

Entrepreneurs' Leadership Experiences with Specific Regard to Mentorship

David A Robinson

RMIT Asia Graduate Centre, RMIT University Vietnam

Geoffrey VanderPal DBA

RMIT Asia Graduate Centre, RMIT University Vietnam

Duc Nhat-Hoang

RMIT Asia Graduate Centre, RMIT University, Vietnam

This paper explores leadership of entrepreneurs through the specific lens of mentorship, a dimension on which to date only limited research has been conducted. Narratives behind the motives of mentorship are examined to uncover the elements that allow for a healthy mentor relationship between entrepreneurs, the mentors, and their followers, the mentees, in organizations. Participants reported that role-models influenced them as mentors. Furthermore, participants emphasized the importance of being role-models when practicing as mentors. This paper contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between role-modeling and entrepreneurial success.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurs, apart from being primarily inspired by innovation, driven to implementation, and challenged by risk, are often expected to assume the role of enterprise leader (in addition to being enterprise initiator). The necessity for entrepreneurs to embrace the tripartite innovation, implementation, and risk, is borne out in the following definition: an entrepreneur is a person who creates something of value and assumes the risks of building a business around it (Robinson et al., 2007). Thus, it is useful to know how entrepreneurs deal with these challenges. Interestingly, this is one aspect that has remained relatively unexplored in the mainstream literature on entrepreneurship (Chen et al., 2014; Kansikas et al., 2012; Pitts, 2008; Pearson and Marler, 2010; Roomi and Harrison, 2011), which seems to have focused more on the processes inherent to venture formation than the leadership processes necessary to sustain a venture once it is formed.

According to Contin-Pilart and Larraza-Kintana (2015), the concept of a dominant entrepreneurial role-model, often represented by parents, teachers, and other entrepreneurs, emerged as a significant source of the entrepreneurial learning processes. This process of having a role model involves interaction from both the entrepreneurs (also mentors) and the mentees. It seems that personal affinities, rather than formal reporting relationships, are important elements in building mentoring relationships (Eby and Lockwood, 2005). One of the reasons for this was found to be an individual's need to feel at ease in

relaying experiences, emotions, beliefs, fears, and failures to the mentor (Hinde, 1997). In order to understand the relationship between a mentor and a mentee thoroughly, it is important to explore how mentorship is practiced in various facets of a mentor-mentee relationship structure. This, in turn, helps to understand how such activities can lead to a prospective healthy relationship and improve entrepreneurs' mentorship function.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentorship is about providing the mentees with “guidance, support, knowledge, and opportunities for whatever period the mentor and protégé deem this help to be necessary” (Burlew, 1991, p. 213; Steele, 2013). For more than 30 years, mentoring has been studied and the many positive benefits discussed in management literature. ((See Allen, Eby, O'Brien, & Lentz, (2008) for a comprehensive overview)) The nature of this relationship can be understood as a liaison which includes influence, communication, and obligations, as there is an influencing learning process taking place between the mentor and the mentee that engages the parties to accomplish a mutual purpose or perform required tasks. The liaison is expressed in various aspects within a business and management setting, including teamwork, empowerment, support, and organizational development.

Mentoring in Teamwork

The role of a mentor within the dimension of teamwork is similar to an individual holding a leadership role guiding a team towards goal attainment. Bass (2008) summarized leadership elements as the leader formulating and articulating the mission and goals for organizational members: the leader provides direction for goal attainment; the leader provides the structure and methods to achieve organizational goals; the leader resolves issues; and the leader evaluates members' contribution to the effort (Tichy, 2004). Additionally, a leader demonstrates the capacity to communicate his experience and knowledge in a transferable way so subordinates are able to internalize this know-how. To do so, leaders need to be aware of their followers' values and to generate congruence of values between both parties. Value system congruence amounts to the extent of agreement between value systems of a leader and a follower, which has been found to be significantly related to employee satisfaction and commitment (Krishnan, 2002). This is also supported by findings of Schminke et al. (2005), who found that convergence between a leader's level of cognitive moral development and a subordinate's level of cognitive moral development have the most positive effect on subordinates' satisfaction and commitment. Even though subordinates may not work closely with the organization's overall leader, value congruence with this leader affects the subordinates' attitudes. Weak value system congruence between an organization and its members could result in changes in a member's value system, changes in organization's value system, or resignation of members (Schminke et al., 2005).

Mentoring in Support

A recent empirical study of 280 full-time employees showed that follower engagement derives mostly from the personal relationship between the employees and their leader rather than the influence of inspirational leadership behaviors (Burch and Guarana, 2014). Follower engagement helps develop a better understanding of what is expected from them and provides a sense of security to openly communicate their ideas and allows them with more work resources. Specifically, leaders who authentically lead by example and act in a consistent manner over time positively empower subordinates to engage within the workplace (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). Authentic role-modeling represents actions that are a clear and emphatic expression of a leader's commitment to organizational tasks, which in turn gives direction to followers about how to remain engaged emotionally, physically and cognitively during work performance (Wang et al., 2014).

Through authentic leader behavior, a desirable/ethical climate can potentially be generated. Such a climate arises from transparency, integrity, trust, and high moral standards, which, in turn, have the

potential to create and sustain a healthy organization (Gardner et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2005). Through social exchange process (Blau, 1964; Gooty and Yammarino, 2016), particularly leader-member exchange, individual followers develop a sense of obligation towards their leader, which contributes to positive performance. Hence, subordinates are inspired to reciprocate duties to their leader's open and fair treatment.

Leadership styles displayed by mentors can influence their protégés' perceptions of the mentoring they receive. Transformational mentorship can have the positive impact of increasing the protégé's openness to receive mentoring (Mencl et al., 2016; Sosik and Godshalk, 2000). Mentorship is regarded as a source of wisdom in terms of job expertise and behaviors. This suggests that mentors who develop reward behavior with individually considerate behaviors may provide psychological support to protégés. Kalshoven et al. (2011) found that the implementation of ethical leadership behavior created a psychologically safe environment. A psychologically safe environment creates trust relationships within the organization, especially between leader and followers. In this environment, followers are encouraged to actively report and contribute to workplace issues, problems, and processes. Because of this, employees feel secure and enjoy a sense of personal acceptance to discuss and contribute to organizational development. Consequently, employees attain more job satisfaction (Avey et al., 2012). It is suggested that mentors provide two main functions towards the mentee: a career related aspect and a psychological effect (Kram, 1985), as outlined in St-Jean (2011).

Mentoring by Example

Mentorship manifests as guidance for career-related issues. The mentee's integration in the business community can be augmented through the mentor's own network. The mentors provide support with knowledge and information that is valuable to the job they are doing. Furthermore, the mentor helps a mentee to engage in self-reflection, thereby ensuring that unhelpful beliefs, attitudes, or habits do not prevent him/her from reaching their business goals (St-Jean, 2011). Mentees and their mentoring role models have the tendency to resemble each other in terms of business characteristics, nature of opinions, and corporate behaviors. Mentors seek to build their image as role models to implement effective control of ethical behaviors to ensure a high level of integrity. Caldwell et al. (2007) supported this notion by arguing that great leaders are viewed by subordinates as engendering dedication to work ethic. An ethical leader is thus a role model who engenders ethical conduct, ethical decision-making and pro-social behavior in subordinates (Den Hartog and Belschak, 2012; Hunter, 2012). An ethically functioning leader has the personal strength and moral fortitude that drives their motivation and thinking (Trevino et al., 2000). The potential benefits of ethical leadership and its application include higher levels of trust can be developed between a leader and their subordinates because interactions are characterized by fairness, honesty, and a supportive workplace culture and environment (Brown and Mitchell, 2010).

Mentors need to be perceived as people who *talk the talk* and *walk the walk* (Stanwick and Stanwick, 2003). A mentor may present excerpts from life and the lessons learned through stories that provide inspiration (St-Jean, 2011). Mentors who act as role models provide mentees with motivation and inspiration to realize their potentials in business (Bosma et al., 2012). The use of role model is seen as a good foundation to build up excellent entrepreneurs in the future. Bosma et al.'s study (2012) found that 54% of entrepreneurs have had a role model at some phase of their business development.

Authentic leadership behavior has a positive effect on subordinates' efficacy. This results from the authentic leader's relational transparency, leading by example, and role-modeling. When the leader delivers authentic openness and acceptance in communication, it leads to the subordinate harnessing those characteristics as core beliefs to their functioning (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005; Gardner et al., 2011). Subsequently, subordinates' believe and demonstrate heightened levels of efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, when mentored by an authentic leader. These components are known as collectively psychological capital (Luthans et al., 2007). Clapp-Smith et al.'s (2009) study revealed that subordinates' psychological capital was greatly enhanced through the mutual trust relationship that developed and grew because of authentic leadership. Potentially, trust levels between subordinates and

leaders can be strengthened when opportunities for subordinates' self-development are made available and actioned, and this creates a mutual learning environment for both the mentor and the mentee.

Mentoring for Success

Various factors have an impact on forming an effective mentor-mentee relationship that generates positive outcomes, which subsequently lead to overall success. An effective mentor-mentee relationship demands commitment to the relationship. Preparedness to change has considerable impact on the outcome (Audet and Couteret, 2012). The success that a mentoring relationship brings about does not only rely upon the mentor's competences but those of the mentee as well. It requires the mentees to be receptive to coaching and open to change. Research by Audet and Couteret (2012) showed that the trial-and-error approach was the most suitable learning method.

Apart from mentoring, other influential factors that have significant effects on entrepreneurs' success are the level of family support, good customer service, charisma, friendliness to customers, business stress, ability to manage personnel, previous business experience, hard work, appropriate training, satisfactory government support, political involvement, and marital status (Kara et al., 2010).

CASE STUDIES

Examples of Entrepreneurs who also became good business leaders

Livio DeSimone, George Hatsopoulos, and Steve Jobs are examples of business leaders who established their own businesses and developed them into high-profile companies. DeSimone was Chairman and CEO of 3M Company, an American international conglomerate organization; Hatsopoulos is chairman and CEO of Thermo Electric Corporation, a provider of technical and industrial applications; and Jobs is well-known as the founder and CEO of Apple, a technology company specializing in consumer electronics and computer software. Each of them has their own approaches to stimulate their employees; but fostering autonomy, creativity, and innovation within the workplace appear to be common elements that have ensured their employees excel. DeSimone encouraged a high sense of trust between managers and their employees. Inherent in that trust was the attitude that failure is considered an opportunity to learn (DeSimone et al., 1995). Hatsopoulos valued the spirit of partnership and constant communication between employees as more important than the line of power hierarchy in organization. The early identification of problems and employees' sense of empowerment to actively seek for new ideas became hallmarks of 3M's success (DeSimone et al., 1995).

For Jobs at Apple, adaptability is very important. New employees were mentored to develop an understanding of strengths and weaknesses of the company as well as the external influences (McInerney, 2011). Talent acquisition and investment in professional development are believed by Jobs to be worthwhile investments because motivation and innovation are powerful drivers of success (Ahmed, 2010). Without a doubt, it is the human factor that these entrepreneurs focus on the most.

Examples of Entrepreneurs who didn't become good business leaders

Despite many success stories, there are cases of entrepreneurs who were good at starting their own businesses but not as effective at maintaining them. Jack Dorsey, co-founder and current CEO of Twitter, and Ron Johnson, former CEO of JC Penney, are two such examples. Dorsey is a visionary entrepreneur, however, he is seen as a bad manager who unrightfully took credit, poorly handled criticism, and generally was lacking in managerial skills. The pursuit of personal benefits and power led to Dorsey being fired as CEO of Twitter (Griffith, 2015). He also lacked effective communication skills, and his interaction with stakeholders was poor. As for Johnson, he was fired from his own company due to reported poor leadership and unprofessionalism, including lack of consumer understanding, lack of market research focus, ineffective application of market strategy, which all contributed to failures in the business (Tuttle, 2013).

Examples of corporate leaders that turned into entrepreneurs

Larry Page, CEO of Google, started his career as a businessperson who has a great sense to identify problems and to persevere with any challenge. Page and his company have been criticized over the years for the company's actions; however he never fails to revive the company from crisis and never sways from pursuing his vision for the company (Namin-Hedayati, 2014).

Throughout the development of Google, Page has demonstrated excellent entrepreneurial wisdom, expanding the business portfolio to various fields and providing sterling leadership. He has vision and communicates that vision with employees constantly; he praises innovation as a means of taking businesses and life to new levels of advancement. New ideas are all valuable assets, and Page has become skilled at realizing which are worth pursuing. Page understands that it is essential that employees feel they are making meaningful impact by contributing to a global society.

As for Bill Harris, Executive Vice President of Intuit, he was formerly president and CEO of Chipsoft. When Intuit was still a small company with a successful software product but lacked entrepreneurial spirit, Harris succeeded in getting people from different departments to collaborate, a strategy that ensured the company's effective growth (DeSimone et al., 1995). Cross-disciplinary collaboration has subsequently become a hallmark of the company, resulting in significantly expanded product lines and revenue increases, while providing a solid company culture that can be sustained as the firm expands its market reach through acquisitions.

Through cross-disciplinary collaboration, decision-making power has been distributed throughout the organization, a vital step in creating a customer-centered organization, as the company allows people at all levels to respond to customers without delay, thereby improving its entrepreneurialism. In the name of innovation, Harris embraces risk and failure and the company invests heavily in uncertain products with high potential. Intuit continues to be entrepreneurial as it grows due to its customer-centered approach.

PARTICIPATING ENTREPRENEURS' EXPERIENCE

According to the nine entrepreneur participants of this qualitative study, mentorship is the key to developing employees, and through them the organization. Mentors are the main and most desirable source of knowledge for mentees, ranging from professional skills (directly serving business functionality) to personal skills (enhancing physical and mental capacities). Mentors stimulate development through observation, learning-by-doing, and examples.

A common pattern in the interviews was that entrepreneurs who mentor others experience regret for their own lack of mentorship in the formative years of their own development. Another function of mentorship that appears to be of considerable value for the participants is the motivational energy the mentors radiate. A receptive approach is required for a mentor-mentee relationship to be effective; thus, the mentor who is inspirational and encouraging of the mentee to actively seek solutions for themselves is usually greatly admired. The mentors' influence tends to affect the mentee's later professional habits and behaviors, as well as their own mentoring styles, which demonstrates mentoring's cumulative effect. Various cases are recorded in which entrepreneurs began by having mentors or having them midway of their careers; both scenarios provide positive outcomes in both work life and personal life. It is clear that mentorship is important in all phases of careers. The study confirms much of what is written in the literature regarding the benefits of mentoring especially focused upon the mentee and benefits derived.

How to be an effective mentor

Participants in the study believe that it is vital that mentors are able to mobilize mentees' energy. Motivation comes from a sense of autonomy in the workplace. Effective mentoring allows employees to self-evaluate, to be creative, and to be empowered to practice appropriate decision making. Mentoring is more about stimulating effective decision making practices in the mentees than about providing them with the answers. Participants in the study expressed strong beliefs that a mentor delivers positive qualities and sheds light on new possibilities, such as brainstorming the potential and being directional.

Constant communication with employees is considered essential to identify ongoing and potential problems in the workplace. By actively listening to mentees, the mentor demonstrates empathy on both professional and personal levels, which encourages mentees to seek further consultation and support. Emotional support is also a function of the mentoring role. It was noted that the mentor and the mentee do not always need to interact formally and that much of the mentoring can take place during informal or social interactions.

That mentorship is about providing experience to influence the way of thinking and behavior of the mentees has been demonstrated by one specific entrepreneur, who in the early stage of career development had a mentor who was perceived as being 'hard'. The mentee initially did not recognize that the true intention of apparently meaningless tasks he/she assigned was to help develop basic product knowledge, which was necessary before advancing to higher level learning. The approach was influential as the entrepreneur ultimately developed a willingness to learn. The entrepreneur later claimed that the mentor inspired active learning and the ability to absorb the essence of any responsibilities delegated, which accelerated the mentee's career progress. Thus it can be said that one role of a mentor is to inspire and motivate the mentee to self-improve.

THEORY AND PRACTICE

In this section comparisons are made between corporate leaders, established entrepreneurs, participants in this study and relevant theory, with the aim of establishing the extent to which participating entrepreneurs' experiences were found to be in line with what might be expected.

Mentorship in Teamwork

The theory tells us that leaders need to be directional and inspirational, which helps circulate knowledge and energy within the organization (Tichy, 2004). It is also clear that value congruence between leader and follower also stimulate employees' satisfaction and commitment (Krishnan, 2002). Corporate leaders' experiences confirm this. For example, Larry Page is a leader with clear vision. By communicating his visions constantly to his staff members, he succeeded in creating congruence in values and goals. Successful entrepreneurs, such as George Hatsopoulos, used consistent communication to ensure the flow of knowledge throughout the company, whilst actively inspiring new ideas. Participating entrepreneurs share the belief that mentors should be able to mobilize energy in the workplace so that the firm performs at optimal efficiency.

Mentorship as Empowerment

Theory tells us that empowerment is a source of motivation, achievement, resilience, and confidence (Drew, 2010). Larry Page believes in employee empowerment so that all feel they can make a meaningful contribution. George Hatsopoulos strove to blur the lines of hierarchical power to allow everyone a sufficient level of autonomy to make decisions regarding their work. Participating entrepreneurs reported acting as mentors in an effort to stimulate effective decision making practices utilized by employees.

Mentorship as Support

Theory informs that follower engagement is derived from the formation of unique relationships between employees and leaders, which require flexibility and adaptation by leaders (Burch and Guarana, 2014). Employees' stress is reduced when such unique relationships succeed (Sosik and Godshalk, 2000). Bill Harris supports employees by showing appreciation for their ideas. Livio DeSimone encouraged his management staff to trust in their employees, to the degree that success is not always expected in all trials and failure is considered an opportunity to learn. Participants of this study agree on the importance of having a mentor that radiates motivation and encourages mentees to actively seek new and different solutions.

Mentorship by Example

Theory tells us that when leaders act as role models for employees to emulate mentorship is in play (Bosma et al., 2012). Mentors often provide guidance for career-related issues, ensuring that employee's previously-learned habits do not inhibit current work performance (St-Jean, 2011). The way in which Bill Harris provides mentorship is by encouraging employees to respond immediately to customers if within their capabilities, thus allowing them to 'learn while doing' and improve themselves correspondingly. Steve Jobs emphasized the important of adaptability in handling work and human interactions, believing that any individual can fit in if they understand thoroughly the company's values and culture. Participants agreed that mentors exert considerable influence on mentees. Though they also noted that influence runs in both directions. There is agreement among them that a mentor's influence has a replicating and multiplying effect, since it influences the mentee's own mentoring style later on.

Mentorship for Success

The theory is clear that an effective mentor-mentee relationship, emanating from the mentee's commitment and preparedness to change as well as suitable methods of mentoring (Audet and Couteret, 2012), can generate business success. Successful corporate manager, Bill Harris, implemented cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary cooperation, which became a hallmark of his company and resulted in a widely expanded business portfolio. Entrepreneur, George Hatsopoulos, ensured constant communication as he found it to be effective in ensuring greater success among his staff members. Among participants in this study, constant communication in the form of professional advice, networking, and psychological counselling was considered the primary tool for success in the workplace. In a mentoring relationship these forms of communication are often carried out in informal ways.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

While mentoring has long been regarded as beneficial in the corporate world, it is clear that entrepreneurial participants in this study have not only benefitted from mentorship themselves but that they are also convinced that mentorship is a valuable way to support and empower their employees. They see the mentoring process as an important source of influence, a driver of success, and a key feature of transformational leadership.

This study, in the phenomenological tradition, began 'in silence'. The researchers did not presume to know the theory or past empirical evidence around mentorship, preferring to rely on the lived experiences of entrepreneur participants as clues to the meaning, value and effectiveness of mentorship among them.

The study provides compelling evidence that entrepreneurs' lived experiences of mentoring and mentorship are similar and inclusive of those experienced by established big-name entrepreneurs, as well as by corporate managers, and correspond with the principles espoused by leadership theory.

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