

≈ SUMMARY ≈

**MAGIC BULLETS, MATES OR MYTHS – WHO ARE THE MENTORS?**

*Marian Tye and L. Murray Gillin*

*Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship, Swinburne University of Technology*

**Principal Topic**

To date, by far the bulk of mentoring literature reflects activity in intra-organisational and corporate environments. In 2000 it was estimated that over a third of the major U.S. corporations had established formal mentor programs (Nemanick, 2000). The rise of the mentor is often seen as coinciding with the rise of the human resource development movement and achieved prominence in the period 1975 – 1990 (Monaghan and Lunt, 1992) and interest in mentoring was significantly boosted with the introduction of equal employment opportunity legislation, when mentor programs were identified as a means of addressing opportunities for women and individuals in minority groups. The available literature is largely organisation-centric and portrays mentoring as the best (and sometimes worst) thing to happen in career development. The majority of references relate to formal mentoring programs.

However, entrepreneurial research has, over time, identified a number of particular factors which are believed to contribute to entrepreneurial success. Of particular interest to this research is the reference to mentors. Gartner et al. (1992) identified one of the factors contributing to the likelihood of success of the entrepreneur was the amount of time and the intensity devoted to specific activities including finding mentors. Authors such as Hisrich (1989) and Timmons and Spinelli (2004) recommend entrepreneurs use mentors, advisors or form quasi-boards to gain valuable counsel and advice from outsiders. However few studies have examined the relationship of the mentor and the entrepreneur. Despite this, the concept of mentoring is increasingly applied to sources of assistance advocated for nascent entrepreneurs.

A process of discovery continues to explore the concepts of mentors and mentoring to better understand the role of significant others in the process of new venture creation. This paper builds on previous exploration of data.

**Methodology**

This study, whilst fitting into the interpretive paradigm, has combined both inductive and deductive processes. The methodology selected is an iterative sequence of activities resulting in a multiple case study, the objective being to gather rich data to gain greater insight and themes for more intensive investigation. The methodological processes were selected to move from the intuitive and inductive to the acquisition of qualitative data for analysis and deduction.

The data on which these analyses are based include survey and qualitative interview, and other data for thirty-two case studies of owner managers of growth ventures. The cases were drawn from the USA, Canada, England and Australia in order to gauge the use of the term “mentor” by non-US entrepreneurs.

## **Results and Implications**

Based on the in-depth interviews and surveys, entrepreneurs would appear to use the term “mentor” infrequently and sparingly. With very few exceptions, those individuals named as mentors were valued for the psych-social support provided as well as their business-related acumen. Although entrepreneurs attributed characteristics generally associated with mentoring such as “coach” and “role model” to significant individuals, the term “mentor” would appear to be reserved for the select few.

Attributing success or failure to the consequence of their own ability and actions drives the entrepreneur to seek out individuals who, between them, provide a range of mentor-like assistance. Although gender differences emerge in both the “who” and “how” of this assistance, there is agreement that mentors are not the magic bullet, they are unlikely to be mates, and maybe mentoring programs are based on myth. The implications are challenging for those designing mentor programs.

**CONTACT:** Marian Tye. Team Works Australasia Pty Ltd. PO Box 237 Nth Fremantle WA 6159  
Tel: 0419 967 455, Email: [mtye@teamworks.com.au](mailto:mtye@teamworks.com.au)