that is, the Southern Region of Brazil—totaling 5,788 companies served distributed across agriculture, commerce, industry, and services sectors.

The analysis categories related to the performance of Southern Region companies considered: (i) companies participating in Cycles 1, 2, and 3; (ii) companies classified as ME or EPP; and (iii) companies that performed initial and final measurements of the productivity index per employed person—that is, those that participated in all stages of the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program. For the analysis of solutions implemented in companies, besides the categories mentioned above, companies that achieved a productivity increase equal to or greater than 500% (i.e., at least quadrupled the indicator) were also considered. Data analysis utilized tools such as electronic spreadsheets for chart construction and statistical analyses.

For problem prioritization and solution implementation, the Innovation Radar was used; this instrument aims to measure the maturity degree of innovation in Micro and Small enterprises based on factors targeting competitiveness (Brasil, 2022).

According to Gomes et al. (2018), the Innovation Radar is used by ALIs to measure the maturity of companies served by the program, aiming to identify real corporate innovation needs and thereby design an action plan with practical suggestions through the implementation of solutions that boost business results in the medium and short term.

4 RESULTS ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This subsection presents the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program and its methodology at the national level, the program's results in Cycles 1 and 2 regarding initial and final measurements of the sustainability dimension, and results related to the increase in the companies' productivity indicator based on the monitoring by Local Innovation Agents, in accordance with the specific objectives defined for this study.

4.1 THE BRASIL MAIS PRODUTIVIDADE PROGRAM

Sebrae's Brasil Mais Produtividade Program aims to increase the productivity and competitiveness of micro and small enterprises in Brazil. This initiative provides support and resources to help companies improve operational efficiency, adopt best practices, and innovate to elevate productivity levels.

A fundamental aspect of the program is the provision of consulting services to assist companies in identifying areas for improvement and implementing productivity-enhancing strategies (Chimello & Hupalo, 2022). These consulting services can cover various areas, such as process optimization, technology adoption, quality management, and workforce training. By working closely with experienced consultants, companies can develop customized solutions to address their specific productivity challenges (Krumenauer & Hupalo, 2022).

In addition to consulting services, the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program also offers training workshops, seminars, and online resources to educate business owners and employees on productivity-enhancement techniques. These educational initiatives cover a wide range of topics, including lean management, digital transformation, supply chain optimization, and performance measurement.

By equipping companies with knowledge and skills, the program enables them to make informed decisions and implement changes that drive productivity growth (Cruzetta & Hupalo, 2022).

The Brasil Mais Produtivo Program has been an important initiative to boost productivity across various sectors in Brazil. This program aims to improve corporate efficiency and competitiveness (Gomes & Santos, 2019). Within the broader context of productivity in Brazil, programs like this have been fundamental in promoting innovation and productivity in micro and small enterprises (Linhares et al., 2019).

Through the development of management capabilities and practices, the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program seeks to improve companies' perception skills, critical thinking, organizational capacity, short- and long-term planning, leadership, control, decision-making capacity, productive reorganization, adoption of a culture of continuous improvement, and identification of investment opportunities by developing management capabilities across various areas necessary for proper business functioning—such as performance management, indicators, operations and sales, quality, strategy, production, knowledge, human capital, and digitalization, among others (Gasser, 2020).

The Brasil Mais Produtividade Program offers companies tools to improve management and innovate processes to increase productivity. It is based on the development of managerial capacities benchmarked against global best practices. The initiative is directed at small businesses and medium enterprises in industry, commerce, and services sectors.

In this sense, the program aims to tackle one of the main problems—low business productivity—by improving managerial and digital competencies through quick, low-cost interventions ranging from digital content on the program platform to effective assistance for companies across all sectors: commerce, services, and industry (Sebrae, 2021).

This methodology consists of a four-month journey where the ALI maintains contact with registered and qualified entrepreneurs. Over these months, a specific program methodology is applied, directed at identifying entrepreneurs' problems and, through management tools, contributing to solving them.

According to Sebrae (2018), the basis of the ALI Program methodology was defined by eight premises: concrete results; use of indicators; results for Sebrae and the innovation ecosystem; involvement of the business team; collective construction of solutions; tools; businesses motivated to innovate; and ALI as an innovation facilitator. The latter is an important source of knowledge in tool application, as it supports action implementation, performs interventions, and utilizes company team knowledge to generate results.

The methodology also defines elements conditioning its phases or cycles: communication for positioning; continuity conditioned on interest and overcoming challenges; sprint-based execution; periodic face-to-face meetings; and interaction with the Innovation Ecosystem (Marengo et al., 2022). Figure 1 illustrates the entrepreneur's innovation journey toward productivity.

Figure 1
Entrepreneur's innovation journey in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program



Nota: Sebrae (2021)

As shown in Figure 1, the methodology of the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program comprises stages distributed across months with individual and collective meetings between entrepreneurs and activities coordinated by ALIs. Initially, the priority problem is defined based on mapping derived from the company diagnosis.

Subsequently, the solution for the prioritized problem is defined, during which the initial measurement of the Innovation Radar and the productivity indicator per employed person also takes place. Next, the action plan for implementing the solution to the prioritized problem is refined based on ALI guidance. Finally, in the evaluation stage, final measurements of the Innovation Radar and productivity indicator are conducted to verify the effectiveness of the proposed actions and the program itself.

4.2 RESULTS OF THE BRASIL MAIS PRODUTIVIDADE PROGRAM

During Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program, 5,788 companies were served in the Southern Region of Brazil across 472 municipalities—121 in Paraná, 210 in Santa Catarina, and 141 in Rio Grande do Sul—representing a municipal coverage per state of 30.33%, 71.19%, and 28.37%, respectively.

In total, 201 ALIs worked in the field helping entrepreneurs identify problems and implement solutions, evaluating their effectiveness in pursuing productivity growth through increased gross revenue and reduced variable costs and number of employed persons. Table 1 presents the number of companies served during Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program by economic sector.

Table 1

Number of companies served in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program by economic sector in the Southern Region

<i>State</i>	<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Agriculture</i>	<i>Commerce</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Services</i>
PR	1	0,00%	34,00%	58,30%	40,39%
	2	100,00%	43,14%	26,01%	37,34%
	3	0,00%	22,86%	15,70%	22,27%
	Total	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%
SC	1	33,33%	35,30%	41,62%	41,42%
	2	0,00%	39,85%	34,44%	35,64%
	3	66,67%	24,85%	23,94%	22,94%
	Total	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%
RS	1	0,00%	37,31%	45,33%	38,08%
	2	0,00%	37,31%	32,18%	36,27%
	3	100,00%	25,38%	22,49%	25,65%
	Total	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%	100,00%

Table 1 shows that Santa Catarina served 3,031 companies (52.37%) in Cycles 1, 2, and 3, followed by Rio Grande do Sul with 1,725 services (29.80%), and Paraná with 1,032 companies served (17.83%). The services sector stood out with the highest predominance of business assistance across all three Southern states, notably Rio Grande do Sul, which presented a 44.75% assistance rate in this sector during the analyzed cycles.

Furthermore, an insignificant participation of agribusiness sector companies was observed, totaling only 0.16% of services during the analyzed period for the study states. Regarding firm size, companies classified as ME and EPP were considered.

The business size with the highest predominance of assistance during Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program in the Southern Region was ME (81.84%), with the remainder being EPP (18.16%). According to Sebrae (2019), an ME is classified as a company with up to 9 employees in commerce and services and up to 19 employees in industry.

An ME must present gross revenue equal to or lower than BRL 360 thousand annually, opting for Simples Nacional, Presumed Profit, or Actual Profit taxation regimes, in addition to being registered with the Commercial Registry or Legal Entities Registry (Brasil, 2006).

Figure 2 illustrates the performance of Southern Region states regarding the productivity indicator across Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program. It is evident that, on average, participating companies in the Southern states showed evolution in the productivity indicator per employed person, which—according to program methodology—is the difference between gross revenue and variable costs divided by the number of employed persons.

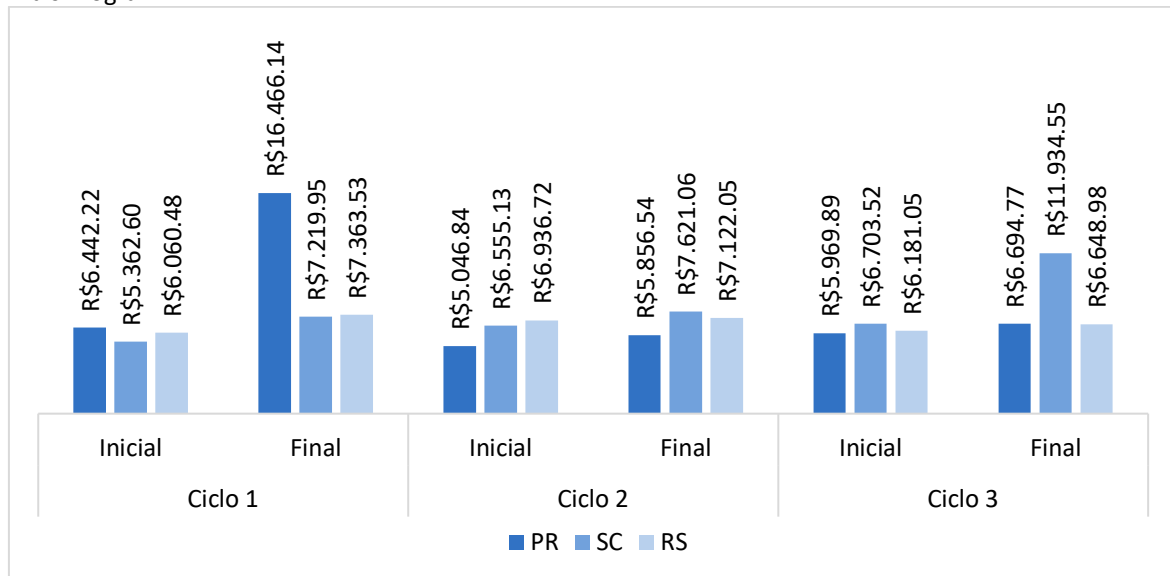
In this regard, Paraná stood out in Cycles 1 and 2 with indicator variations of 155.60% and 16.64%, respectively, while Santa Catarina stood out in Cycle 3 with a 78.03% variation. Overall, across the analyzed cycles, the Southern Region presented a 41.10% variation, resulting in a significant increase in the indicator.

Also according to the data, the Southern Region experienced a 15.19% variation in gross revenue, moving from an average of BRL 302,449.92 in initial measurement to BRL 348,402.19 in final measurement, with Paraná standing out. Regarding variable costs, an average variation of 7.70% was observed among the analyzed states, with Rio Grande do Sul highlighting, suggesting that companies promoted some type of business improvement. On average, companies in Southern Brazil reduced their workforce during participation in the Brasil Mais

Produtividade Program with a variation of -0.83%, with Paraná being the state with the largest reduction in the number of employed persons.

Figure 2

Performance of Southern Region states regarding the productivity indicator in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program



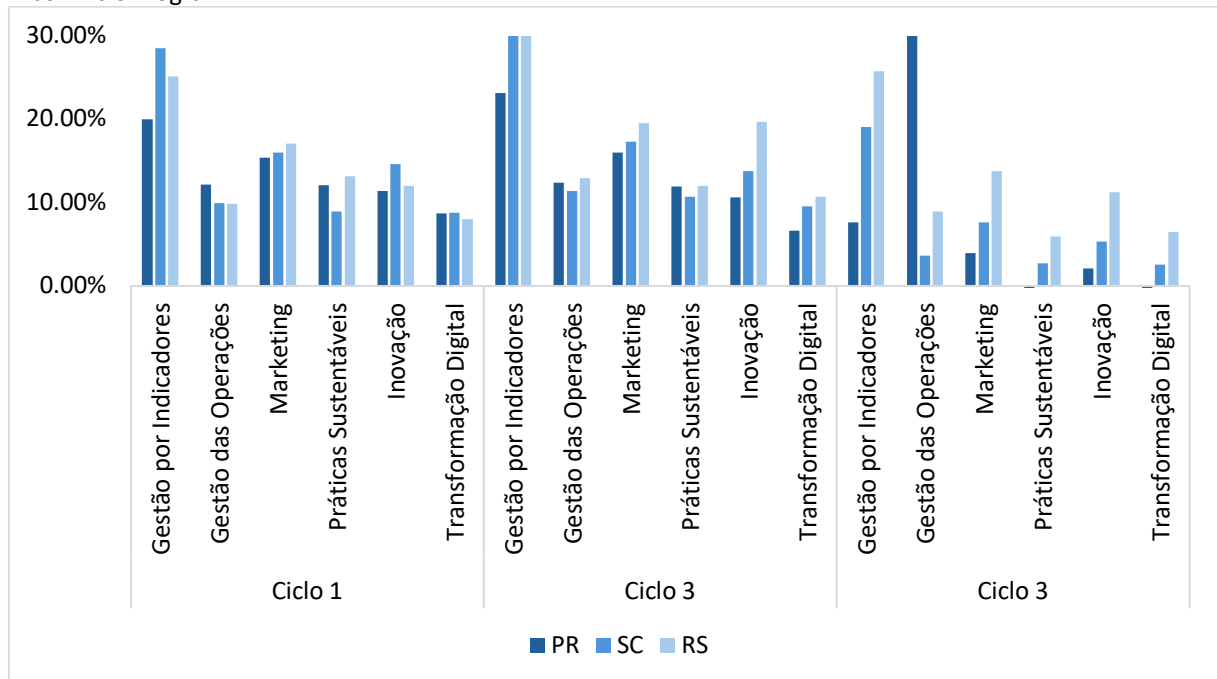
According to Figure 2, general considerable advances were perceived regarding Innovation Radar indicators in the Southern Region. The Indicator-Based Management indicator—subdivided into Key Indicators, Goal Setting, and Monitoring—presented the highest initial maturity observed by ALLs during company monitoring, as well as the highest variation among other indicators considering the three cycles (24.02%). The Innovation indicator—subdivided into Process Innovation, Product and Service Innovation, and Innovation Culture—presented the lowest variation between initial and final measurements (7.97%) during Cycles 1, 2, and 3, moving from 3.08 to 3.33 on average, suggesting that some type of innovation already existed in companies at program onset, so advances were less pronounced at the end.

Figure 3 presents the percentage variation of Southern Region states regarding Innovation Radar indicators in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program. As further shown in Figure 3, the Sustainable Practices indicator—subdivided into Energy Management, Water Management, and Waste Reduction—presented the lowest scores regarding company maturity level, averaging 1.75 in the final measurement. Although it showed a 23.40% variation during the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program, it remains an indicator requiring greater attention from companies, which, if properly addressed, can yield considerable reductions in variable costs such as electricity and water.

Figure 3 also points out that the Digital Transformation indicator—composed of intermediate indicators Internal Digitalization, Digital Presence, and Electronic Payment Methods—can constitute an opportunity for companies investing in its improvement. Although a 20.46% variation is evident in the indicator between program start and completion, compared to other indicators, digital transformation remains a bottleneck for most companies.

Figure 3

Percentage variation of Southern Region states regarding Innovation Radar indicators in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program



Overall, regarding Innovation Radar indicator variations across the analyzed period, Paraná stood out in Sustainable Practices (59.83%), Santa Catarina in Innovation (12.13%), and Rio Grande do Sul in Indicator-Based Management (27.23%), Operations Management (10.68%), Marketing (17.13%), and Digital Transformation (8.57%). Considering the Southern Region during Cycles 1, 2, and 3, the average variation in Innovation Radar indicators was 20.46%, with Santa Catarina companies standing out (35.95%).

These findings dialogue with international studies indicating that quick, low-cost interventions tend to generate expressive productivity gains in MSEs (OECD, 2020). The predominance of simple solutions aligns with Tidd et al. (2020), who argue that small businesses typically innovate incrementally and focus on organizational routines. Furthermore, the strong presence of digital marketing actions and operational organization reinforces what Chesbrough (2020) characterizes as small-scale open innovation, based on the incorporation of external market practices.

4.3 MAIN SOLUTIONS IMPLEMENTED BY COMPANIES

During the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program, Local Innovation Agents accompany companies in searching for solutions to problems found and validated with entrepreneurs. During Cycles 1, 2, and 3, companies in Paraná, Santa Catarina, and Rio Grande do Sul undertook actions toward productivity growth, and on average, all indicators showed positive variation. In this sense, as described in methodological procedures, this study adopted a cutoff for companies that achieved a productivity variation per employed person that at least quintupled compared to initial measurement. In Paraná, considering this cutoff, 9 companies met the established analysis criteria. Figure 4 presents prioritized problems and implemented solutions in Paraná during the analyzed cycles.

Figure 4

Prioritized problems and solutions implemented by Paraná companies in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program

Segment	Problem	Solution
Home & Construction	Lack of quality customer service and post-sale	Creation of a customer service process flow
Home & Construction	Difficulty in commercializing developments	Improvement of the company website and promotion through persona definition
Wholesale Commerce - Other	Low customer demand	Creation of a sales funnel
Food & Beverages	Elevating call center capillarity	Implementation of CRM in the company
ICT	Difficulty in service pricing	Application of a cost spreadsheet
Tourism	Employee and machinery idleness	Promotion of attractions on social media
Services - Other	Difficulties in Growth Hacking implementation	Implementation of management tools
Food Services	Difficulties in launching a new product	Prototyping a children's product line
Wholesale Commerce - Other	Lack of planning in commemorative date catalog launches	Hiring a marketing team and implementing management tools

As shown in Figure 4, based on problems presented by Paraná companies, most solutions relate to adopting marketing practices (4) and implementing management tools (4), followed by only one solution focused on prototyping. Among analyzed companies, 77.78% are ME and 22.22% are EPP. Overall, these are low-complexity solutions, such as implementing electronic spreadsheets, which resulted in an average productivity increase of 1,265.76% between initial and final measurements.

In Santa Catarina, under the same conditions as Paraná, 20 companies met the established analysis criteria. Figure 5 presents prioritized problems and implemented solutions in Santa Catarina during the analyzed cycles.

According to the problems presented by Santa Catarina companies in Figure 5, solutions concentrated on marketing actions (10), management tools (8), product prototyping (1), and process management (1). Among analyzed companies, 90.00% are ME and 10.00% EPP. Low-complexity solutions predominated, such as using social media for promotion, associated with an average productivity increase of 3,640.13% and revenue increase of 677.61%. Figure 6 presents prioritized problems and implemented solutions in Rio Grande do Sul during the analyzed cycles.

Figure 5
Prioritized problems and solutions implemented by Santa Catarina companies in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program

Segment	Problem	Solution
Tourism	Lack of use of available CRM	Team training
Food & Beverages	Lack of targets for seasonal sales periods	Use of BSC
Food & Beverages	Lack of measurement of low revenue and unknown causes	Use of electronic spreadsheet for product pricing
Fashion	Lack of store visibility on social media	Creation of monthly calendar for social media posts
ICT	Time management difficulties	Use of pending actions tracking spreadsheet
Food & Beverages	Lack of juice flavor options	Provision of new juice flavors
Home & Construction	Lack of marketing planning	Creation of marketing department
Fashion	Excess seasonal clothing inventory	Mapping customer consumption profiles and online events for product promotion
Services - Other	Financial management difficulties	Modification of business plan
Metallurgical Industry	Pricing difficulties	Measurement of time per performed service
Retail Commerce - Other	Absence of checklist use	Use of checklists in processes
Home & Construction	Lack of workforce qualification	Creation of documents for job and salary plan organization
Retail Commerce - Other	Difficulties in being recognized for offering exclusive service	Execution of promotions on social media
Retail Commerce - Other	Lack of strategies to attract new customers	Execution of promotions with discount coupons
Food & Beverages	Lack of indicator control	Use of management tools
Education	Difficulties in acquiring licensees	Broad promotion of service and benefits
Retail Commerce - Other	Lack of digital presence	Creation of an institutional website
Services - Other	Difficulties in promoting products on social media	Implementation of social media posting calendar
Creative Economy	Difficulties in customer acquisition due to technical terms in promotions	Elaboration of a more assertive communication strategy
Home & Construction	Lack of definition of main products and services	Definition of internal activity flow

In Rio Grande do Sul, under the same conditions as Paraná and Santa Catarina, 19 companies met the established analysis criteria. As shown in Figure 6, most solutions relate to adopting marketing tools (11), followed by management tools (4) and processes (4). Among companies presented in Figure 6, 78.95% are ME and 21.05% are EPP.

Figura 6

Prioritized problems and solutions implemented by Rio Grande do Sul companies in the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program

Segment	Problem	Solution
ICT	Difficulties in ticket definition, development, and tracking	Implementation of indicator management plan
Handicrafts	Difficulties in process mapping	Implementation of registration document to track piece production process
Services - Other / Health / Education / Food & Beverages / Home & Construction / Tech Industry	Difficulties in communicating and promoting business / Difficulties in expanding customer spending without increasing sales cost / Lack of monthly targets / Difficulties in increasing sales / Sales conversion difficulties / Difficulties in developing and implementing new business solutions	Creation of digital marketing strategy / Restructuring target policy / Creation of multilevel marketing campaign / Implementation of conversion funnel / Creation of monitoring app
Fashion	Production process layout problems	Identification of improvements in process and production layout
Health / Food & Beverages	Lack of marketing and promotion / Lack of cash flow and working capital	Performance screening to measure customer satisfaction / Elaboration of pub space layout plan
Home & Construction	High workload related to customer contact / Lack of customer maintenance	Hiring professional to assist in administrative demands, customer contact, and prospecting
Beauty	Difficulties in revenue and expanding customer leads	Updating visual identity of all product line items and executing social media communication
Food & Beverages	Difficulties in customer acquisition	Implementation of new distribution format for main product
Home & Construction	Difficulties in promotion and sales channels	Implementation of new promotion process and new sales channels
Food & Beverages	Difficulties in expanding sweets/preserves sales to supermarket chains	Structuring sales process
Services - Other / Creative Economy	Difficulties in service pricing / Lack of market positioning	Restructuring company commercial sector (Alteration in customer acquisition strategy)

Just as in Paraná and Santa Catarina, these are low-complexity solutions resulting in an average productivity increase of 1,317.63% between initial and final measurements, with average revenue growth of 254.73%. The obtained evidence confirms that a large portion of MSE problems is associated with managerial failures and lack of standardized processes, converging with what the OECD (2019) describes as structural barriers to productivity. From a theoretical standpoint, findings converge with incremental innovation literature (Tidd & Bessant, 2020), as most implemented solutions—even of low complexity—produced significant impact.

Divergences also emerge: while literature associates innovation with more robust technological changes, data reveal that for MSEs, simple adjustments can generate proportionally greater effects, especially in environments of low managerial maturity.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study aimed to present the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program and its methodology, present program results in Cycles 1, 2, and 3 for Southern Brazilian states, and relate implemented solutions to the improvement of company indicators in the analyzed states.

Regarding the Brasil Mais Produtividade Program—a Federal Government initiative through the Ministry of Economy in partnership with CNPq and Sebrae—its capacity to contribute to the economic development of small businesses was evidenced, boosting them primarily through the implementation of solutions to prioritized problems identified via a specific methodology. A total of 5,788 companies were analyzed in this study, served between November 2020 and October 2021, having the opportunity to boost their businesses with ALI support. It is worth noting that companies were assisted during the pandemic period characterized by economic uncertainty.

Regarding program results, a significant impact was perceived on participating companies' gross revenue growth, presenting an average indicator variation of 15.19%—moving from an average revenue across analyzed cycles of BRL 302,449.92 to BRL 348,402.19 at final measurement. The number of employed persons per company showed a 0.83% reduction, reaching an average of 7.54 people. Productivity increased by 41.10% during the participation of companies in the Southern Region, reaching a total of BRL 26,094.62 at the end of Cycle 3 compared to BRL 19,494.32 in Cycle 1. Productivity is an indicator directly dependent on gross revenue, variable costs, and number of employed persons; even with increased variable costs suggesting business improvements, productivity increased.

Concerning solutions implemented for problems observed through Innovation Radar application and ALI monitoring, most were of low or zero complexity from an innovation and technology standpoint. Implemented solutions highlighted marketing-related actions—above all digital marketing—and management tools, such as electronic control spreadsheets. Entrepreneurs' lack of knowledge regarding everyday business processes, coupled with insecurity regarding digital technologies, leads to business growth difficulties.

This study has limitations, such as analyzing only Cycles 1, 2, and 3 of the Brasil Mais Program, whereas six cycles will be conducted through the program's conclusion in 2022, which certainly would lead to new conclusions if analyzed in totality. Furthermore, many businesses have their own nature and are affected by activity seasonality—such as ice cream shops, which have higher demand during warmer weather. Consequently, evolution could not be identified for some companies during the four months of ALI assistance, though longer monitoring would likely yield better results given more time for reliable evaluation. Finally, future continuation is suggested to identify solutions implemented across other Brazilian federal units after all six cycles.

Beyond these limitations, using internal Sebrae reports may introduce recording biases, as information partly depends on ALI interpretation. Analysis is also subject to the absence of more granular data on specific sectors, seasonalities, and individual firm characteristics. The short time frame (four months per cycle) limits conclusions on sustained effects of implemented solutions, making it impossible to state whether productivity gains persist long-term. Nor was the influence of external factors evaluated—such as economic conjuncture,

prior digitalization degree, or manager competencies—elements that can affect result interpretation.

Based on results, a future research agenda is suggested encompassing: (i) longitudinal studies to verify whether productivity gains persist over years; (ii) comparisons across regions and sectors, evaluating whether specific segments respond better to program interventions; (iii) more robust economic analyses considering regression models, counterfactual evaluation, or impact analysis (quasi-experimental); and (iv) in-depth qualitative investigation, with interviews with entrepreneurs and ALIs, to understand internal mechanisms of solution adoption.

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