MENTOR OR TORMENTOR: UNDERSTANDING HOW MENTORS IMPACT ENTREPRENEURS’ PERFORMANCE USING A CREATIVITY PERSPECTIVE (SUMMARY)

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**SUMMARY**

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**Principal Topics**

Mentors benefit entrepreneurs by lending them expertise and access to rewards such as capital, contacts, etc. (Ozgen & Baron, 2007; Davidsson & Honig, 2003). In this paper, we use a creativity lens to explore how mentors who are also investors influence startup performance. Given startup teams’ attraction to mentor-investor rewards and mentor-investors’ need of control to manage risks, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) suggests mentor-investors may stifle entrepreneurial creativity increasing the likelihood of venture failure. In contrast, the learned industriousness theory (Eisenberger, 1992) suggests that rewards signal the importance of creativity, which guides individuals’ behavior towards goals.

We suggest that choice control moderates the relationship between rewards and startup creativity. Choice control refers to aspects of the reward or context that offer or limit choice (Byron and Khazanchi, 2012). To generate creative ideas, startup teams must explore diverse alternatives (Amabile, 1996). Given choice, startups need to coordinate their team members’ collaboration (Harrison & Rouse, 2013; Hackman, 1987). Coordination refers to the “temporary unfolding and contextualized process of input regulation and interaction articulation to realize a collective performance” (Faraj & Xiao, 2006: 1157). We propose that rewards convey information that helps startup teams coordinate their creative collaboration.

**Method**

We conduct an experiment in which we manipulate reward choice and task choice. We also survey entrepreneurs and mentors who report on the extent to which mentors control startup choices.

**Results and Implications**

We expect that startups use reward information to filter choices and coordinate their team members’ collaboration. By heeding reward information, entrepreneurs narrow their consideration set of choices and simultaneously increase the likelihood that their creative ideas are well received by my mentor-investors. As anticipated, initial results show that reward choice does not affect team creativity when reward choice does not provide information that can be used to filter choices. By examining the effects of extrinsic rewards on team creativity in the entrepreneurial context, we extend the literature on creativity rewards to entrepreneurship to better understand how mentor-investors impact entrepreneurial teams’ performance.

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