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Should Mentors of Entrepreneurs be Trained or their Experience is Enough?

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Additional information is available at the end of the chapter

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial mentoring is the support of novice entrepreneurs by experienced professionals in the business world. Despite this practice gaining popularity, a question remains: is it necessary for these organizations to train mentors or is the mentor's experience sufficient? To answer this question, we analyzed the effect of the mentor's training, as well as his/her profile in terms of experience, on the mentee's degree of satisfaction and learning. Our results show that the more a mentor is trained, the more he/she develops relational competencies, thereby creating a favorable (trusting) environment and developing an appropriate mentoring style (maieutic), which allows the mentee to learn and become more autonomous. However, the mentor's experience in entrepreneurship does not have an impact on the quality of the mentoring relationship, nor does it impact the novice learning. Our results also show that, contrary to our expectations, mentoring experience has a negative impact on most of the psychological functions of the mentor. We found that this negative effect is neutralized by continuous training of mentors. This suggests that entrepreneurship support organizations should implement specific training sessions for experienced mentors.

Keywords: mentoring, novice entrepreneur, entrepreneur's support, training, mentoring experience

1. Introduction

For many years, several forms of support to entrepreneurs have emerged in most industrialized countries, with the aim of helping them in the start-up phase or facilitate the growth of their business. Among the many packages proposed by the authorities and other organizations helping entrepreneurship, mentoring is gaining in popularity. A mentoring relationship

essentially consists of matching experienced business people with a novice entrepreneur [1]. Research in this field indicates that mentoring enables the novice to develop cognitive and affective learning, such as the capacity to spot opportunities and develop a coherent vision of his¹ entrepreneurial project [2–4].

From the perspective of the organization coordinating such programs, the focus is directed not only toward the results for the novice but also toward the “black box” of mentoring. Indeed, if mentoring seems to generate positive results as a whole [e.g., 5–8], it has been demonstrated that some mentoring relationships, in contexts other than entrepreneurship, can lead to inappropriate behaviours on the part of the mentor, which sometimes leads to undesirable outcomes for the mentee [9, 10]. We can hence consider that some entrepreneurial mentors may be inappropriate, or even harmful, in the functions we would expect of them [5]. Putting aside the toxic behaviors, some mentors reveal themselves to be of limited use, providing help that produces a very marginal effect [11].

We can, therefore, ask whether becoming an efficient mentor implies appropriate preparation, requiring then prior training, or whether a personal or a professional experience in entrepreneurship is sufficient for the emergence of positive results for the mentee. In this instance, it seems that no study has yet shown the consequence of recruiting specific mentors’ profiles and providing them with training on mentees’ results. Our paper will, therefore, focus on this particular question.

To do so, we will first present past research about mentoring for entrepreneurs and the role of training mentors within this context. Second, we will present and discuss the results of our empirical study. These results have established a strong correlation between mentor training and mentee outcomes in terms of learning. We will conclude with a discussion and recommendations for organizations.

2. Literature review

2.1. Defining mentoring

Inspired from Greek mythology, the term “mentor” generally refers to a person with certain qualities or who is in a position of power who benevolently watches over a younger or a less-experienced individual, who in turn benefits personally and professionally of the advice and support of his/her mentor. In the entrepreneurial context, although many definitions may exist, mentoring is the creation of a supportive relationship between a novice entrepreneur (called a mentee) and an experienced business people (called a mentor), the latter allowing the former to develop as a person (i.e., both personally and professionally). As suggested by Paul [12], mentoring differs from coaching, tutoring, and apprenticeship since it is primarily oriented toward the quest for meaning, as opposed to the acquisition of techniques. Mentoring differs from counselling, consulting, and mediation, as it is action-oriented, but to a lesser degree than

¹ Masculine form used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

sponsorship. Therefore, the underlying idea behind mentoring is to educate, where the mentor is “driving” and “guiding,” and differs from coaching, which is based on motivating, or counselling and based on a psychological help [13]. To recognize a mentoring relationship, as suggested by Haggard et al. [14], three dimensions need to be present: there must be a reciprocal relationship, involving mutuality of social exchanges, developmental benefits for the mentee, in particular for his career, and frequent and significant interactions with a long-term perspective.

2.2. Conceptual framework for mentoring

In their exhaustive review of mentoring in its intraorganizational context, Wanberg et al. [15] established several dimensions allowing the *protégé* to develop positive outcomes². First, the *protégé*—as much as the mentor—contributes to the success of the mentoring relationship, whose specific characteristics can be critical. The relationship dynamics thus created will enable the mentor to execute his functions, which in turn will allow the *protégé* to learn. Hence, he will receive distal outcomes such as job satisfaction, professional retention, salary increases, promotions.

It is widely known in different mentoring contexts that trust is essential to allow the relationship to develop, and therefore, maximize the developmental potential of the mentee [16, 17]. There also needs to be a positive “alchemy” between the members of the dyad [6, 18]. This could refer to the mentee’s perceived similarity with the mentor, an essential component to ensure the success of the relationship [15, 19]. These elements are essential but not sufficient for the appearance of results for the mentee.

The mentor’s functions are the different roles played by the mentor in the relationship [16]. These functions allow the mentee to receive outcomes from this relationship [15], such as learning development [15, 20]. The different mentor functions studied in an organizational context are generally grouped into three categories: psychological, career-related, and role model [21, 22]. In the context of the novice entrepreneur, the content of these functions is slightly different from mentors in large organizations, but they are grouped into the same categories [23]. Hence, there are psychological functions: when the mentor gives feedback to his mentee, reassures, and motivates and acts as a confidant. These functions appear to be the most important for the mentee to see the benefits of the relationship [24]. There are also entrepreneurial career functions at play when a mentor gives the mentee information about the business world, introduces the mentee to someone in his network, confronts the mentee’s ideas in order to test their maturity and guides the mentee toward appropriate solutions. Finally, there is the role model function, where the mentor shares his entrepreneurial experiences with the mentee in order to give him inspiring examples. Here again, it obviously seems useful for the mentors to understand the functions they are expected to perform so that they can be more efficient in their role.

² The word “*protégé*” is used in the literature to designate the one being helped by a mentor in an intra-organizational context, whereas “mentee” specifically designates the entrepreneur accompanied by a mentor.

To maximize the various outcomes, it is recognized in the entrepreneurial context that the mentor should ideally adopt a maieutic style (i.e., oriented toward questioning the mentee), coupled with significant engagement in his mentoring relationship [25]. In such a context, this makes sense, since the mentee needs to maintain independence with regard to decision-making and learn to find solutions by himself. Furthermore, mentors being generalists (as opposed to coaches who can be specialists, for example), unaware of all of the sectors of the industry, need to direct their efforts toward questioning in order to avoid giving bad advice to the mentee. That said, it appears that many mentors adopt a rather directive style in (as opposed to maieutic) and are not very engaged in the relationship [25]. Knowing that mentoring style could considerably hinder the development of relationship outcomes, especially in terms of increased entrepreneurial self-efficacy and other learnings for the mentees, this seems more desirable for mentors to learn developing a style that better meets the mentees' needs.

Lastly, it has been shown that mentoring can increase a novice entrepreneur's learning [4, 26]. According to Choueke and Armstrong [27], mentoring is nevertheless the fourth source of learning in order of importance (43%), ahead of graduate studies. According to Clutterbuck and Megginson [28], the mentor brings to the mentee a reflexivity space in which the latter takes the opportunity to develop new ideas through purposeful and uninterrupted thinking activities. This can then allow him to make sense of critical events he is confronted with in his firm [29], which highlights the importance of mentoring for the inexperienced entrepreneur.

2.3. The role of mentor training

Most researchers on intraorganizational mentoring agree on the need to train all formal mentoring program participants in order to prepare them for this relationship [28, 30–34]. Participants, mentors, and mentees must understand their role and the framework defined by the organization initiating the program [35]. Studies have shown that mentoring relationships have three times more chances to succeed if the mentors and mentees have been trained [32]. According to Allen et al. [30], participants training have been positively correlated to stronger mentor engagement, a better understanding of the program, and perception of its results.

Mentor training could have an impact on several levels: it defines the relationship framework and rules of the game by clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each individual and helps the mentors develop the necessary relational skills for a better knowledge and experience transfer in a maieutic style.

Defining a framework right from the beginning of the relationship is essential, since it can avoid some dysfunctions, as mentioned by Eby [36], and some frustrations described by mentees when the mentor becomes too directive [31]. The framework allows the mentor to fully understand his/her role, relationship, functions, differentiating mentoring from coaching, training, counselling, and other forms of support, as well as understanding the limits of his/her intervention. Training also enables the mentor to develop the necessary relational skills he/she may not have acquired during his/her career, such as communication, questioning, and listening skills, or how to build rapport and a trusting relationship [32, 37].

If we more specifically consider the entrepreneurial context, and in particular, the mentor's functions [23], it becomes obvious that his/her experience allows him/her to perform the career functions: integrating the mentee into a network, giving information about a specific sector or an industry, confronting/challenging and guiding. As an experienced entrepreneur, he/she can also serve as a role model. Training could also help mentors to be more effective with the different kind of mentees they may support [38]. Experience, however, is not necessarily a good indicator that he/she has the capacity to provide the psychological functions (reflector, reassurance, motivation, and confidant), which are directly linked to the relational skills mentioned above.

Furthermore, in their seven case-study research, Mitrano-Méda and Véran [39] concluded that one of the three key success actions of an entrepreneurial mentoring program coordination team was the "preparation of mentors and mentees." They showed that among the many actions coordinators could make, only three had a positive impact on the success of the mentoring programs (measured in terms of satisfaction, learning, and goal achievement): the creation and facilitation of a network, the preparation of mentors and mentees, and the coordination of the matching process.

To summarize, the literature on intraorganizational mentoring and recent research on entrepreneurial mentoring strongly suggests that mentors need to be trained to understand the framework and to develop relational skills in order to create an efficient mentoring relationship [40]. Furthermore, to perform an important part of the mentoring functions, mentors need to have some relational competencies that may not have been acquired during his/her professional life. Lastly, it is important that mentors be prepared to support the mentee's experiential learning. These considerations lead to the following hypothesis:

H1: Mentor training has a positive effect on the relationship developed with the mentee as well as on intervention style, functions, and the novice's learning.

2.4. The role of mentor profile

In the majority of mentoring programs implemented by support organizations in several countries, mentors are volunteers coming from the business world. For entrepreneurship support organizations, this has not only obvious advantages, such as lower support costs, but also major drawbacks. Indeed, it is more difficult to manage a volunteer who wants to help than to impose a procedure on a recruited employee. In this context, in order to have enough mentor-volunteers to provide the mentoring service, organizations accept not only mentors with experience as entrepreneurs but also others who have never started a business, such as bankers, consultants, professional coaches, senior executives from large firms.

We may wonder whether the experience as an entrepreneur can impact the various elements of the mentoring relationship. For example, knowing that the role model function is more significant among mentors who have been entrepreneurs themselves in comparison with others [23], this may have an impact on the mentee's learning. In addition, knowing that mentors can help mentees identify opportunities [2, 3], it would be logical to think that a mentor with experiences in identifying opportunities himself could more easily help a mentee develop

efficient cognitive patterns [41]. In mentoring for youth at risk, mentors with previous experience with youth in their communities were able to buffer the negative effect of environmental stress on match duration or negative perception of relationship quality [42]. However, as suggested by St-Jean and Audet [25], it could be more difficult for experienced entrepreneurs to assume a maieutic style (based on questioning) as their experience allows them to quickly identify the “solutions” to communicate to the novice, thereby using a more directive style. In spite of this, knowing that perceived similarity is important in establishing the relationship [43] and that a mentor who has never been an entrepreneur could be seen by the mentee as being less relevant, we suggest the following hypotheses:

H2: Mentor experience as an entrepreneur has a positive impact on the relationship with the mentee, as well as on the mentoring functions and mentee learning.

H3: Mentor experience as an entrepreneur has a negative impact on the mentor’s style of intervention.

Furthermore, the mentoring experience a mentor accumulates could also be beneficial. Intuitively, it is logical to think that a mentor who is new to this role would be less effective than one who has mentored several entrepreneurs. Furthermore, several studies take mentoring experience into consideration as an exogenous variable whose effects on mentoring results need to be controlled [e.g., 11, 20, 44]. More specifically, in the context of a large organization, it has been shown that prior mentoring experience allows the mentor to practice the career functions with more intensity [45] and, occasionally, the psychological functions [46]. Knowing that the intensity of the mentor functions are positively correlated with results, especially in terms of mentee learning, everything converges toward mentoring experience procuring greater mentee results. Similarly, a mentor with mentoring experience could learn from his past mistakes and improve his ability to initiate a trusting relationship, while adopting a style of intervention more appropriate to entrepreneurs (i.e., maieutic and engaged). These considerations lead to the following hypothesis:

H4: Prior mentoring experience has a positive impact on the relationship with the mentee, intervention style, functions, and mentee learning.

3. Methodology

3.1. The program studied

We collected data through the *Réseau M*³, a business-mentoring program created in 2000 by the *Fondation de l’entrepreneurship*, an organization dedicated to economic development in the Province of Québec (Canada). It is offered to novice entrepreneurs through a network of 70 mentoring cells spread out across the province. These cells are generally supported by various economic development organizations, such as *Centres locaux de développement* (CLD), *Sociétés d’aide au développement des collectivités* (SADC), and the local chambers of commerce. These

³ For more information: <http://www.entrepreneurship.qc.ca/mentorat-pour-entrepreneurs>.

organizations ensure the local or regional development of the program, while subscribing to the business-mentoring model developed by the *Fondation*. More precisely, local organizations employ a cell coordinator in charge of recruiting mentors, organizing training sessions for them, promoting the program to novice entrepreneurs, pairing participants, and supervising the ensuing mentoring relationship. The novice entrepreneurs may benefit from mentor support for a minimal price, a few hundred dollars annually, and in some cases, free of charge. In order to supervise local development correctly, the *Fondation* provides development workshops on the mentor–mentee relationship to give novice entrepreneurs a clear idea of the mentor’s role. Based on an intervention code of ethics where relationship confidentiality is of capital importance, the business mentoring service has also created a standard contract to guide the parties in determining the terms and conditions of their relationship and the desired objectives. This program thus falls under the category of formal mentoring.

In order to support local development, the *Fondation de l’Entrepreneurship* has implemented improvement workshops focused on the mentor–mentee relationship to clarify the role of mentors with new entrepreneurs. Thus, various training sessions offered by the *Réseau M* allow the mentors to better define their ideal style of intervention, as well as their roles, and other activities are organized to enable them to develop their listening and questioning skills, etc. Some local cells suggest that their mentors follow basic training (3 h) on the mentor’s roles before being matched. Other cells do not. Using the data collected from this mentoring program, we aim to verify whether these mentor-training sessions benefit the mentees.

3.2. Sample and design of the dyad analysis

In spring 2008, 981 mentees from the *Réseau M* of the *Fondation de l’Entrepreneurship* with a valid email address were contacted to participate in the study. Of that number, 360 completed the online questionnaire, for a response rate of 36.9%. They had to reply to a large number of questions regarding sociodemographic and company characteristics, their psychological profile, mentoring relationship, perception of the mentor, and certain mentoring outcomes. We also asked them if they agreed that their answers be matched anonymously to the answers of their mentor to enable a dyadic analysis. Out of the 360 respondents, 216 accepted. We matched their answers and indicated the name of their mentor.

In spring 2010, the *Réseau M* provided a list of 1004 mentors with a valid email address. According to the *Réseau M*, there were a total of 1200–1300 mentors. Each mentor with an email address received a personalized invitation to reply to an online questionnaire as well as two reminders for the nonrespondents. In total, 366 mentors agreed to participate, for a response rate of 36.4%.

For both the samples, we compared early respondents—the ones who had replied before the first reminder—to those who responded after a reminder was sent, following the argument developed by Armstrong and Overton [47] to estimate the nonrespondent bias. No significant difference appeared between these two groups (i.e., mentors and mentees) in terms of sociodemographic characteristics (age, gender, education, etc.) and the variables of interest for this study. This suggests that nonrespondents were similar to the respondents.

Out of the mentors who responded to the 2010 survey, 78 were identified (named) in the mentee survey, and could therefore be matched to their mentee's responses (corresponding to a sample of 21.5% of the mentees). Thus, in this dyadic study, both the mentor and the mentee responded anonymously to the questionnaire at different times, which excludes all possible interference between the responses of one with the other.

The questionnaire was administered online through a professional Web-based survey provider (www.surveymonkey.com). It was administered in French, and we translated all of the measures that were previously developed in English. Translation was done by two bilingual researchers separately and then compared. No major differences were found. The online questionnaire was pretested, and no changes were necessary.

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. For mentors

Questions were asked about the number of hours of training they had received through the *Réseau M* and how many they had received elsewhere: "How many hours of training relevant to your function as mentor have you received until now (if none, please indicate "0")?" We will verify the influence of these two variables on the relationship components with the mentees.

For the measure of the mentor's entrepreneurship experience, the mentors were asked to indicate the number of years they had spent as "entrepreneur (self-employed, in business)" as their main activity.

For the measure of mentoring experience, the mentors indicated the number of mentoring relationships (more than three meetings) they had had as a mentor within the *Réseau M*.

3.3.2. For mentees

Several measures were used for the mentees (see the details at **Table AI** in Appendix 1).

As an indicator of relationship quality: the level of trust the mentee had toward the mentor—based on Rempel and Holmes [48]—(three items); the perceived similarity—inspired from Ensher et al. [19]—(four items); and satisfaction with the mentor—Ragins and Cotton [49]—(four items). The measures are unidimensional (throughout an exploratory factorial analysis) and Cronbach's Alphas are 0.741, 0.897, and 0.937, respectively, which is considered excellent [50].

As an indicator of the style of mentoring intervention: the maieutic approach (three items) and the degree of engagement in the relationship (three items)—two measures based on St-Jean and Audet [25]. The measures are unidimensional and Cronbach's Alphas are 0.688 and 0.90, respectively.

As an indicator of the functions of the mentor: the nine functions of the mentor—St-Jean [23]—(35 items in total). The measures are unidimensional and Cronbach's Alphas vary between 0.882 and 0.953.

As an indicator of the outcomes for the mentee: the learning acquired during the relationship—developed by Allen and Eby [20]—(5 items). The measure is unidimensional and Cronbach's Alpha is 0.910.

3.4. Data analysis

Dyadic analysis is a strong research design, as it is based on measures taken from both sides of the dyad. All the variables are continuous variables. Some of them are not normally distributed. As we want to highlight the impact of mentor's characteristics on mentee's mentoring relationship, we used correlation analysis and specifically, Spearman's correlations (nonparametric).

4. Results

4.1. Portrait of the mentor training

First, we need to underscore the fact that the number of declared training hours within the *Réseau M* varies from 0 to over 50 h⁴, as was the case for the training sessions outside the *Réseau M*. Some exceptional mentors exceeded the 50 h of training, whether it was within *Réseau M* (7 cases) or elsewhere (19 cases). The average number of hours of training within the *Réseau M* was 9.2 (8 as a median), with a standard deviation of 10.36. The average number of training hours outside the *Réseau M* was 11.36 (3 as a median) with a standard deviation of 15.54. We observe that the distribution curve is not normal, especially for the training received outside the *Réseau M*, where an extreme group had received a very large number of hours of training and a strong majority had only received a small number of hours of training, or sometimes none at all.

Regarding entrepreneurship experience, the number of years varies between 1 and 54, with an average of 23.56 years (median at 23) and a standard deviation of 11.49. The distribution is normal.

The number of mentoring relationships (i.e., mentoring experience) varies between 0⁵ and 21, with an average of 5.96 (median at 4) and a standard deviation of 4.39. The distribution is a "count" type, meaning that a large concentration of the sample had just had a few relationships, and the count declines progressively until 21. Indeed, 90% of the sample had had fewer than 10 relationships in total.

⁴ It should be mentioned that the scale used was graduated by categories where the maximum was "over 50 hours".

⁵ The data described the total sample of mentors, rather than the dyad, in order to illustrate the *Réseau M*. situation. This is why we note that some mentors have never been in a mentoring relationship, which would not be the case with those who were paired as a dyad, since they would necessarily have had at least one relationship; that for which the analysis was conducted.

4.2. Impact of mentor training, mentor career, and mentoring experience on the mentee

We checked whether the training received by the mentors had an impact on the answers of the mentee regarding the outcomes of the relationship, the mentor's functions, the mentoring style deployed, and the quality of the relationship. The results are very remarkable and revealing. As shown in **Table 1**, the training the mentor received via the *Réseau M* and elsewhere is positively and significantly correlated with two out of three components of the quality of the relationship: trust in the mentor and perceived similarity. However, mentor training has no effect on general satisfaction toward the mentor.

	Hours of training <i>Réseau M</i> (<i>n</i> = 77 ^b)	Hours of other training (<i>n</i> = 51)	No. years of experience as entrepreneur (<i>n</i> = 55)	No. mentoring relationships (<i>n</i> = 66)
Quality of the relationship				
Trust toward the mentor	0.322**	0.386**	0.128	0.059
Perceived similarity	0.269*	0.329*	-0.063	-0.223*
Satisfaction with the mentor	-0.001	-0.061	0.036	0.162
Mentor's style				
Maieutic approach	0.229*	0.271 [†]	-0.016	-0.001
Mentor's engagement	0.242*	0.167	-0.107	-0.149
Psychological functions				
Reflector	0.216 [†]	0.206	-0.059	-0.226 [†]
Reassurance	0.299*	0.141	-0.079	-0.342**
Motivation	0.349**	0.187	-0.046	-0.229 [†]
Confidant	0.236 [†]	0.156	0.053	-0.293*
Career functions				
Integration	0.109	0.066	0.092	-0.024
Informational support	0.055	-0.006	-0.111	-0.102
Confrontation	0.197	0.073	-0.063	-0.154
Guide	0.263*	0.091	0.006	-0.302*
Role model function				
Role model	0.238 [†]	0.069	0.087	-0.134
Relationship outcomes				
Mentee's learning	0.209 [†]	-0.004	0.082	-0.091

^aSpearman's correlations (nonparametric) were used since the variables were not normally distributed.

^bSome data were missing and the smaller "n" is indicated.

[†] = $p \leq 0.10$

* = $p \leq 0.05$

** = $p \leq 0.01$

*** = $p \leq 0.001$

Table 1. Correlations^a between the hours of training received by the mentor and his characteristics and the answers from the mentee about components of the relationship.

As for the mentoring style, we know that the style combining a maieutic approach and strong engagement from the mentor provides the best results [25]. We observed that attending training sessions via the *Réseau M* allows the mentor to understand and implement the ideal style since the correlations are positive and significant. The training provided outside the *Réseau M* helps the mentor develop a maieutic approach, but not engagement.

In terms of the mentor's psychological functions (reflector, reassurance, motivation, confidant), the more the mentor is trained via *Réseau M*, the more these functions are fulfilled. This is not the case for the training sessions outside the *Réseau M*. For the other functions, only the "Guide" function (i.e., suggesting courses of action to the mentee) and the Role Modeling function are stronger when the mentor is trained within the *Réseau M*, which is not the case for training sessions outside the *Réseau M*.

Lastly, we observed that training mentors via *Réseau M* is positively and significantly correlated ($p \leq 0.10$) with mentee learning.

As far as the level of the mentor's entrepreneurship experience is concerned, there is no significant correlation with the variables of interest. Hence, entrepreneurial experience does not positively influence the quality of the relationship, the psychological, career, or role model functions, and has no effect on learning. We, therefore, reject hypothesis 2 (H2). Furthermore, there is no relation between the mentor's intervention style and his career (via the number of years of entrepreneurship experience). We, therefore, cannot confirm hypothesis 3 (H3). Lastly, the number of mentoring relationships has a significant impact on perceived similarity, on all psychological functions and the guide function. This impact being negative, we cannot confirm hypothesis 4 (H4).

4.3. Can mentor training neutralize the negative effect of mentoring experience?

These results have triggered this study's researchers' curiosity and reflection. If mentor training has a positive impact, and experience has a negative impact, could training neutralize the negative effect of mentoring experience? This initially unplanned research question is crucial for entrepreneurship support organizations offering mentoring services. To find the answer, we created two groups using the median of the number of mentoring relationships (four relationships) as a separator, in order to compare the effect of training on mentors with little experience (four relationships or fewer) to its effect on experienced mentors (five relationships or more). The results are shown in **Table 2**. In the group of mentors with less mentoring experience, training only improves the reassurance function. However, in the group of experienced mentors, training can increase trust and perceived similarity, which in turn allows for a more appropriate style of mentoring (maieutic), thereby increasing the intensity of all psychological functions, as well as the guide and role model functions, in addition to enhancing mentee learning.

	Hours of training Réseau M	
	Less experienced mentor (≤ 4 relationships) $n = 23^b$	Experienced mentor (≥ 5 relationships) $n = 42$
Quality of the relationship		
Trust toward the mentor	0.054	0.467***
Perceived similarity	0.051	0.421**
Satisfaction with the mentor	-0.018	0.009
Mentor's style		
Maieutic approach	0.148	0.296*
Mentor's engagement	0.282	0.234
Psychological functions		
Reflector	0.093	0.346*
Reassurance	0.407[†]	0.381*
Motivation	0.258	0.429**
Confidant	0.171	0.345*
Career functions		
Integration	0.074	0.112
Informational support	-0.037	0.141
Confrontation	0.162	0.251
Guide	0.299	0.364*
Role model function		
Role model	0.046	0.404**
Relationship outcomes		
Mentee's learning	0.079	0.311*

^aSpearman's correlations (nonparametric) were used since the variables were not normally distributed.

^bSome data were missing and the smaller "n" is indicated.

[†]= $p \leq 0.10$.

*= $p \leq 0.05$.

**= $p \leq 0.01$.

***= $p \leq 0.001$.

Table 2. Correlations^a between the hours of training received by the mentor and the answers from the mentee about components of the relationship, based on their level of experience as a mentor.

5. Discussion

The results indicate that to be a good mentor, one needs to be trained. The studies on mentoring show that the first outcome of mentoring (proximal outcome) is the learning a mentee gets from the relationship [15]. Learning is of great importance for a novice entrepreneur, and it becomes evident that training mentors is important in order to maximize the novices' out-

comes. Beyond the achieved mentee's learning, outcomes for training mentors are also meaningful, especially in terms of developing abilities to implement a quality relationship with the mentee, which will allow him/her to generate various outcomes. Thus, it seems that training serves as a basis for starting and maintaining a quality relationship. We have noted that *Réseau M*'s training has better results than training delivered by other organizations. Here, it seems that the particular nature of the entrepreneurial mentoring relationship requires the development of tailored training (via the *Réseau M*), rather than general training sessions (via other nonentrepreneurship-specific organizations) which only seem to be useful in the establishment of quality relationships (creation of trust and development of perceived similarity) based on questioning (maieutic approach).

Training enables the mentor to put his accumulated entrepreneurial experience to good use so that he can assume an appropriate mentoring style, as well as an approach that allows the creation of trust and support as the relationship progresses. Without appropriate support (training and documentation), the implementation of a mentoring program for novice entrepreneurs could be less efficient on several levels.

Our results do not allow us to assert that a mentor who has had prior entrepreneurial experience will provide better mentoring support than those who have had a career in the civil service or large organizations. Contrary to our initial expectations, it seems that the mentor's career does not impact the mentoring relationship. Here, we need to mention some limitations. It is possible, for some novice entrepreneurs requesting mentoring, that the entrepreneurial past of the mentor be especially important to them. Thus, by specifying this aspect to the program coordinator, the matching can be impacted as the mentee will be paired with a mentor with the corresponding profile. For other mentees for whom the mentor's career has no importance, they will be matched with different profiles, some of whom may not have had an entrepreneurial career. Results seem to show that once the mentee has accepted the mentor's career profile (entrepreneur or nonentrepreneur), it will no longer impact the ensuing relationship.

This result is important for entrepreneurship research. A mentor with experience as an entrepreneur is not giving better mentoring than unexperienced ones. Based on our results, it is not obvious that unexperienced entrepreneur could develop his/her cognitive schemas when being mentored by an experienced entrepreneur [41], not as he/she will have better information to identify opportunities [2], better networking, or more insightful learning [51]. It seems that mentors with experience in the business world, but not necessarily as being themselves entrepreneurs, would be enough to develop mentoring outcomes for the novices, as it was observed on a student sample [52]. As long as the preparation for being a mentor is more important than previous entrepreneurial experience, research should focus on mentor's capacity to mentor, as marginal mentoring could occur and blur the effectiveness of mentoring on novice entrepreneurs.

The negative impact of mentoring experience is an important result to underscore. Where, in other contexts, the literature has shown positive impacts of prior mentoring experience, our study reveals a negative effect, more specifically on psychological and guide functions, as well as perceived similarity. These results suggest that, initially, mentors could be less confident in their ability to properly mentor novice entrepreneurs. Thus, they could be more attentive to

the mentee's needs and the psychological aspects of mentoring in particular. With more experience, they could be less attentive to the psychosocial needs of entrepreneurs and focus more on business issues.

This finding is relevant for entrepreneurship research. Mentoring that occurs naturally outside of formal programs for novice entrepreneurs would probably bring mentors without specific training. As long as mentees (or researchers) are looking at career-related outcomes, untrained mentors could be as good as mentors trained and part of formal mentoring programs. Because novice entrepreneurs could select any mentor in their own network in informal setting, they will likely choose trusting and similar ones. However, for novices with psychological needs, but unwilling to disclose them to an informal mentor, trained mentor in formal program could be more effective to fulfil their needs.

As for the interaction between training and experience, our results enable us to better understand the mechanisms to optimize results for novice entrepreneurs. Hence, mentor training is only marginally useful for new mentors, but is crucial for experienced mentors and can help neutralize the negative effect of accumulated experience. It would therefore appear that training allows mentors to question their intervention and help them maintain an awareness of the psychosocial aspects of mentoring. Without continuous training, the quality of their intervention could decrease in these areas.

5.1. Limitation of the study

Our results have an important limitation: we have not identified the most effective training. Although we know that training has a major impact, it is not yet possible to target the most useful or appropriate training sessions. We can easily think that basic training sessions on the role of the mentor, including the most effective styles, as well as others allowing the mentor to ask questions to the mentee—enabling the mentee to further his thinking and develop the expert's cognitive patterns for example—could be the most appropriate [41].

Furthermore, the dyad analysis only involved 78 cases in total. This could create a bias in our results, where an existing significant relationship among some variables would not appear in the data set, creating a type II error. This is why the significance thresholds at $p \leq 0.10$ were indicated. Despite this limitation, the results from the dyad analysis are even more valid since the relationship is significant despite the small number of cases. Another limitation concerns the notion of time, which was not considered. Indeed, a mentoring relationship evolves over time. The 2008 mentee survey collected answers from mentees interested in responding to the questionnaire, some at the beginning of the relationship and others after the relationship had ended. Matching these with the mentor responses in 2010 could create biases regarding the relationship of cause and effect between the mentor training received and the surveyed relationship. This would suggest that a longitudinal study of dyads would be appropriate to observe the effect of mentoring over time, with variables such as the characteristics of the mentor, and more specifically, the training he has received.

5.2. Recommendations to entrepreneurship support organizations

The outcomes of this research are of utmost importance for organizations that support entrepreneurship via a mentoring program. First, if a mentee accepts the career profile of a mentor, it is not necessary for the mentor to have been an entrepreneur in the past; related experience in business can be sufficient. This knowledge may dispel some myths and beliefs held by practitioners, such as the idea that only a mentor who has prior entrepreneurial experience can mentor another entrepreneur. This does not seem to be the case.

We note that dedicated and entrepreneur-specific training is more appropriate to improve a wider range of mentoring elements (quality of relationship, style, functions, and results). Thus, basic training on communication and how to establish quality relationships through listening and questioning can be provided by various organizations, even if they do not have in-depth knowledge of the novice entrepreneurs' issues. However, to further their skills, especially regarding the psychosociological aspects of entrepreneurship (and their corollary, the mentor's psychological functions), such knowledge is necessary and mentor trainers need to be competent in this regard.

Although our results show the positive impact of training, this outcome does not necessarily indicate that only "knowledge transmission" training should be provided to neutralize the negative impact of mentoring experience. Indeed, a professional codevelopment approach to training [53] could be appropriate for mentors. In this regard, the mentors of *Réseau M* are grouped into regional cells where they can discuss their practices, under the supervision of a chief mentor elected by their peers. With the knowledge of this study in mind, such groups could beneficially replace traditional "knowledge transfer" training, even though our results cannot confirm this.

Training has been shown to be more useful to mentors who have more mentoring experience. Although this does not suggest that training mentors who may initially lack certain skills is unimportant, we generally observe that training can neutralize the negative effect of a mentor's accumulated experience. This clearly indicates the need for organizations offering mentoring programs to implement continuous training for mentors. Failure to make the required investments to achieve this could result in a decrease in the quality of the mentoring relationships, particularly with regard to the psychosocial support provided to novices by the mentors.

6. Conclusion

Our research on the connection between mentor training and mentee outcomes in terms of relationship effectiveness and learning has allowed us to identify one of the success factors in the entrepreneurial mentoring process. Although there are clearly others, this factor appears to be important for organizations that use mentoring to support entrepreneurship. Such organizations can use mentor training to improve the effectiveness of the relationship without encroaching on the relationship itself, thereby letting the dyad manage its own progress.

Our results show the importance of mentor training, especially regarding the development of their relational competencies, and particularly for mentors who have accumulated several mentoring experiences. These skills allow mentors to use or share their experience and avoid harmful behaviours. Training can provide an ethical and relational framework by informing mentors about their roles and responsibilities, their limitations and the rules of the game. It also allows the mentor to develop competencies such as listening skills, empathy, and how using a maieutic approach.

Training is only one of the success factors in the entrepreneurial mentoring process, so we suggest that researchers delve deeper into the overall process and investigate other factors that could contribute to a successful mentoring relationship. Not limited to, such factors as mentor selection, mentee training, the matching process and the follow-up procedures could be managed by the program coordinators and impact the mentoring relationship. This could be potential research extension to this research.

The practice of entrepreneurial mentoring is well developed, while research on the subject is still in its infancy. This research contributes to a better understanding of the specific mechanics of mentoring in the entrepreneurial context, is showing some results which are going against the popular belief that to mentor entrepreneurs you need to be an experienced entrepreneur and is hinting to further the research on the question of what makes a good entrepreneurial mentor.

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Appendix 1

Measure	Items	Scale
Trust toward the mentor	I can trust my mentor.	Likert 1-7
	My mentor is reliable.	
	My mentor behaves in a predictable way.	
Perceived similarity	My mentor and I share the same values.	Likert 1-7
	My personal interests are in agreement with those of my mentor.	
	My mentor's personality is similar to mine.	
	My mentor and I see things in the same way.	
Satisfaction with the mentor	My mentor is someone I am satisfied with.	Likert 1-7

Measure	Items	Scale
Maieutic approach	My mentor fails to meet my needs (reverse-scored).	Likert 1–7
	My mentor has been effective in his role.	
	My mentor disappoints me (reverse-scored).	
Mentor' engagement	He helps me find my answers on my own.	Likert 1–7
	He asks the right questions to make me think.	
	He doesn't tell me what to do.	
Reflector function	He is available quickly when I need him.	Likert 1–7
	I feel he is involved in the mentoring relationship.	
	He follows up on our meetings and discussions.	
Reassurance function	He makes sure I'm making progress.	Likert 1–7
	He enables me to have a clear image of myself and my business.	
	He highlights my strengths and weaknesses.	
Motivation function	I know how he perceives me very well.	Likert 1–7
	He allows me to get <i>feedback</i> .	
	He calms me when I'm nervous.	
Confidant function	He reassures me.	Likert 1–7
	He helps me to take some perspective on my issues.	
	I feel he has confidence in my abilities.	
Integration function	He motivates me.	Likert 1–7
	He encourages me to persist.	
	He believes I can succeed as an entrepreneur.	
Integration function	He is a good confidant.	Likert 1–7
	He is someone I can confide in.	
	I consider him a friend.	
Integration function	He is more than just a professional acquaintance.	Likert 1–7
	He connects me with people he knows.	
	He introduces me to people in his network.	

Measure	Items	Scale
Informational support function	He suggests people who can help me.	Likert 1–7
	He is willing to share his contacts.	
	He gives me information about the business world.	
	He shares his knowledge.	
	He gives me technical information.	
Confrontation function	I can benefit from his expertise.	Likert 1–7
	He highlights the consequences of my decisions.	
	He wouldn't hesitate to contradict me if he disagreed.	
	He forces me to demonstrate the accuracy of my ideas.	
	He constructively criticizes my decisions.	
Guide function	He suggests new options.	Likert 1–7
	He proposes other perspectives.	
	He give me advice regarding my issues.	
	He helps me clarify the issue at hand.	
Role model function	He is a model for me.	Likert 1–7
	He shares his success and failures.	
	He is a good example of entrepreneur.	
	He talks about his professional and life experiences.	
Mentee's learning	I learned a lot from my mentor.	Likert 1–7
	My mentor gave me a new perspective on many things.	
	My mentor and I were "co-learners" in the mentoring relationship.	
	Reciprocal learning took place between my mentor and I.	
	My mentor shared a lot of information with me that helped my own professional development.	

Table AI. Details of the measures used in the mentee questionnaire.

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