This work was carried out with the aid of a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.
ABSTRACT

Mentoring is a critical aid for the establishment and sustenance of business enterprises. However, extant literature on mentoring has predominantly focused on limited context such as employee mentoring for career progression within organizations. Some scholars have been of the view that studies in this area should focus on other contexts such as mentoring new businesses. This study fills this gap by examining the dynamics of mentoring relationships in building social enterprises in India. By adopting a paired-cases approach, this research identifies and elaborates the expected attributes of mentors and protégés and also documents the key functions of mentoring. Conclusions from this study indicate that mentors and protégés expect experience and empathy, intensity and interest, transparency, development of individual and ‘social spark’. Creation of an appropriate climate for mentoring, inculcation of structured thinking processes, leveraging differences of views, facilitating access to network of mentors and reiteration of enterprise objectives constitute the key functions of mentoring.
INTRODUCTION

Mentoring – a relationship where an individual receives long term support, guidance and advice to work on elements of their business from a more experienced person (NESTA 2009) – is considered to be a critical element in setting up successful business enterprises. Studies show that mentoring not only provides economic benefits (LEED Unit 2006) but also enhances the enterprise's ability to innovate, change and effectively manage projects (Garvey and Garrett-Harris 2008). The literature on mentoring, however, is predominated by employee mentoring or intra-organizational mentoring. While some useful lessons could be derived from such works, it is also important to understand that, given the differences between mentoring employees and new businesses (for more on this refer Waters et al., 2002), the functions of mentoring could be different. This paper attempts to explore these differences by asking and answering a few exploratory questions on the nature and form of mentoring in enterprises and with particular reference to social enterprises.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

More than three decades of research on mentoring has showcased the benefits that individuals and organizations derive from mentoring (Chandler et al. 2011). Most of this research, however, has revolved around mentoring employees in an intra-organizational context and with an exclusive focus on career progression as a primary end product of mentoring.

Kram (1983, 1985), for example, has highlighted the functions and phases of mentoring. It has been argued that mentors provide two sets of support to the protégés: psycho-social and career related. Kram (1983) argues that psycho-social support – role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling and friendship – would provide a young adult with competence and confidence to enact the managerial role. Through career related support – sponsorship, exposure-and-visibility, coaching, protection and challenging assignments – the young manager can learn the ‘ropes of organizational life and in preparing for advancement opportunities’ (p. 614). She also went on to indicate that the mentoring relationship passes through distinct stages - initiation, cultivation, separation, and redefinition.

Building on the foundations of such works, mentoring is now seen as an interaction of multiple levels. Chandler et al. (2011), in providing a meta-review of the literature on mentoring, have argued that it

“...is enacted and shaped by systems at multiple levels—at the individual level (ontogenic system), the immediate social context (microsystem), and broader societal influences (macrosystem)” (pp. 521)

Though elaborate, the literature on mentoring does have certain key limitations. First, most of these studies are based on employees and organizations based in America and European countries. Few studies have looked at mentoring in the context of an emerging economy such as India. A recent attempt to address this gap by Ramaswami and Dreher (2010) found some aspects of mentoring to be culturally invariant. For example, the protégés in this study expected their mentors to have attributes like listening and communication, knowledge of work area, patience, empathy, understanding and genuine interest – expectations that are similar to that of their
western counterparts. A few other findings were culture dependent. For instance, familiarity (family or business connections) was seen as a primary source of compatibility and hence a primary facilitating factor of mentoring relationships. Obviously more studies in multiple cultures are essential to substantiate and add more value to this body of literature.

The second limitation is that the extant literature on mentoring has focused primarily on mentoring functions and processes associated with career development of employees within an organization. As some scholars have pointed out, there are multiple contexts in which mentoring could play a critical role. The functions of mentoring could vary because of contextual differences. So, mentoring or assisting employees in career development may not be the same as advising people on new businesses. Waters et al. (2002), in reflecting on these differences, have argued that the literature on employee mentoring almost takes for granted the experience, rank and influence of the mentors as necessary factors for mentoring protégés. However, in the context of a new business, such characteristics (for example, rank) could be irrelevant. So, there are grounds to believe that mentoring functions could be different in these contexts. In particular, social enterprises may spring some unique challenges, as in contrast to commercial enterprises. Social wealth creation becomes the key objective and economic wealth creation as a necessary by-product for sustainability in social enterprises (Mair and Mati 2004). In highlighting these differences others have also argued that there are limits to the value that can be captured by a social enterprise as entrepreneurs

“...who address basic social needs such as food, shelter or education very often find it difficult to capture economic value because even if the ‘customers’ are willing, often they are unable to pay even a small part of the price of the products and services provided” (Seelos and Mair 2005 cited in Mair and Mati 2004, pp. 8)

Thus, the ‘uniqueness’ of the social enterprise business model and the segment they cater to makes the process of mentoring much more challenging, as the mentor and the protégé would have to balance both commercial and social demands. To sum up, research on employee mentoring does indicate the importance of compatibility between the mentor and protégé for a productive mentoring relationship. For such compatibility to emerge there has to be clarity on the mutual expectations of mentors and protégés. But hardly any study has examined these expectations in the context of a social enterprise. Similarly, the functions of mentoring an enterprise could be different from that of mentoring an individual on career progression within an organization. However, not much research has been conducted to identify these functions of mentoring in an enterprise and in particular, a social enterprise. Taking into consideration the aforesaid gaps, we address the following research questions.

• What are the key attributes that mentors and protégés expect of each other in mentoring of social enterprises?

• What are the key functions of mentoring in the context of an enterprise?

• What are specific functions of mentoring in the context of a social enterprise?
**METHODOLOGY**

The aim of the study is to understand the process of mentor-mentee relationship as perceived by both actors co-creating it. We used a narrative approach to unravel the dynamics of the relationship within case study format. Case study is an empirical enquiry that “…investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin 2003, pp. 13). Armato and Caren advised that “in small-N samples, researchers should pick their cases with care, making sure to provide as much variation as possible” (Armato and Caren 2002).

We interviewed nine mentors and twelve mentees to understand their experiences with multiple mentorship relationships, to mitigate sampling bias erring towards successful mentorship relationships. We have presented sample characteristics of mentors and mentees in Table 1 and Table 2.

Some of these mentoring experiences have been successful with the enterprise achieving financial stability. In a few cases, the enterprises that were set up were closed down or never went beyond the idea stage. To ensure broad coverage and variety, the pairs were also chosen from diverse sectors ranging from technology to rural livelihoods. Each of these interviews lasted sixty to ninety minutes and the interviews were taped after seeking permission from the respondent.

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The recordings were analyzed using grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) to identify broad themes that emerged. These themes are presented in the following sections.

**FINDINGS**

The findings of this study are organized around the two broad questions that the paper plans to address. Within these broader categories, we arrived at multiple sub-themes by combining key themes from the extant literature on employee mentoring and recurring themes from the interview transcripts.

Under the first category, the focus is on desirable attributes of mentors and protégés. We identified five key attributes - experience and empathy, intensity and interest, transparency, development of individual and social spark. While experience and empathy is associated with mentors, the remaining is applicable for both mentors and protégés. The second category elaborates on the functions of mentoring in social enterprises. Analysis of interview transcripts resulted in identification of five sub-categories under functions of mentoring. They are: creation of an appropriate climate for mentoring, inculcation of structured thinking process, leveraging on differences of views, facilitating access to network of mentors and reiteration of enterprise objectives. The following sections elaborate on the aforesaid themes and substantiate it with relevant quotations from the interview transcripts.

**DESIRABLE ATTRIBUTES OF MENTORS AND PROTÉGÉS**

**A. Experience and Empathy**

Several protégés lay a lot of emphasis on the mentors’ experience. Though corporate experience (say, as a senior manager in a reputed organization) does help, the protégés find considerable value addition in working with a mentor who has been successful (or even failed) in creating and sustaining an enterprise. According to some of these protégés, there is a higher probability of bonding with such mentors as they are seen as people ‘who have been there and done it all’. The protégés underline the fact that starting an enterprise and sustaining it is a ‘lonely…and very stressful’ experience. As a protégé pointed out,

“…there had been many times when I have wondered how I would pay the salary, clear the bills…whether the critical sales would go through…and people who have gone through it would understand it very well”

This synchronization with the entrepreneurial mind-set can help the mentors to offer some practical guidance. It is important, as some of them point out, to drop down to the level of the budding entrepreneur and empathize with the protégé. Though experienced, if the mentor does not see the situation through the eyes of the protégé there is bound to be a ‘disconnect’ between the expectations of the two parties.
“(this mentor) had retired from a very large organization…we are very small and face a lot of uncertainty, what will happen if I do not get another round of funding, team members dropping out…I have to take some critical decisions but I found this mentor talking at a different level…though whatever he said was correct but it was not good enough for the current situation…one of the things that he suggested was to use substantial resources to build a strong brand…but brand building takes a lot of money…I mean he might have had, in his past organization, access to brand consultants. But I cannot access them, their rates are so high. He could not help me on how I can build brands with the limitations that I have as a new entrepreneur.”

Of course, such disconnect could also be because of the inability of the protégé to express the existing business situation appropriately to the mentor. In particular, in the initial stages of the mentoring relationship when the mentor and protégé are beginning to understand each other, it is important to clarify intent, the idea behind the business and if the enterprise has already been established a ‘true’ picture of the business. In one of the interviews a protégé, when asked about this, pointed out that it could arise if you are not ready with data.

“Before meeting mentors I prepare myself with two things. One is personal want and another is the knowledge about where your business is and you are. The mentor may not be in your situation so it’s your job to explain yourselves.”

Nevertheless, relevant experience tempered with empathy is seen as a very desirable attribute of the mentor. Some mentors do agree with this observation when they point out the importance of remembering their own journey through these stages. In reliving such memories the mentor gains a better understanding, albeit vicariously, of the existing situation and so is better placed to offer relevant and appropriate suggestions.

**B. Intensity and Interest**

Typically mentoring, unless is part of a structured exercise that is undertaken and monitored by an association or organization, tends to happen in infrequent bursts or episodes. Under such circumstances, a lot of premium is placed on the intensity of the interactions. Both the mentors and protégés used expressions like ‘quality time’ or ‘focused discussion’ to describe the characteristics of intensity. It implies that both the parties would have to be well-prepared to extract the maximum out of the limited time. As a mentor pointed out,

“…I do make a conscious effort towards this…because the time that you spend with them would have to be highly impactful. I expect them to come to me with specific questions or problems…and after an intense interaction we will probably come out with 8 to 10 action items which would keep them busy for another few months…I find it very useful…I do not subscribe to the views like we have to meet three days a month regardless of whether you have an issue or not…I think both would have to be respectful of each other's time…”

It also becomes the protégé’s responsibility to ensure that significant gains are made during such brief interactions. Some protégés facilitate this by presenting information succinctly and seek advice on critical areas. As a protégé indicated
“...we need to get the maximum advice in a limited span of time...from my meeting with mentors what I have learnt is that they do not like multiple slides...whatever you have to say you have to do it in few slides...by looking at that they are in a better position to advice...so even a half-an-hour meeting if you can present information appropriately lot of benefits can be obtained.”

Data from the interviews also indicate that ‘perceived interest’ of the mentor on the issues that are brought to the table is also another desirable characteristic. The ‘interest’ is gauged by the protégé in multiple ways. For example, a protégé pointed out

“He (the mentor) asked for a report on what I have done and the time he spent in reading it right from the concept of the report to minor things like comma missing here...It was not necessary for him but...I mean to that level of detail he would address the issue...and that has an impact from how I see things to how I write”

In addition, the protégés also assess the mentors by their willingness to follow up on ideas that they had proposed. This follow-up signals to the protégé about the commitment the mentor had invested on this enterprise. For example, a protégé narrated how having decided on ‘cold calling’ as an appropriate sales strategy the mentor did not walk away but went on reviewing the progress of the strategy and discussed ways of fine-tuning it.

Any perceived lack of interest by these parties can turn out be a big barrier in the relationship. A mentor illustrated this breach with an example,

“...these protégés were at the initial stages of design and manufacturing of the product and they took some inputs on sales and pricing strategies...I also took the initiative of making some introductions to them...but it was disappointing as they did not follow up with these introductions...two or three such incidents then I decided to cool off and stopped opening up my rolodex.”

C. Transparency

Being upfront and honest about the state of things was pointed out as another desirable characteristic. Most mentors agreed that if the mentoring process had to be effective it is important the protégé ‘presents the true picture.’ Be it the intentions or the status of the enterprise, the mentors expect the protégé to talk through the issues that he or she is faced with and not ‘gloss over’ existing inadequacies. From the protégé’s perspective, transparency also includes the admission from the mentor, that he may not be the right person to guide him on a specific issue, rather than offering some ‘general suggestion’ or sending the mentee on a wild goose chase. As a protégé pointed out, such a behavior would enhance the ‘respect’ of the concerned mentor and, more importantly, given the inherent ‘blind faith’ that some protégés develop (at least in the initial stages of mentoring) it is important that the mentor is transparent about his or her capabilities. Transparency, according to these individuals, is a key ingredient for developing trust – a key ‘lubricant’, as a mentor pointed out, in keeping the wheels of mentoring spinning.
D. Development of the individual

Though the primary objective of mentoring is to ensure success of the enterprise there is also, in most cases, an unstated expectation about the development of the concerned individuals. This development is not well-defined nor is it specifically articulated but a closer reading of the transcripts does reveal some underlying aspirations. The mentor, according to a protégé, has to reiterate and underline that the enterprise is the responsibility of the protégé. Though obvious, such reinforcement also enhances the protégé's sense of ownership. As a protégé pointed out,

“We should not connect mentors with final outcome. At the end of the day it’s your success or failure….it’s your company and the mentor cannot be held responsible for the outcome. Choice and execution of his ideas is up to you.”

The push towards encouraging independent decision-making is a key piece in the development of the individual. Some mentors ensure that the line between recommendation and decision is never breached.

“At every point in time, I stop at one stage and let them decide…my brief stops at advice. I do not take decisions for them…so if there is a capital call to make, somebody has to make an investment in your company…I bring the whole team onto the table…I may even negotiate on his behalf but ultimately I would leave the decision to him.”

Learning is another component in the development of the individual. That the protégé learns may not be surprising but mentors also look forward for some learning to emerge out of this engagement. It could be about some technical aspects – as a mentor pointed out, he had never read anything about bamboo, the business his protégé was in, but within a short span he was able to absorb a lot – but it could also be about how some of the business ideas finally shaped up. Some mentors pointed out that sometimes disagreements also acted as key raw materials for their learning (some examples are elaborated under the section ‘leveraging on differences of views’)

E. Social Spark

Some mentors did expect their protégés to have a ‘social bent of mind.’ This inclination, however vague or ambiguous, is a trait that needs to be nurtured. As a mentor pointed out,

“For some of them who are interested in changing the world…help the poor…uplift rural society…it is important to nurture that desire to serve because we do not have enough people like them…of course they may need to go through a structured mentoring program for realizing these objectives… but that passion and energy are vital.”

According to these mentors, such an inclination would get strongly reflected in the business model and would also act as a guiding principle in the growth of the business. As the enterprise grows there could be economic opportunities that might appear more ‘viable’ or attractive. For example, mobile technology solutions have the potential to impact rural life and at the same time have applications in commercial segments. Such moments trigger a debate in the minds of the protégé between short-term gains and long-term social impact. It is under those circumstances this attribute of ‘social spark’ can guide the protégé towards a meaningful and productive resolution.
To summarize, the study of mentors and protégés have identified a set of expectations about the desirable attributes of these individuals. The presence or absence of these attributes would influence the effectiveness of the mentoring relationship. However, the picture is still only half complete as functions of mentoring also play an equally important role.

The next section elaborates on these functions.

**FUNCTIONS OF MENTORING**

**A. Creation of appropriate climate for mentoring**

In the initial stages of the mentoring relationship, when the enterprise is about to be established or recently established, the mentor forms his impressions about the nature of the business and the individual, which in turn, influences the psychosocial and enterprise-related support extended by the mentor. The protégé, in turn, uses this stage to formalize vague ideas into concrete plans and assesses the mentor's possible contribution towards this. This stage, as a mentor remarked, is marked by 'experimentation' as ideas get thrown around, implementation hurdles are discussed, ideas are tested against reality and lessons are learnt on the way.

From the mentor’s perspective it is at this stage that he educates himself about the contours of the proposed business and market. Though experienced, it is essential, as some mentors point out, to understand the specifics of the business before offering suggestions. As one mentor pointed out, it is quite similar to what a physician would do – listen to the ‘patient’, understand his condition and then prescribe ‘medicines’. It makes the ‘patient’ quite satisfied too.

“…probably one of the reasons why they respect or accept me as a mentor is my style. I ask a lot of questions and I try to understand their problems and challenges before I start offering my advice…that gives them a feeling that I have spent a lot of time getting to know detail what they are up to…in my mind it is very important stage in the mentoring relationship”

“…for the first three months it was more of knowing each other and experimentation. I asked a lot of harsh questions on the business…it was like let us try out and see if this is going to work”

This is also a period in creating the 'environment' that certain mentors use to encourage the protégés to indulge in some constructive introspection on the path they have decided to venture upon. Such critical thinking helps the protégé to not only do a reality check but also to hone the business idea. For mentors, the thoughts and actions of the protégé in this phase give a clear signal about the seriousness of the individual. A protégé recounting his experience observed,

“I was keen on setting up rural BPOs…I went to my mentor and ‘I said I want to be an entrepreneur and that had always been my dream…and I have some ideas and can you hear me out.’ He asked me a lot of questions and
he was also a bit concerned as rural BPO at that time was a small but growing segment...we spent a lot of time talking about this...and finally when he saw that I was serious and had certain ideas he was keen to help me”

B. Inculcation of Structured Thinking Processes

At this founding stage of the relationship, the mentor and protégé work together, quite closely in some cases, to build some of the key components of the enterprise. The starting point, as a mentor pointed out, is the individual. The challenge here is to translate the protégé's ‘I-want-to-change-the-world-through-this-social-enterprise’ enthusiasm into something real and manageable. Critical to this step is inculcation of a structured thinking process in the mind of the protégé. Introducing this ‘disciplined’ and ‘focused’ thinking takes different routes. For example, a mentor observed

“The entrepreneur was open to address any vertical as long as there was opportunity for business and I had to take a step back and say that let us not do that let us design some marketing material identify top prospects, attend relevant vertical conferences…and do it in a structured way. That has become so ingrained in the team where they have acquired some discipline in how they look at opportunities.”

To take another route, the influencing of the thought process can also include nudging the protégé from a product-centric to customer-centric perspective. A protégé recounted how his mentor made him focus more on customers' perception,

“...the mentor is not changing the products but he helped us to position it well and made us understand the positioning...we used to, in the early stages, while selling the product to prospective clients, talk a lot about how advanced this technology is, about its special features etc...but my mentor indicated that alongside this pitch you may also need to talk about the cost advantages of this product, gains, savings...so he made us see it from the customer’s perspective”

At this stage, some mentors observed that it was important to communicate to the protégé on the ‘temporariness’ of the mentor. In other words, the protégés had to stand on their feet and had to equip themselves with capabilities to handle future problems. To facilitate such independence, mentors initiate informal learning programs. As a mentor stated,

“Out of those thirty customers, I was directly involved with the first ten I used to go with him...the last twenty I have not gone and without me he closes the deals...(this has been made possible) because of the reviews that we do after these calls...monitoring what we have learnt and how we can do better.”

C. Leveraging on differences of views

Navigating through the relationship of mentoring is never easy, as disagreements or differences of view crop up on various issues. However, both the mentors and protégés indicate that such disagreements are but ‘natural’ and it is important to ‘manage’ and, more importantly, make ‘use’ of them. Analysis of interview transcripts suggests that a key component in conflict management is the ‘perception’ that mentors and protégés have about themselves and
each other. Though difficult to articulate, this perception is seen as a bundle of attitude, respect and assessment of intent. The final outcome of the disagreement is, to some extent, dependent on the configuration of these individual elements. For example, a mentor who considers the protégé to be a novice would expect complete compliance and so any deviance would be seen as ‘indiscipline.’ However, a mentor who is open to suggestions does gain in the process. A mentor reflected on one such episode. Though tactical in nature, the episode did act as a learning point for the mentor.

“…this business magazine had shortlisted us and they had wanted to talk to us about a piece…I was of the view that it was waste of time…but my protégé said that let us spend some time on that as it would help our brand…I was reluctant but I agreed and so they came and spoke to us and the piece was published. This actually translated into a very good business opportunity for us…and from that time I decided that we should do some more of these interviews…I still remember that I had tried to dissuade him and he took a decision against my advice…a lesson for me.”

Disagreement, if it arises, is also seen by some protégés as an opportunity for rethinking the idea. Rather than being discouraged by the opposing views, these protégés use it as an opportunity to further refine and shape the idea. Thus, disagreement, according to them, could be converted to a win-win proposition for all. The protégé, in illustrating this point, observed,

“There is this company we are trying to collaborate with…but my mentors were advising me to be cautious…I had spent a lot of time with this company and I could see a clear business proposition coming out…and I think that some time when you are in disagreement it makes you think more…that made me go back and I by thinking critically actually uncovered some loopholes in the contract…this way the mentor’s objection is taken care of and my objective of not letting this company go is also achieved.”

D. Facilitating access to network of mentors

As the enterprise stabilizes - a steady cash flow and stable product-market fit - the relationship between the mentor and the protégé also undergoes changes. The mutual understanding, if cemented in the incubation phase, turns the relationship into that of ‘co-equals’. Commenting on this transformation, a protégé observed,

“The reciprocation of respect amongst us has changed over the stages. During the initial time [the mentor] used to advise and ask us to do it and now as we have grown he asks “What do you think about it”? From ‘do it’ to ‘what do you think about it’, I see a change in our relationship.”

Of course, such changes in relationship are determined by the learning that the protégé has imbibed in the incubation phase and the willingness to face challenges. The mentor’s engagement with the protégé moves on to more strategic arenas and less time is spent on operational issues. This waxing of protégés’ capabilities and the waning of the mentors’ operational advice is a sign that the relationship has been productive and has reached the culmination point.
“If they are willing to learn from the experience, their dependence on you as a mentor keeps coming down because their ability to think on their own keeps increasing...their maturity as entrepreneurs, their sophistication keeps improving. So there is no need to ask them the same basic questions that you did in the beginning. They do not come back to me on things like this is what happened, this is what they said how should I respond...now the time that I spend with them becomes less and less.”

Interviews suggest that the protégés, in addition to key mentors, also develop a network of ‘informal’ mentors over a period of time. Typically, these mentors are active for a shorter duration of time and guide the protégés on specific issues. The access to this network is, more often than not, facilitated by key mentors or developed through the personal contacts of the protégé. The logic, as a mentor pointed out, is to ensure that the protégé gets wider exposure to ideas from people who might not be completely associated with the company (unlike key mentors) but nevertheless have ideas or specific suggestions. As a protégé observed,

“We have developed contacts with four or five people from very different fields... with some I have a built a personal contact. One is actually our customer. One of them helps in government regulations and understanding macro-economic situations. Another has helped in business development and stage funding. Some of them are helpful in initial stages. For example, a mentor advised that the rigor of technology has to be perfect as rural people may not be tech savvy...another mentor was instrumental in creating sales and marketing strategy and on how to kick start a company with no track record and how to replicate the success.”

This network can also extend to include stakeholders such as the customers and employees and in some cases close friends and relatives. This ‘360 degree’ mentoring provides new perspectives, yet, given the short-term engagement of these mentoring relationships the chances are, according to a protégé’, that suggestions from these mentors might not be given serious attention. But, suspending the cynicism can turn out to be beneficial for the protégé and the enterprise

“Now, this entrepreneur had visited our office, where we demonstrated our products and briefed him on the company...and he gave us some suggestions that this would work, this may not work and this will not work and on hearing this, I was unhappy and had even thought what did he know...but over a few weeks of time I gave it some careful thinking and I realized that he was right...we did change some product features and now it is making lot more sense.”

E. Reiteration of enterprise objectives

Though this study predominantly focused on mentoring in social enterprises, a fundamental question on how different it is to mentor in contrast to a commercial venture provided some insightful answers. Some mentors argued that the ‘basics’ of mentoring did not vary between these entities.

“I think they have the same problem and same challenges. They are largely looking for same sorts of assistance and inputs...somebody to understand the problem, give them suggestions and solutions, connect them with people who can help them...I do not see much difference.”
From the protégés' perspective though, to begin with, there is a lot of fanfare around the 'social' part of the enterprise. It is possible that over a period of time the 'commercial' part assumes more significance and 'social impact' becomes a by-product. This is not to suggest that it is carried out deliberately but given the pressures of the environment the entrepreneur sees 'financial' parameters as far more important. Commenting on this, a protégé from a 'social enterprise' observed,

“It’s the usage of the word ‘social’ that makes me uncomfortable. Recently certain types of people have started saying that this is our financial metrics and this is our social metrics and investors should accept a compromise in financials for the sake of social metrics. We as a company, consider financial metrics as the final say. Our board has understood our philosophy clearly and we they do not ask questions on social impact. We do report them with market segmentation and rural urban divide in customers but it is purely from a marketing point of view.”

Yet, given the definition (contested, no doubt) of social enterprise as an entity that adds social value, the mentor faces a dilemma as, in the end, it is the protégé's ‘business’. In addition, not all mentors are capable of guiding the protégé on identifying and measuring social impact. For some mentors such dilemmas do not exist, as they are very clear and choosy about the enterprises that they wish to mentor. For the enterprises they choose, the ‘social impact’ is intertwined quite thickly with the fabric of the business. According to a mentor, these are the businesses that have ‘social impact rolled in.’ However, even within such enterprises there are possibilities that the protégé may try to focus on profitable segments with minimum social impact and it becomes the responsibility of the mentor to point out the primary objectives behind the setting up of the enterprise. Consistent counseling and pointing out the possibility of a much more wide impact in the future are some of the techniques that mentors try to use to set the protégé ‘back on track.’ This is probably a key contribution that a mentor could make in guiding the social enterprise.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper makes three contributions to the existing knowledge and practice on organizational mentoring. First, it has identified and elaborated on key attributes of mentors and protégés necessary for a productive relationship. Second, this paper has argued that the functions of mentoring a new business while having certain parallels with that of the functions of employee mentoring also differ in few aspects. Third, mentoring social enterprises, though not fundamentally different from that of mentoring commercial enterprises, creates some unique challenges for protégés and mentors. The following section elaborates on each of these contributions.

Some studies on employee mentoring point out characteristics such as willingness to learn, honesty, confidence, ability, and competence as desirable protégé characteristics (for example, Allen 2003). In the area of entrepreneurial mentoring few studies have identified and matched socio-economic factors, compatible learning styles and industry-specific experience (Devins et al. 2005; Kent et al. 2003) as key ingredients for the success of mentoring relationship. This study extends these findings by suggesting that experience and empathy, intensity and interest, transparency, development of individual and social spark are seen as some of the desirable attributes by mentors and protégés. Though, some of these attributes have been identified in earlier works (for example, honesty) this study embeds these attributes in the context of mentoring in social enterprises and more
importantly, provides specific illustrations of how these attributes are understood and assessed by the individual concerned. Take, for instance, the development of individuals. This characteristic might easily be seen as an obvious attribute but some protégés indicate that some mentors, in their zeal, might actually take decisions for the protégés. Instead, the protégés require the mentors to mold their decision-making abilities and ensure that they are ready to take on future challenges. This distinction from the individual and the enterprise and ensuring growth of both these entities is the implicit meaning behind the attribute development of individual. Similarly, interest shown by either mentor or protégé is assessed through different indicators. For example, the protégé gauges the interest of the mentor by taking into consideration the time lavished on say, a report or the follow-up by the mentor on previous suggestions. Though such indicators would vary based on the individuals or contexts, what emerges quite clearly is that mentors and protégés are continuously engaged in the process of determining the quality of interest.

The second conclusion that could be drawn from this paper is on the contents of mentoring new businesses. Previous works on the contents of mentoring, in particular employee mentoring, have focused on the psycho-social and career related support that mentor provides. Kram (1983), for example, suggested that mentoring relationships offered both career-related and psycho-social support. While the former enhanced the protégé’s visibility and enhanced his or her capabilities of navigating through the corporate world, the latter function instilled in the protégé “a sense of competence, confidence, and effectiveness in the managerial role.” (p. 614) Yet, as some scholars have observed, given the difference in contexts between employee mentoring and new business mentoring, there is bound to be some difference in the nature of mentoring functions (Waters et al. 2002).

So, while there is evidence in this study to suggest that mentors did provide, say, exposure and visibility – a key psycho-social support function (Kram 1983) - to the protégés, there is also sufficient evidence to indicate that they provided other mentoring functions that are more oriented towards new business mentoring. Thus, for example, this paper indicates that effective mentors created an environment, particularly at the initial stage of business, where the protégé is encouraged to reflect quite intensively on the path ahead. The mentor also, as it has been argued earlier, assists the protégé in developing a disciplined or structured thought process. At the same time, it has also been indicated that in the initial stages of the enterprise and the mentoring relationship, the functions of mentoring could be strongly affected by disagreements. The resolution of these disagreements is dependent, to a large extent, on the perception of the capabilities and intent of the individuals concerned. Though care could be taken in pairing mentors and protégés, it is also important for the individuals to make an early and earnest attempt to understand the strengths, capabilities and the seriousness of the other.

Thirdly, mentoring social enterprises, according to many participants, is not entirely different from that of mentoring a commercial enterprise. Though they face the same types of issues and questions regarding customers, products and markets, the social enterprise, either by definition or by norm, ought to pay ‘explicit’ attention to the impact it creates in the society. This study reveals that sometimes, given the rough and tumble of the market environment, priorities could undergo a shift. Under such circumstances mentors have a critical role to play as they try to balance the social objective or intent of the enterprise with that of the protégés’ desire for a quick commercial return. There are no easy answers for such dilemmas. Yet, this study indicates that mentors do (and probably would have to) choose carefully. Identifying projects that have the potential to make a massive
impact and ensuring that the protégés are on track towards it would probably be one of the critical contributions that mentors could make for the development of social enterprises.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The current study interviewed both mentors and protégés engaged in social enterprises. Analysis of the results has identified key desirable attributes of the individuals and important functions of mentoring. These conclusions, however, have to be seen in the light of certain limitations. All the participants of this study were males and so differential power relationship between genders (Ramaswami and Dreher 2010) and its impact on mentoring remains unexplored and would prove to be a worthwhile avenue for future research. Though the participants were chosen to represent different growth stages of the enterprise, the numbers were rather limited. So, a sufficiently large sample from different stages of the enterprise growth would help in charting the changes in the mentoring functions in a more robust fashion. Further qualitative studies in this area can add more value by substantiating the results of this study and offer a more nuanced interpretation of mentoring relationships. More such qualitative studies would also help in formulating well-informed hypotheses that can then be subject to verification by large-scale quantitative surveys.
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