TRAINING MENTORS: A WAY TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF MENTORING OUTCOMES FOR NOVICE ENTREPRENEURS? (SUMMARY)

Etienne St-Jean
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, etienne.st-jean@uqtr.ca

Stéphanie Mitrano-Méda
MERKAPT

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TRAINING MENTORS: A WAY TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF MENTORING OUTCOMES FOR NOVICE ENTREPRENEURS?

Étienne St-Jean, Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, Canada
Stéphanie Mitrano-Méda, MERKAPT, France

Principal Topic

A mentoring relationship essentially consists of matching an experienced business person with a novice entrepreneur. From the perspective of the organization coordinating such programs, the focus is directed toward results for the novice, but also toward the “black box” of mentoring. In fact, mentors may generally offer good support to novice entrepreneur but some of them may offer marginal mentoring or worse, harmful support. In that perspective, the following questions become crucial: to become effective, does a mentor need appropriate preparation or prior training? Or is his personal or professional experience in entrepreneurship enough to produce results for the mentee?

Method

We surveyed mentors and mentees from the Réseau M in the Province of Québec, Canada. Mentees answered an online questionnaire that contained several measures in order to capture the mentor’s style, functions, and the level of learning that resulted from their relationship (n=360). Mentors also answered an online questionnaire (n=365) and were paired with their mentee for a dyadic analysis (n=78). They gave information about their background and experiences, their level of training with regard to mentoring, and other elements.

Results and Implications

Our results indicate that training is correlated with many indicators of the quality of the relationship, with the mentor’s style, several mentor functions and the novice's learning. However, we found that the entrepreneurship experience of mentors is not correlated with these outcomes, and, surprisingly, that mentoring experiences are negatively correlated with these outcomes. Our further investigation shows that training only had a positive effect for the group of experienced mentors (with four mentoring experiences or more). We conclude that being an effective mentor is something that must be learned. Mentors who gain experience in supporting many entrepreneurs must receive additional training in order to remain attentive to the needs of every mentee and avoid adopting a “one size fits all” approach. The entrepreneurship experience of the mentor is not as important, insofar as it is accepted by the mentee.

CONTACT: Étienne St-Jean; etienne.st-jean@uqtr.ca; (T): +1 819 376-5011 (4293); (F): +1 819 376-5138; Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières, CP 500, Trois-Rivières, Québec, Canada, G9A 5H7.