

The Power of Mentoring? An  
exploratory study into mentoring and  
its effectiveness as a learning and  
development tool for Irish SMEs

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## Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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## **Chapter 1 Abstract**

The aim of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of mentoring as a form of learning and development for Irish SME's. The study will take an exploratory approach on the subject as there is very little research that has been done on this area within an Irish context. For the purpose of this study, a qualitative approach has been used in the form of semi-structured interviews. Five interviews were carried out amongst clients who recently participated in the Dublin Local Enterprise Office's (LEO) mentoring programme. The participants came from different backgrounds and all the participants have their own businesses in a variety of sectors such as crafts, education and male grooming. The study produced some interesting results regarding the extent to which mentoring can affect the mentoree's ideas due to the level of validation the mentoree gains from the mentor. The study also found that culture can affect the mentoring process as one of the participants from the Czech Republic found the mentoring process difficult to follow because of cultural differences. Following the findings of the study, areas such as culture shock within the mentoring process and the effects of learning from the mentor's perspective were considered for future research.

## **Chapter 2 Introduction**

In recent years, the number of SME's within Europe alone has grown to a huge extent and provides employment to 122 million people (Peel, 2008, p. 2). In Ireland for example, SME's have a massive impact on employee turnover as statistics indicate that 50.3% of turnover is caused by SME's which accounts for €168 billion in comparison to €166.3 billion that is generated by large organisations (Central Statistics Office, 2012, p. 16). The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate whether mentoring is perceived to be an effective form of learning, specifically within small and medium sized Irish businesses. In recent years, there has been an increase in the use of mentoring programmes within organisations. The CIPD found that 85% of organisations use mentoring schemes as they are viewed as one of the top three talent development initiatives (CIPD, 2014, p. 9). When one takes these statistics into consideration, it is evident that mentoring is growing within the workplace. St. Jean et al (2011) note that public organisations offering mentoring to people who are looking to start a business is now quite common. Despite the increased focus on this area, there are certain gaps within the research in relation to mentoring.

## **Chapter 3 Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The following chapter will examine the current literature surrounding the topics of this study. The literature review will discuss the push/pull motivation theory and how it affects an individual's motivation to make certain decisions. The literature review will then examine studies which have highlighted the opportunities that mentoring can present to organisations in terms of development for the mentoree, the mentor and the organisation. Following on from this, the literature review will then discuss the mentor/mentoree relationship and how perceptions can affect the relationship and the mentoring experience. The literature review will focus on SMEs, the factors which affect mentoring for them and the limitations that can also hinder mentoring from being implemented within SMEs. Finally, the literature review will discuss the lack of evidence surrounding the effectiveness of mentoring.

### **Mentoring Defined**

The literature review will begin by looking at the definition of mentoring and its place within organisations. According to Jones (2012) there has been an increase in the number of academic studies on mentoring and its importance within organisations. A recent study by the CIPD indicated that 85% of organisations (including those within the public sector) provide mentoring to their employees (CIPD, 2014, p. 9). Many academics have provided various definitions of mentoring over the years. Some view mentoring as “a process to learn new skills and develop the individual's career” (Philip-Jones, 1997, p. 9, cited by Stewart & Rigg, 2011, p. 203). Whereas others define mentoring as a tool which can be utilised to attract, develop and retain talent (Arora & Rangnekar, 2014, p. 208). Lankau & Scandura (2002) note that researchers such as Kram et al (1996) defined mentoring as a working relationship that enhances self development which then contributes towards company performance. Despite the variations on what mentoring is, it is important to note that the outline of these definitions remains constant: relationships and personal development. Each definition revolves around the notion that mentoring is a relationship where a manager uses their experience and knowledge to develop an individual's career and allows them to gain new skills (Stewart & Rigg, 2011, p. 203). In addition to the focus of strengthening and managing the mentor/mentoree relationship, mentoring looks at the bigger picture in terms of learning and development. Unlike coaching which focuses on completing a task that has a short term orientation, mentoring goes even further and looks to develop the individual for the long term

(Clutterbuck, 2004, p. 23). Furthermore, Clutterbuck (2004) notes that both mentors and coaches prefer to give feedback to the participants but the difference with mentoring is that the mentoree is encouraged to reflect on feedback and use it to develop their skills and process of thinking. Mentoring focuses on helping the mentoree to think for themselves and to use their newfound knowledge to help run their business and make decisions on the directions the mentoree's want their organisation and their career to take (Clutterbuck, 2004, p. 20). The approach that will be adopted for this study is Kram et al., (1996) definition of mentoring as a form of self development within a working relationship. According to Doyle & O'Neill, (2001) it is the thirst for knowledge in running a business or solving a particular problem which influences individuals to seek out mentors. However, this does not consider if there are other motivational factors which entice individuals to pursue mentoring. The next section takes a look at the motivational theory of push and pull factors and how it relates to mentoring.

## **Motivation**

This section considers the current literature surrounding motivation, specifically focusing on the push/pull factor theory. The reason being that motivation has a big part to play as it initiates the actions of an individual to make certain decisions (Mullins & Christy, 2013, p. 246). According to Schjoedt & Shaver, (2007) the research surrounding motivational theories indicates that individuals are either pushed or pulled towards career choices such as self employment. Developed by researchers such as Hakim (1989) and McClelland et al (2005), push factors are defined as personal factors which ultimately 'push' or sometimes force an individual to do something whereas pull factors are opportunities that entice individuals towards something (Kirkwood, 2009, p. 346). Push factors are associated as negative aspects such as unemployment and job dissatisfaction (Schjoedt & Shaver, 2007, p. 738). According to Startiene, Remeikiene & Dumciuviene, (2010) dissatisfaction in a current job has now been recognised as a push factor for individuals to become entrepreneurs. However, this theory contrasts a previous study carried out amongst 75 entrepreneurs who found that while some participants were heavily influenced by their current job satisfaction, the participants were more likely to do so as part of a revenge tactic by setting up a business similar to their employer (Kirkwood, 2009, p. 358). Therefore, job dissatisfaction is closely related to push factors. However this leads the literature to question which ones are the strongest?

Earlier studies surrounding this topic have noted that pull factors are more influential than push factors for individuals to become entrepreneurs (Schjoedt & Shaver, 2007, p. 734). This theory

has been questioned by others. As previously discussed, the study carried out by Kirkwood (2009) indicated that more entrepreneurs referred to push factors as their reasons for becoming self-employed. However, another study which was carried out amongst up and coming entrepreneurs found that job satisfaction does not defect motivation as individuals who were satisfied with their job were just as likely to start their own business (Schjoedt & Shaver, 2007, p. 748). On the other hand, pull factors are also quite influential. According to Kirkwood & Campbell-Hunt, (2007) pull factors have been found to be more influential with male entrepreneurs as they had a greater desire to become independent whereas female entrepreneurs were more influenced by push factors; namely childcare and job dissatisfaction. Additionally, research has found that the workings of pull factors closely relate to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. From a sociological-physiological perspective, Startiene, Remeikiene & Dumciuviene (2010) note that pull factors in relation to the individuals need to fulfil goals relates to the individual's esteem needs on Maslow's Hierarchy (see appendix 1). Additionally, the individual's needs will continue to progress as they become entrepreneurs and create their business ventures (Startiene, Remeikiene & Dumciuviene, 2010). Therefore, push/pull factor theory affects and influences an individual's desire to become an entrepreneur and it also works alongside Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The next section will examine what the literature says regarding learning and development.

## **Learning & Development**

As previously discussed in the introduction, mentoring is becoming a more popular learning and development mechanism in organisations (Poulsen 2013, Lankau & Scandura, 2002 and Doyle & O'Neill, 2001). Some of the literature surrounding this area has also discovered links between mentoring and personal competencies. Poulsen (2013) notes that by emphasising competency development as a strategic organisational goal, the mentoring programme will become more effective. On the other hand, mentoring has been known to contribute towards the behavioural development of participants. According to Ragins, (1997) personality is a key component in creating identity and familiarity amongst mentors and mentees, especially during the matching process. However, the research suggests that mentoring could initiate behavioural change in both the mentor and the mentee (Allen, Eby & Lentz, 2006, p. 148). For example, a study which carried out interviews with mentorees who were on a mentoring programme within a healthcare trust indicated changes in the mentoree's self-confidence and ability to initiate change in their roles (Jones, 2012, p. 64). These results exemplify that the

theory that people who receive mentoring are more likely to report greater relational job learning as well as higher levels of skill development (Lankau & Scandura, 2002, p. 780).

While personal learning is evident in workplace mentoring, there is little research which examines the learning outcomes from the entrepreneur's perspective. However, with the increasing focus on entrepreneurship education in third level universities and the implementation of mentoring programmes aimed at supporting entrepreneurs, the research focus has also changed (Lefebvre & Collot, 2013, p. 371). Studies have now shown that mentoring has a link with seeking business opportunities. St. Jean et al (2011) have found that the socialisation component of mentoring allows up and coming entrepreneurs to gain important knowledge in order to understand their business needs which will result in the mentoree having a better chance in finding opportunities that will benefit their start up enterprise. This is often referred to as entrepreneurial learning which ties in with experiential learning.

Developed by Kolb (1984) who believed that individuals learned best by doing, experiential learning is a process in which the learner gains knowledge through experience (Lefebvre & Collot, 2013, p. 371). There are four stages involved in the experiential learning process: concrete experience, abstract conceptualisation, reflective observation and active experimentation (Mainemelis, Boyatzis and Kolb, 2002, p. 5). Poulsen (2013) also notes that experiential learning is a cyclical process as the learner will never stop gaining new knowledge from experiences. In addition to the theory itself, researchers have found that individuals have their own form of learning styles which can often result in the view of learning as a personality trait (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 199). The learning styles have been identified as the Nine-Region Learning Style Type Grid (see appendix 2). Each learning style is linked to the four stages of experiential learning and the grid indicates that each style focuses on certain aspects more so than others but it does not mean that individuals with each style cannot learn from one another (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 199). This is relevant to the mentoring process which focuses on the mentoree learning through their experiences and by the experiences of their mentor (Poulsen, 2013, p. 259). Therefore, it could be suggested that learning is evident within mentoring.

As well as experiential learning, there is also evidence that leadership can be developed through mentoring. According to Borredon & Ingham, (2005) research suggests that a leadership and mentor role can be combined and implemented efficiently in certain organisational cultures such as R & D. This research was conducted within TECHNO, a technical company which

produces advanced equipment in relation to the acceleration of particles (Borredon & Ingham, 2005, p. 493). The study revealed how the founder of the organisation referred to as JO, adopts the common characteristics such as the provision of feedback and guidance but he also provides the atmosphere needed to generate new ideas from employees (Borredon & Ingham, 2005, p. 496). Therefore, the study of TECHNO further exemplifies the presence of experiential learning but it also indicates that mentoring can develop participants in helping them to make changes within their organisation which can result in the participants in taking on leadership roles in the future.

### **The Mentor/Mentoree Relationship**

So far the literature has discussed how mentoring can be defined and its relationship to learning and development. However, none of these components can be achieved without a strong and viable mentor/mentoree relationship. While the mentoree may have reasons for pursuing mentoring, they are not without some internal doubts. For starters, there is the fear of weaknesses being exposed throughout the process and not enough time being spent on developing their strengths (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 36). Additionally, the mentoree is aware of the risk of the process failing due to poor strategies or difficult mentors who do not share the same goals as the mentoree (Clutterbuck, 2004, p. 42). Likewise, the mentor shares the same fears that they will not get along with the mentoree or that the mentoree will not demonstrate the same level of commitment and motivation that the mentor has shown (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 44). Fortunately, the mentoree will overcome these fears and pursue a mentoring relationship. The mentoree does not commence the program without any goals or vision on what is to be expected from the experience. According to Doyle & O'Neill, (2001) the most common expectations mentorees have for their mentor is someone who can demonstrate the right abilities, attitudes and qualities. In terms of abilities, mentorees expect their mentors to have excellent listening skills, to be able to question the mentoree about their future goals and analyse the mentoree's decision making as well as demonstrate the ability to empathise with the mentoree (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 40). These types of expectations form the mentoree's perceived organisational support (POS) which refers to the level of support the mentoree receives from their mentor and the greater the support, the higher the POS (Hu, Wang et al, 2014, p. 25).

Furthermore, mentorees expect mentors to respect their values and to have confidence in their abilities. Eby et al (2013) note the importance of this for both parties as one of the core

mentoring functions is psychosocial support and the mentoree views their mentor as a role model. In addition to this, many mentorees want a mentor that will be honest, supportive, and optimistic and provide a good level of critical feedback but not to the extent where the mentoree feels abused or neglected (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 42). Lankau & Scandura (2002) note that providing feedback allows the mentoree to feel more competent in their contributions towards the process which can further result in positive perceptions towards the mentor. Previous studies have emphasised that the mentor and mentoree should address expectations during the initial first meeting so as to avoid any downfalls caused by miscommunication (Jones, 2013, p. 392). Both parties will have perceptions towards the other and the process but does it have any impact? It does. As previously discussed, mentorees have a certain amount of POS towards mentors (Hu et al, 2014). The time, commitment and experience the mentor gives towards the mentoree are often referred as mentor human capital which can influence the mentoree's perceptions in a positive light (Eby et al, 2013, p. 447). Furthermore, mentoree's who demonstrate positive perceptions towards their mentors tend to have stronger relationships with their mentors and are also more likely to succeed (Hu, Wang et al, 2014, p. 31).

For the mentoree, the ideal mentor is someone who will develop the mentoree's mindset and adapt it to one which the mentoree needs in order to achieve his or her goals (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 41). As Clutterbuck (2004) notes, an excellent awareness of the behavioural needs of others is a core competency that the mentor is required to possess. The ideal mentor will also stimulate the mentoree so as encourage self learning and to help the mentoree to look at strategies and decisions from different perspectives (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 41). Therefore, both the mentor and mentoree will have expectations of one another and it is vital these expectations are achieved. Particularly those of the mentoree as they are the instigators of the process as well as the central focus of the mentor.

### **SMEs: Factors and Limitations in Implementing Mentoring**

In recent years, the study of SME's and their functionality has become a great interest for academic researchers. As previously stated in the introduction, the presence of SMEs has grown significantly and it will continue to grow in the future. Curran (1999), Gray (1998), Storey (1994) and Stanworth & Gray (1991) believe this is the case because SMEs make significant contributions to the local economy (cited by Peel, 2008, p. 1). In Ireland for example, SMEs who trade within the domestic economy generated a total of €42.2 billion of gross value added to the economy (CSO, 2012, p. 16). It is interesting to note the contribution

SMEs make within an economy despite their smaller scale. The reason being that SMEs operate in a different way to large organisations and therefore must be managed in a unique way (Garcia-Morales et al, 2007, cited by O'Brien & Hamburg, 2014, p. 62). Regardless of their uniqueness, there are many barriers SMEs face on a regular basis which often hinders the firm from implementing a development initiative such as mentoring. It is no surprise that a lack of finance, resources and even time are the biggest barriers SMEs face on a daily basis (O'Brien & Hamburg, 2014, p. 62). Additionally, gender roles and management styles can also affect the learning and development of SMEs. Peel (2008) notes that female SME managers are sometimes more open to participate in mentoring than male SME managers due to the differences in which men and women lead and manage in organisations. In alignment with management, the general attitude of the SME manager or owner will ultimately determine if mentoring will be implemented or not. Beaver and Prince (2004) note that trying to implement a strategy which goes against a manager's objectives is extremely difficult due to their management style and the organisational culture. This point particularly refers to SME managers who tend to be quite autocratic and make irrational and impulsive decisions (Peel, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, managers of this particular style would be very reluctant to invest money and time in a mentoring programme that they feel would not be beneficiary to their goals or the organisation (Peel, 2008, p. 4). Despite these barriers, SMEs continue to find ways in which to partake in mentoring but there is another barrier the research has indicated which has dramatically hindered an SMEs willingness to participate in it and that is the effectiveness of mentoring, or rather the lack of evidence of measuring the effectiveness of mentoring which will be discussed in the next section.

### **Lack of evidence on the effectiveness of mentoring**

Allen, Eby & Lentz (2006) noted in their study between formal mentoring characteristics and the perceived effectiveness that there is a lack of research in relation to the effectiveness of mentoring. It is important to note that this is not the first time this has been noticed. Patton et al, (2000) previously discussed how the lack of evidence in determining the effectiveness of mentoring has been due to a severe lack of research. This ultimately results in individuals discouraging from mentoring because there is no proof that mentoring can generate physical results (Peel, 2008, p. 3). According to Gravells, (2006) Nottingham Business Venture's mentoring scheme (NBV) which focuses on SMEs in the Nottingham area, conducted research in order to determine if there was evidence which could be produced in order to support the belief that mentoring is in fact, beneficial for small businesses (Megginson et al, 2006, p. 144).

The research was carried out amongst entrepreneurs that received mentoring over the previous 18 months and while the majority of participants believed that mentoring benefited themselves personally, half of the participants believed that mentoring did not have any significant effect on their business (Megginson et al, 2006, p. 145). It is interesting to note from the example of NBV that mentorees could easily indicate how mentoring effected their own personal development but when it came to the development of their business it was a different scenario. Similarly, mentorees within a Midlands Healthcare Trust found that their work relationships did not experience any changes as a result of the mentoring programme they participated in (Jones, 2012, p. 64).

## **Chapter 4 The Present Study**

As previously stated, the research question is an exploratory study into the effectiveness of mentoring as a learning and development tool for Irish SME's. Note the word 'exploratory'. The question is taking an explorative approach which means the study will provide an analysis on the topic. According to Adams, (2007) an exploratory study is carried out in relation to social processes or relationships between events. There is a lack of understanding about the processes or relationships, how they work and who is most affected by them. An exploratory study attempts to understand such things. It does not aim to understand why something works in a particular way but rather it tries to gain information on the subject, analyse it and suggest ways in which it could be researched further.

The objectives for the dissertation are as follows:

1. To increase understanding of the topic of mentoring, its processes, etc, by conducting investigations of the mentoring process used by the Local Enterprise Office in Dublin.
2. To increase an understanding of the current trends surrounding the practice of mentoring in selected organisations.
  - The research question will investigate the mentoring process used by the Local Enterprise Office.
3. The dissertation will provide a review of the current literature in relation to mentoring and the processes that are used in SMEs.
4. To provide recommendations based on the findings gained from the interviews and to suggest areas for future research.

## **Chapter 5 Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the research methodology section is to highlight the chosen data collection process for the research topic and the rationale for this approach. The first section will discuss the various methodologies that could be used for this research topic. The second section will discuss the rationale for qualitative research. The research design section will outline how the research aims to achieve its objectives of identifying the learning benefits of mentoring from the mentoree's perspective and how this affects the relationship aspect of the process and their personal perceptions. The research approach, the sample and measures as well as the limitations of the study will also be discussed.

## **Research Philosophy**

Quantitative and qualitative methods of research are useful depending on the rationale of the author's study. Quantitative research is known as research which is based on 'principles of positivism and neo-positivism and adheres to the standards of a strict research design' (Adams, 2007, p. 26). The process of collecting data is quite logical as it is often derived from the sciences because it looks to analyse numerical data (Heath, 2005, p. 728). Quantitative research focuses on existing theory and draws up a general understanding of it by creating hypotheses. Heath (2005) further notes that the quantitative researcher's sample is a specific group of people and the findings of the data is a representative of the population of the sample.

Quantitative research involves the researcher using deductive reasoning which is about fact. According to Adams (2007), deductive reasoning looks to analyse theory and create hypotheses which summarise the author's findings from examining and the grounds for testing said theory. With this form of reasoning, it is important to note that the researcher will test the hypotheses in the hope of proving them to be either true or false. If the test is inconclusive, the hypotheses will be revisited and tested again (Adams, 2007).

One quantitative method which is used to collect data is surveys. Surveys are often designed using a certain type of framework such as a Likert scale. For example, a study to determine the relationship between the South African government and SMMEs (small and medium scale enterprises) adopted Likert scale scores where their sample population would be expected to number the extent to which they agreed or disagreed to a number of statements that related to the researcher's hypotheses about the relations between the government and the SMMEs (Peters & Naicker, 2013, p. 18). Other researchers often design simple close ended questions that require a yes or no answer. The benefits of quantitative research are the reliability of the process and the speed of distributing the research to large samples and collecting the data (Choy, 2011, p. 102).

## **Qualitative Research**

On the opposite end of the methodology process is qualitative research. Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research looks at the words. Qualitative research looks at the situation and questions the feelings, experiences, the emotions of real situations and how the participants felt and how they dealt with the situations they were experiencing (Cooper, Reinman & Cronin, 2007, p. 50). When using qualitative research, the method of thinking closely associated with

it is known as inductive reasoning. Unlike deductive reasoning which is based around hypotheses, inductive reasoning concentrates on observing the data and drawing a number of findings (Adams, 2007, p. 29). The collection of data is a continuous process as inductive reasoning focuses on the emotions and opinions of the participants and it is only when there are no new insights does the data collection terminate entirely (Heath, 2005, p. 518). While some researchers prefer to use either quantitative or qualitative methods, it is important to note that some will use a mixed methods approach where a combination of the two is used to collect and analyse the data.

The tools which can be used for qualitative research can vary from case studies to conversational analysis or ethnography where the researcher observes the participants, their activities on location and the location itself over a long period of time (Lee, Mitchell & Harman, 2011, p. 77). In-depth interviews are another tactic that researchers can take and it is often the most popular with qualitative researchers. In-depth interviews are good ways of capturing what the participant is feeling and they take on the form of structured interviews where there is a set process, semi-structured interviews where there is a somewhat set list of questions with the allowance of flexibility and unstructured interviews where the interview is very casual and conversational (Pistrang & Barker, 2012, p. 8). However, Lunenberg & Irby (2008) note that interviews are time consuming which often results in the participant size being smaller than the number of participants taking part in a survey.

## **Research Design**

Having identified the various methods that could be used for the purpose of this research topic, the analysis of the literature surrounding the research topic suggests that the qualitative approach is more suited to the topic and in depth semi structured interviews are more suited tools in helping to collect the required data. How the author came to this conclusion will be discussed as follows.

Having read various articles surrounding mentoring and the learning process behind it, it was duly noted that the majority of the studies carried out adopted quantitative methods or mixed methods. Studies such as Arora & Rangnekar's survey which was conducted amongst managers and their employees across India in order to investigate the mentors relationship in terms of career resilience (Arora & Rangnekar, 2014, p. 205). Likewise, Hu, Wang et al (2014) adopted the quantitative approach by using a survey to determine the level of perceived organisational support received by the mentors and the extent of support received by the protégées themselves (Hu, Wang et al, 2014, p. 22). While these methods produced necessary results, it is interesting to note that the methods do not capture the opinions of the participants. There is no room for further exploration into the protégées opinion on whether they receive enough support. The same applies to the study with the Indian workers. The studies are focused on numerical data only.

On the other hand, the author discovered some studies that took qualitative approaches towards the subject of mentoring. For example, one study used a case study technique to analyse the learning outcomes gained by the staff at a West Midlands Healthcare trust as part of a new formal mentoring programme (Jones, 2012, p. 57). Whereas another study which aimed to examine the contribution of mentoring within a Research & Development team in TECHNO, carried out semi structured in depth interviews amongst the staff and mentor (Borredon & Ingham, 2005, p. 493). Pistrang & Barker (2012) note that the benefit of carrying out interviews is that the data collected is rich and the participants can feel appreciated in being listened to and they may be more open to being honest and provide a greater insight, something which cannot be done with a survey. Therefore, it is evident that a qualitative method is the best approach for the chosen research topic because mentoring focuses on the development and learning process between the mentors and mentorees and a qualitative approach would best capture the outcomes and the experiences of the process and if the mentores felt they learnt

anything at all. Therefore, it is for these reasons why the study will take the form of semi-structured interviews.

## **Participants**

There were five participants in total that took part in semi-structured interviews. The participants have all taken part in the Dublin Local Enterprise Office's mentoring programme. As the participants wished to remain anonymous for the study, they will be referred to as Interviewee 1, Interviewee 2, Interviewee 3, Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 5. The researcher gained access to the participants through one of the female managers at the Local Enterprise Office. For the purpose of this study, she wished to remain anonymous.

Originally from Dublin, Interviewee 1 runs his own newsagents business in the City Centre. He has recently finished the mentoring programme with his mentor but would like to keep in contact with his mentor. Interviewee 2 is also from Dublin but lived in Spain for 30 years. She set up a cartridge recycling business during her time in Spain and she sought mentoring from the DCC. After the business did not succeed, she returned to Ireland with the aim of setting up an online crafters website that sells handcrafted Spanish candles. Like Interviewee 1, she has currently finished the mentoring process.

Similarly, Interviewee 3 is originally from Dublin. Having worked in the financial services and property industry for a long period of time, she then went to China and lived there for a number of years. During her time in China, she gained many contacts and immersed herself in the culture. Upon returning to Ireland, she set up her own educational consultancy firm which works with a number of universities on a global scale. She has four employees: two are based in China while the remaining two are based in Ireland. Like the other participants, she has recently finished the mentoring process.

Originally from Belgium, Interviewee 4 came to Ireland seven years ago. He set up his current business which manufactures and sells male beard and moustache oils. His business is online but he hopes to expand into retail. He has met his mentor for two meetings but there was no contact afterwards and due to a number of errors, the mentoring did not continue.

Interviewee 5, on the other hand, was born and raised in the Czech Republic but now lives in Dublin. She has lived in Ireland for the last ten years and she is currently in the process of mentoring. She has so far met her mentor twice and she is trying to develop herself her own fashion line of hand painted silk dresses.

## **Research Procedure**

The author took a number of steps in order to set the research process in motion. First and foremost, the author had to access the participants that would be her sample for the interview. The author decided that the Local Enterprise Office would be the most appropriate source due to the mentoring programmes they provide to small and medium sized businesses that have just started or have been actively in business for a certain period of time. The author contacted the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) by email, explaining what the research would entail, who she wished to interview, how the interviews would take place and how the information would be stored (see appendix 3). LEO was also informed that all personal information would be disclosed in the strictest of confidence and participants would remain anonymous. LEO contacted the author shortly afterwards and requested a proposal which stated the number of people that needed to be interviewed and the time scale for the interviews to take place.

Following on from this, the proposal was sent to LEO and it identified that the interviews would take place from March and onwards. LEO then requested a draft email that could be sent onto their clients (appendix 4 – 6). Once this was completed, it was not long before LEO sent the email to clients that received mentoring within the last year. It is important to note that LEO also requested a copy of the analysis made from the research as well as some feedback and recommendations. The author consented to this request and within a few days, clients responded with interest in participating in interviews. The total number of people who responded was 13. Out of those 13 people, 5 of the respondents did not want to participate as they were still in the early stages of the mentoring programme. The other 9 respondents were more than happy to take part in interviews. Times and dates were arranged for each client but 4 of the respondents ended up cancelling at the last minute due to scheduling and internet malfunctions as 2 of the participants were only available to meet through Skype. Despite this, five interviews were conducted. The author arranged to conduct the interviews in local cafe's nearest to the participant so as to make it as convenient as possible for the participants. One of the interviews was conducted on Skype and was recorded through Vodburner, software that automatically records Skype calls. However, one of the participants who originally consented to the interview being recorded decided she would not be comfortable with it on the day of the interview so notes were taken for her interview. The other interviews were recorded using a Smart Phone and the interviews were transcribed and stored on in a zipped file on a USB memory stick (see appendix 7 for a sample of the transcriptions).

The participants were asked a set number of questions in relation to their background, the scale of their business, what lead them to go for mentoring, their experience with the mentoring programme, what they felt they learned, did they think it was beneficial to their business, would they recommend mentoring to anyone and where do they mentoring will go in the future and what hopes do they have for their businesses (see appendix 8). The participants were asked these questions and the interviewer probed the participants on any other details they felt could be beneficial to the research.

## **Ethical Considerations**

In terms of ethics, the author is aware of personal data that the participants discussed during the interviews. The author is also aware that the participants may not wish to have their names used in the final draft of the dissertation. Therefore, the author has taken precautions by informing the candidates that their names will remain anonymous in the dissertation. As previously stated, the author sent the candidates an email stating this and the author reassured each candidate their anonymity before the interview began. In relation to the personal data being used, the author will remove any names mentioned by the participants and the author will take extra care with data surrounding the candidate's business by removing any financial information, business performance, etc to ensure a fair level of anonymity.

## **Limitations**

One of the biggest limitations of this methodology approach is the time factor. As there is a limited amount of time to complete the dissertation, the author is aware that there has to be a limited number of interviews as the interview process can take a long time. This is due to contacting the participants, conflicting schedules of the participants, conducting the interviews and of course, transcription.

Another limitation is technological malfunctions. As some of the interviews are being done via Skype, there is the limitation of the Skype call freezing or a loss of internet connection which would disrupt both the call and Vodburner. Another limitation with conducting interviews over Skype is the lack of physical interaction which can often be lost when speaking to one another via webcam.

As previously stated, the limitation of conducting semi structured in-depth interviews is that it does not allow the researcher to use a bigger sample because of the length of time taken to complete the process. Additionally, the author is aware that there is a limited access of participants because there is no guarantee that they will participate due to their schedules or unforeseen occurrences.

## **Chapter 6 Findings**

### **Introduction**

This section will now present a table of the main findings of the research. The title of the research question is as follows: *The Power of Mentoring? An exploratory study into the effectiveness of mentoring as a learning and development tool for Irish SMEs.* The study took the form of five semi-structured interviews with entrepreneurs who took part in the mentoring programme with the Dublin Local Enterprise Board. The findings of these interviews are presented in a table format under a thematic analysis which highlights the themes and sub themes that recurred throughout the participant's responses as well as examples from the interviews which highlights the relevant themes and sub themes.

Themes	Sub Themes	Examples from responses
Globalisation	Culture Shock, Multinational Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recurring reference of international experience from participants.</li> <li>• Participants lived abroad, set up multinational companies or are not of Irish origin.</li> <li>• Interviewee 2 lived and set up her business in Spain then returned to Ireland.</li> <li>• Interviewee 3 set up her business in China while living there and Interviewee 4 originated from Belgium.</li> <li>• Interviewee 5 came to Ireland from Czech Republic to set up her business.</li> <li>• Cultural differences in mentoring practices in Spain and Ireland.</li> <li>• Interviewee 2 found Spanish practices very process focused but Irish mentoring more advice focused.</li> <li>• Interviewee 2 experienced culture shock when returning to Ireland as she found it difficult to reimburse herself in the culture again.</li> <li>• Interviewee 5 experiencing culture shock due to language barriers and because she <i>'don't know really Ireland. I don't really know the culture'</i>.</li> </ul>

Themes	Sub Themes	Examples from responses
Experiential Learning	Gaining knowledge, reflecting, receiving feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants reported learning the most by the experience</li> <li>• Mentor’s knowledge was beneficial in creating ideas.</li> <li>• Interviewee 2 felt her mentor’s experience and feedback helped her find her business idea.</li> <li>• Feedback was important to all the participants as they felt it gave them validation.</li> <li>• Interviewee 1 reflected on the social aspect of the process as <i>‘you can just get caught up in the day to day stuff and you don’t sort of open your mind and think outside the box so talking to someone about that will just help you, give you a jolt and just give you a different angle’</i>.</li> <li>• Interviewee 4 found the process unsuccessful but learned what other options would be beneficial to him such as angel investors.</li> </ul>

Theme	Sub theme	Examples from responses
Motivation	Push and Pull Factor theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The motivation behind the participants pursuing mentoring relate to the push/pull theory.</li> <li>• Interviewee 1 was more push factor focused as it was to develop another project.</li> <li>• Interviewee 3 was more ‘push factor’ focused as she needed help with day to day administration.</li> <li>• Interviewee 2 needed to set up her business (push) and she also wanted to find information on digital marketing (pull).</li> <li>• Interviewee 4 simply wanted to create jobs (pull) and needed funding (push).</li> <li>• Interviewee 5’s intention was very much push factor focused as she wanted to run her fashion business.</li> </ul>

Theme	Sub theme	Examples from responses
Relationship Management	Perceptions, networking, mentor/mentoree relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Majority of the mentor/mentoree relationships were positive and strong.</li> <li>• There was lots of networking through the mentor's contacts which the participants found to be extremely beneficial.</li> <li>• All of the participants had positive expectations prior to starting the process.</li> <li>• Interviewee 4 was the only participant who did not have any relationship with his mentor.</li> <li>• Interviewee 4 noted a severe lack of information and no communication from his mentor resulted in the process failing.</li> <li>• Despite his disappointment and the events of the process, he said he would still recommend mentoring to anyone who wished to set up a business.</li> <li>• Interviewee 1 and 2 regarded their mentors as role models and friends and felt that they gained a lot of</li> </ul>

		<p>experience and knowledge from them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Likewise, Interviewee 3 had the same views towards her mentor as she felt that he <i>‘understood her situation and the needs of the business’</i>.</li><li>• Interviewee 5 felt that the cooperation from her mentor, talking about ideas and the feedback she received was the most beneficial aspect of her relationship with her mentor.</li></ul>
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Theme	Sub theme	Examples from responses
Entrepreneurial Learning	Seeking opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important learning component for the participants.</li> <li>• Most of the participants found that mentoring led them to good opportunities for their business.</li> <li>• Interviewee 2 found some difficulty in deciding what type of business she wanted to set up.</li> <li>• With the help of her mentor she <i>'looked at about ten different types of businesses'</i> before she found her idea.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to present the findings of the semi-structured interviews through a thematic analysis. The findings were presented under the themes of Globalisation, Experiential Learning, Entrepreneurial Learning, Motivation and Relationship Management. The findings of the research indicated that the participants were motivated by push/pull factors in seeking mentoring and despite the outcomes; they all had positive perceptions about the process before it even began. Despite these positive perceptions, the findings indicated that Interviewee 4 still had positive perceptions about mentoring as a concept, despite the fact that it was a negative experience for him. Interestingly, the study showed that globalisation and culture differences can affect the learning process of mentoring as some of the participants who came from foreign countries and those who lived abroad before returning to Ireland found this to be the case. The study found that the mentoree's learned the most from the experience itself as well as the mentor's experience. The findings also discussed how mentoring allowed

Interviewee 2 to seek opportunities to help her discover her business idea. The next section will take these findings and interpret their relation to the literature surrounding this topic.

## **Chapter 7 Discussion**

Taking the above findings into consideration, one must now analyse them in greater detail and discuss the linkages between the data and the relevant literature surrounding the topic as well as the relevant themes that were previously highlighted and discussed upon in the findings section. The discussion will focus on the research aims and the sub themes which relate to said aims.

### **Motivation for pursuing mentoring**

It was evident that all of the mentorees had their own individual motivations in seeking mentoring. The reasons they gave in their interviews were factors such as lack of funding which forced them to seek mentoring support or they were factors such as seeking opportunities to develop the business that enticed them to contact the Local Enterprise Office. The author notes that this information links with the push/pull factors theory. One notes that push factors involves things such as family or unemployment that force the individual to make a certain decision whereas pull factors entice the individual to pursue something that could be beneficial to them in the long run, such as running a successful business (Hakim, 1989). In recent years, studies on entrepreneurs have highlighted a greater shift towards pull factors as it has been discovered that pull factors are linked to successful business performance (Shinnar & Young, 2008). Likewise, this information is seen to be applicable within an Irish context as *'the rise in entrepreneurial activity in Ireland in recent years has been driven primarily by perceptions of opportunity'* (Small Business Forum, 2006, p. 54). Previously seen in the section under motivation in Findings, the motivators that the interviewees gave for pursuing mentoring were prime examples of push/pull factors. Interviewee 1's motivations for mentoring were pull factors as were Interviewee 3's and Interviewee 5's as the reasons they gave were related to finding information on a particular market and pursuing other projects within the pipeline. However, this information contrasts with data which has been collected from recent studies which revealed that independence and money are the main pull factors for entrepreneurs (Kirkwood, 2009, p. 352). Likewise, Kirkwood (2009) also revealed that the most common push factors for entrepreneurs are job dissatisfaction and supporting family. While Interviewee 2 did demonstrate a high level of job dissatisfaction and seeking information whereas Interviewee 3 indicated operations management as their push factors, Interviewee 4 was in a different case because his motivations were a combination of push and pull factors. Although there have been some studies such as the one carried out by Kirkwood (2009) have indicated

that there can be a combination of the two, there is little discussion on whether or not these factors can still apply to entrepreneurs seeking mentoring. Interviewee 4 was the only participant who showed a combination of the two as he highlighted a lack of funding (push factor) and the opportunity to create employment (pull factor) as his reasons for seeking mentoring from the Local Enterprise Office. Therefore, push and pull factors have a strong influence on the motivation levels on entrepreneurs to pursue opportunities but what happens when the opportunities are seized? What does the entrepreneur learn from these opportunities?

According to the Small Business Forum (2006), the level of support provided to entrepreneurs in developing their business has grown in the number of government agencies and institutions, such as the Local Enterprise Office, that provide mentoring services to small and medium sized businesses. The author previously discussed how Interviewee 2, in particular, had found that the mentoring process helped her to find an idea that she could then turn into a business. According to St. Jean et al, (2011) there is a link between mentoring and entrepreneurs seeking ideas. During the mentoring process, it is understood that the entrepreneur (or mentoree) gain a vast amount of tacit and technical knowledge and the more knowledge that is gained results in a greater influence on the innovation of the mentoree (St. Jean et al, 2011, p. 39). In addition to this, Politis (2005) further discusses how entrepreneurs with a vast amount of entrepreneurial experience are more likely to develop patterns in spotting opportunities quicker than others which will further result in a greater chance of venture success (Politis, 2005, p. 400). Prior to her current business, Interviewee 2 had set up two different businesses in Madrid that did not succeed even though she had a lot of experience in various areas. However, the perseverance and the foundation of knowledge to start another business allowed her to find a business idea through her mentor's advice. Mentorees who receive regular criticism regarding their strategy have better opportunities to develop their ability to seek good opportunities (St. Jean et al, 2011, p. 40). Interviewee 2's previous start up experience provided a good foundation of knowledge but it was the knowledge she gained during the mentoring process that allowed her to seek out opportunities through her Spanish contacts that allowed her to find her business idea and develop it into a viable and successful business. Therefore, mentoree's who have start up experience are more capable of identifying opportunities which will result in a positive impact on the business (Politis, 2005). The next section will move away from entrepreneurial learning and examine another form of learning which is believed to have some similarities with entrepreneurial learning and that is experiential learning.

## **Experiential Learning**

In addition to the process of entrepreneurial learning, experiential learning is another learning mechanism that is related to mentoring. In recent years, research has shown a significant proportion of the mentoring process is carried out through the experiential learning theory (Poulsen, 2013, p. 259). Kolb believed that people learn through experience and it is through experience that individuals gain knowledge (Kolb, 1984). Experiential learning is a cyclical process that involves four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, active experimentation. The first stage, concrete experience, involves the mentoree's personal experience setting up the foundation of the mentoring process as well as the mentoree's expectations of the process, while the mentor also shares their personal experience with the mentoree and address expectations (Poulsen, 2013, p. 259). With this newfound knowledge, the mentoree will begin to reflect on what they have gained which leads into the reflective observation stage. Poulsen (2013) warns that the mentoree tends to focus on aspects of situations that support their preconceived expectations and it is the role of the mentor to challenge the mentoree's notions and ideas in order to maximise the reflection stage (Poulsen, 2013, p. 260). Following on from this reflective observation, the mentoree enters the abstract conceptualisation stage where the mentoree's outlook on business begins to change and they begin to see things in a new way which leads to a new way of dealing with situations (Poulsen, 2013, p. 260). Finally, the last stage of process, active experimentation, involves the mentoree designing a plan using the new found knowledge they have learned from the mentor; and putting the plan into action (Poulsen, 2013, p. 260). The experiential learning process rotates on a continuous basis as individuals never stop learning from experiences be they professional, personal and even academic.

According to a study carried out by Kolb & Kolb (2005), experiential learning theories are being implemented into education more, particularly amongst entrepreneurial and management students. Kolb & Kolb (2005) recognized the existing research was largely focused on learning styles and how socialisation plays a significant part in gaining knowledge. All of the interviewees noted they learned new pieces of knowledge just from socialising with their mentor as well as other members of the public. For example, Interviewee 4 did not realise there were courses which provided information regarding certain industries until he had spoken to other entrepreneurs. Likewise, it was only when speaking to staff in retail shops, did Interviewee 5 gain a better understanding on the standards she needed to meet to make her luxury scarves collection. Lefebvre & Collot (2013) recognised that individuals use

interpersonal communication for one of three purposes which involve achieving a particular goal, setting up or maintaining relationships or examining the situation that the communicative process is taking place in. Communication can be an indicator of the individual's behaviour but the research does not take the context or institution in which this can take place and whether or not this could alter the purposes of the individual. Politis (2005) notes that individuals with diverse backgrounds are more likely to stimulate creativity which further aids learning and development. Additionally, the environmental context determines the nature of the learning process. The experience of entrepreneurial students will be semi formal and focused on making discussions instead of harnessing performance and the individual's experience (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p. 203). This contrasts with formal mentoring provided by large organisations and institutions such as the Local Enterprise Office and Enterprise Ireland. Mentoring programmes provided by these types of organisations operate highly structured and formalised processes which work towards specific learning outcomes and goals (Lefebvre & Collot, 2013, p. 374). However, the theory is not without its limitations. Based on the interviewee's responses regarding the mentoring process, the processes were highly informal as they would meet their mentors in social settings such as coffee shops or the mentoree's home. Although the process was heavily influenced on the mentoree's specific goals, it is interesting to note that structure to achieve said goals is not always formal.

Within experiential learning, there is a significant element of personal learning and more so within a mentoring context. Jones (2012) defined personal learning as a process where skills and knowledge are gained which contributes to an individual's self-development. Personal learning was a recurring reference throughout the interviews. When asked to describe the mentoring process and their learning outcomes, the interviewees noted how mentoring contributed towards their self-confidence and improved their abilities to deal with employees and stakeholders. It is interesting to note that Interviewee 4 felt that he still learned how to deal with conflict and how to build strong networks despite the fact that he felt that mentoring was '*wasted on [him]*'. A study which investigated the learning outcomes of a mentoring programme in a West Midlands Healthcare trust also found self confidence and learning how to be more patient in difficult situations were the main personal learning aspects that the mentorees had gained from the programme (Jones, 2012, p. 63). In addition to self confidence, the process of receiving feedback and the persuasion of the mentor's way of thinking can improve critical thinking and enhance the mentoree's self development (Lankau & Scandura, 2002, p. 781). The interviewees felt more confident in their abilities as managers because their

mentors advised them and provided feedback when it was needed. Doyle & O'Neill (2001) discuss that these actions are a part of the role a mentor should have which is to advise and not to criticise. The authors' further note that addressing one another's expectations and perceptions is a valid part of the relationship between the mentor and mentoree.

### **Mentor/Mentoree Relationship & Perceptions**

Throughout the interviewing process, the interviewees discussed how the relationship they had with their mentors provided a personal sense of uplifting as well as professional and commercial guidance. Throughout the relationship, both the mentor and the mentoree will be expected to prove themselves to one another but it is noted that some relationships do not always succeed due to conflicting interests or lack of mentoring experience (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 49). For Interviewee 4, he felt the lack of organisation and miscommunication with the mentor and the Local Enterprise Office led to a failure in his relationship with his mentor:

*'There was a lot of information missing online..... So, um...plus also my communication via email with the Local Enterprise Office wasn't always too confident. My folder got mislaid for over a month'.*

Regardless of the outcome of any mentoring relationship, each relationship goes through a number of stages. Clutterbuck (2004) defined these stages as the introduction stage, the middle stage, dissolving the relationship and restarting the relationship. The introduction stage begins with both parties introducing themselves to one another, personal perceptions are tested, expectations are addressed, and both the mentor and mentoree have to interpret if they can work well together and if so, business goals are set (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 51). The interviewees felt that the introductory discussions were beneficial in getting to know your mentor as Interviewee 2 referred to mentoring to a *'marriages; they don't always work out'*. Once the introductions are made, the relationship progresses to the middle stage which is something the Interviewees discussed in great detail. The work begins in this stage as the mentor uses their experience, knowledge and networks to provide support to the mentoree (Clutterbuck, 2004, p. 111). The interviewees communicated with their mentors quite frequently, in contrast to Interviewee 4 and Interviewee 5, who is still in the introductory stage of mentoring. According to Jones (2012), open systems should be put in place to allow a consistent flow of communication between mentor and mentoree. Doyle & O'Neill (2001) further emphasises the need for clarity in communication as the smallest misunderstanding can affect the mentoree's confidence and the professional relationship. In order to avoid

misunderstandings, the mentor and mentoree must be factual when discussing business matters (Doyle & O'Neill, 2001, p. 57).

Once the mentoring relationship has progressed after a period of time, it begins to dissolve and the mentoree will drift apart from the mentor as the mentoree may wish to become independent or run their business (Clutterbuck, 2004, p. 114). Following on from this, Clutterbuck (2004) the relationship will reach the final stage as the mentor and mentoree will rekindle the relationship and enhance it into a friendship. It was evident that Interviewee 1 and 2 are currently shifting towards this stage as they have not been in touch with their mentors for quite some time but make plans to do so soon whereas Interviewee 3 is still in the dissolving stage. With Interviewee 5 moving into the middle period, Interviewee 4 is the only exception as his relationship did not succeed beyond the introduction stage as perceptions were not met.

The perceptions that mentorees have towards mentoring often been overlooked in terms of their effect on the mentoring experience. However, the interview data suggests that the mentoree's perceptions have a greater impact on the process than one may realise. For example, Interviewee 1, 2 and 3 had perceived to gain support and digital marketing knowledge from participating in mentoring and when asked if these expectations were met, both participants responded positively as their expectations were exceeded as they felt they learned more than expected. The organisational theorist, Eisenberg, developed the perceived organisational support theory (POS) which suggests that employees perceive their employer to have a positive or negative orientation towards them (Hu, Wang et al, 2013, p. 22). Hu, Wang et al (2013) note how further research has shown that POS is linked to increases in job performance in the organisational context but also in mentoring. Within the mentoring context, POS is linked towards the career and psychosocial functions and the more support that the mentoree receives will lead to a higher POS and a stronger relationship between the mentor and mentoree (Hu, Wang et al, 2013, p. 26). Therefore, how can POS increase? Through mentor human capital and protégée human capital. According to Eby et al, (2013) mentor human capital refers to the commitment and time the mentor invests into the mentoree (or protégée) and likewise, protégée human capital refers to the mentoree's willingness and motivation to commit to the relationship. The mentor's high level of commitment towards the mentoree creates a positive effect towards the mentoree which will result in higher levels of motivation and greater social capital (Eby et al, 2013, p. 449). With regards to the interviewees, it was evident that the ones who had a positive mentoring experience (Interviewees 1, 2 and 3) that they had high POS and one noted that these interviewees had strong relationships with their mentors as well as a greater

level of success which contrasted Interviewee 4 and 5. Therefore, the perceptions of mentorees can affect the mentoring relationship and ultimately the outcomes.

### **International Context**

Nowadays, business has become more diverse and global in terms of scale and strategy. With the ever increasing globalisation, the mentoring process has also become more global and diverse. A lot of entrepreneurs aim to globalise their businesses and some are willing to emigrate for this to happen. It is fascinating to see that four out of the five interviewees had emigrated to set up businesses, experienced mentoring in another country and one even immigrated to Ireland from Belgium. The biggest barrier which affects individuals going to other countries is culture shock. Culture shock is defined as anxiety faced by individuals *'which typically accompanies intercultural communication encounters'* (Smith, 2008, p. 41). The cultural differences in values, customs and even processes such as mentoring can psychologically affect the individual. For example, Interviewee 2 felt that the mentoring she received in the DCC in Madrid didn't allow room for advice and personal development whereas the mentoring she received from LEO was more focused towards advice and allowing her to learn. Similarly, Interviewee 5, having come from the Czech Republic, struggles to develop her fashion design due to language barriers and knowing how to find local suppliers of fabrics and labels. Another study carried out by Arora & Rangnekar (2014) indicated that mentoring in India is focused on long term goals and has a hierarchical structure as the mentor is viewed as a type of parental figure. The mentoree expects mentors to be strict while adhering to the custom of working in harmony due to the preference of avoiding conflict (Arora & Rangnekar, 2014, p. 207). Therefore, cultural differences are present even in mentoring and as the interviewee's have shown, mentoring is more diverse and these cultural differences can affect the mentoree's performance.

## **Limitations**

The study focused on the mentoree's perceptions of mentoring as well as the learning outcomes but it does not consider the mentor's perspective and the learning opportunities that the mentor can gain from. In addition to this, the demographic focus was on Irish SME's whose structures greatly differ in terms of resources, capacity and even strategy. While the study touched upon the push/pull factors theory, it does not take into account of other motivating theories such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as that can affect the mentoree's need of self actualisation. As previously discussed in the methodology section, the data is very limited in terms of demographics. Only five people were interviewed due to the response rate and the time constraints that are associated with the interview process. Therefore, these are the limitations of the study which have noted and taken into consideration with regards to future research which will be discussed in the next section.

## **Conclusion of Discussion**

This section analysed the key themes of the research and compared the data with the academic research that is relevant to each theme. The section analysed how push and pull factors can affect decision making in mentoring, how increases in entrepreneurial and experiential learning can have positive effects on the mentoree's success and the connection between the mentoree's personal perceptions and the relationship the mentoree has with their mentor. This section briefly discussed culture shock and it also compared the cultural differences towards mentoring and how it can affect the mentoree due to the increasing diversification of mentoring.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

The purpose of the dissertation was to conduct an exploratory study into the effectiveness of mentoring as a learning and development tool for Irish SME's. Section 2 discussed the research objectives and demonstrated the aims the author wanted to achieve in carrying out the study. Section 3 of this paper discussed the theories of the recent literature with regards to mentoring, the mentoring relationship, learning and development and Irish SME's. Section 4 had discussed the methodology of the study and found that a qualitative approach was the most appropriate method for this study because the study is more focused on the mentoree's perspective and their experiences of mentoring and these experiences are better captured through semi-structured interviews. Section 4 discussed the key findings of the research while Section 5 discussed the findings in relation to the findings in the academic literature. The most relevant findings from the research are identified below.

### **International Business**

One of the themes which unexpectedly appeared in the research was the theme of International Business. The study discovered a lot of the participants had some level of international experience as many of them lived abroad and set up international businesses before returning to Ireland whereas others came to Ireland to start up a business and took up mentoring along the way. During the mentoring process, some of the participants experienced a certain degree of culture shock as they found it difficult to grasp Irish regulations, access local suppliers and trying to overcome language barriers, which was especially difficult for the participant from the Czech Republic.

### **Entrepreneurial Learning**

The research discovered that mentoring has a connection with the entrepreneurial process of seeking venture opportunities and venture creation. During the interview process, the interviewees mentioned how their work with their mentors allowed them to find their idea which would then go on to become their business. The interviewees explained how their mentors advice and support allowed them to discover new developments and opportunities that could be useful to their business venture.

### **Motivation – push/pull factors**

Part of the research objectives was to determine the reasons why the interviewees wished to pursue mentoring. The research discovered that the participants reasons were factors of the push/pull theory. The participants were more influenced by push factors such as lack of funding and inefficient operations and administration process. However, participants also cited certain pull factors like expansion, job creation and one factor which was found to be quite recurring in the interviews was information. The participants noted that they pursued mentoring because of the opportunities to gain relevant information which would be useful in developing their businesses and their ideas.

### **Experiential Learning**

One of the core research objectives was to investigate the learning outcomes of the mentoring process. As well as a personal growth, the participants found that they learned more from the mentor's experience and knowledge. The research indicated that the participants learning process not only aligned with Kolb's experiential learning process but it also indicated that a mentor's knowledge and advice allows the mentoree to observe and reflect on their own doings and make changes; a necessary component of Kolb's learning cycle. However, the research indicated that one of the participants did not learn from the experience as their mentoring experience did not occur due to a lack of organisation and miscommunication with their mentor.

### **Relationships & Perceptions**

Another research objective was to investigate the relationship each participant had with their mentor as well as the perceptions they had with regards to the process. The study found that the majority of participants had a strong relationship with their mentor but also had positive perceptions about the process before commencing it. The study discovered that positive perceptions have an effect on the relationship between the mentor and the mentoree as positive perceptions can strengthen the relationship between both parties. Additionally, the mentorees felt that gaining feedback and listening to their ideas provided them with validation to enhance their business and see it through to new opportunities.

## Recommendations

Based on the research objectives and the findings of the research, the following recommendations are being made to enhance the learning and development tools of mentoring in the future:

- Ensure a higher level of communication between the mentor and mentoree by instilling a system which allows the mentoree to easily contact the mentor.
- Evaluate the matching process for mentors and mentorees and try to adjust the process which will allow clients to be rematched with a different mentor if their current mentor is difficult to access.
- Provide foreign clients with language classes or resources which will help them to better understand Irish business law and regulations. Encourage mentors to spend extra time with these clients if possible so as to help them overcome culture shock.
- Update the Local Enterprise Office website on a regular basis to ensure that information regarding business planning, funding and so on to ensure that the information given to clients is clear and concise.

## Costings

Based on the figures from the 2011 and 2012 County Enterprise Board's accounts, the return on investment (ROI) for mentoring can be calculated (see below). The figures indicate that the return on investment is 100% for both years as there was no surplus or deficit in the budget. Therefore, the percentage indicates that mentoring is highly beneficial to both parties in the long run.

$$\text{Return on Investment} = \frac{\text{net profit}}{\text{capital employed}} \times 100$$

$$\text{ROI 2011} = \frac{24,237 - 0}{24,237} \times 100 = 100\%$$

$$\text{ROI 2012} = \frac{27,420 - 0}{27,420} \times 100 = 100\%$$

## **Chapter 9 Future Research**

There are a number of areas that could be examined for future research. As the study was focused on the effectiveness of learning from a mentoree's perspective, further research could be carried out from the mentor's perspective. This study could lead to greater opportunities for researchers to investigate the effectiveness of mentoring for mentors in greater detail. Additionally, more research could be done in regards to entrepreneurial learning, the factors that can affect it and how entrepreneurial can be stimulated and controlled. The cultural background of the mentor and/or mentoree and its effect on the mentoring process is something which has potential in terms of research as the study has shown that it can affect the process and future research could further investigate the area and design solutions that mentors could use to reduce the impact of culture shock and improve the quality and success of the mentoring process. While the study took an exploratory approach, these are the areas which could be investigated to a greater depth in the future.

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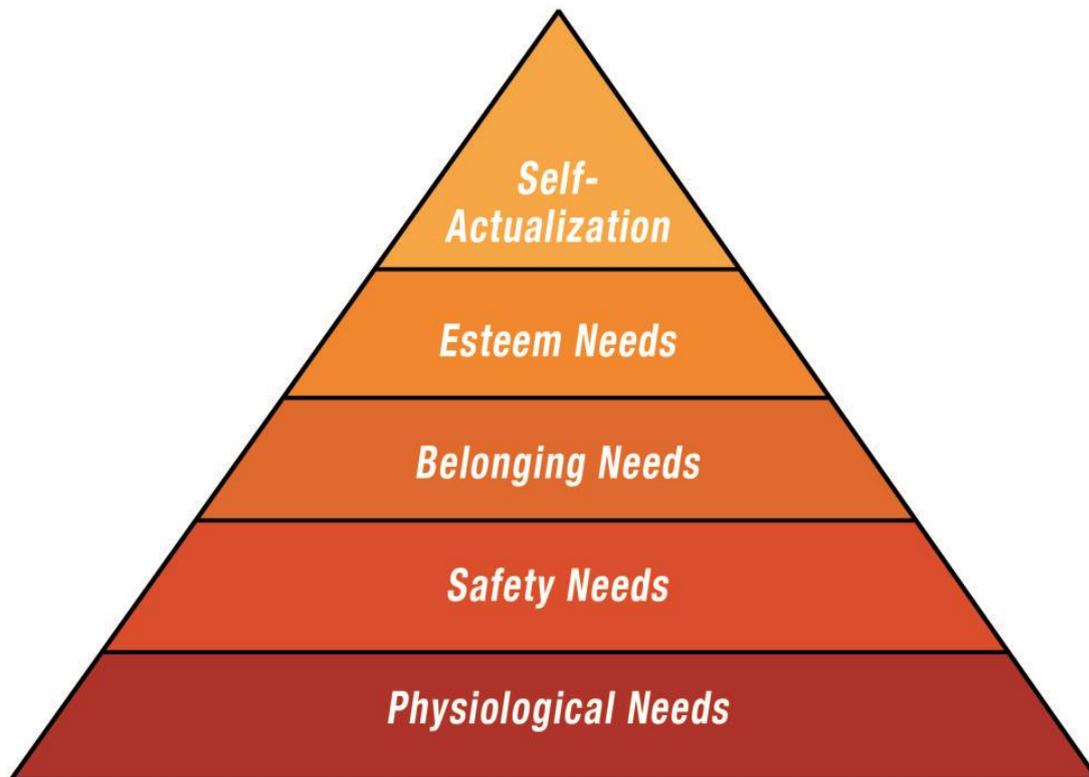
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## Appendices

### Appendix 1



Bueno, B.J. And Jeffrey, S. (2015) 'Why Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is Crucial for Your Business' [online]. *The Cult Branding Company*. Available from: <http://www.cultbranding.com/maslows-hierarchy-needs-crucial-for-your-business/> [Accessed 17 August 2015].

**Appendix 2**

**CONCRETE  
EXPERIENCE**

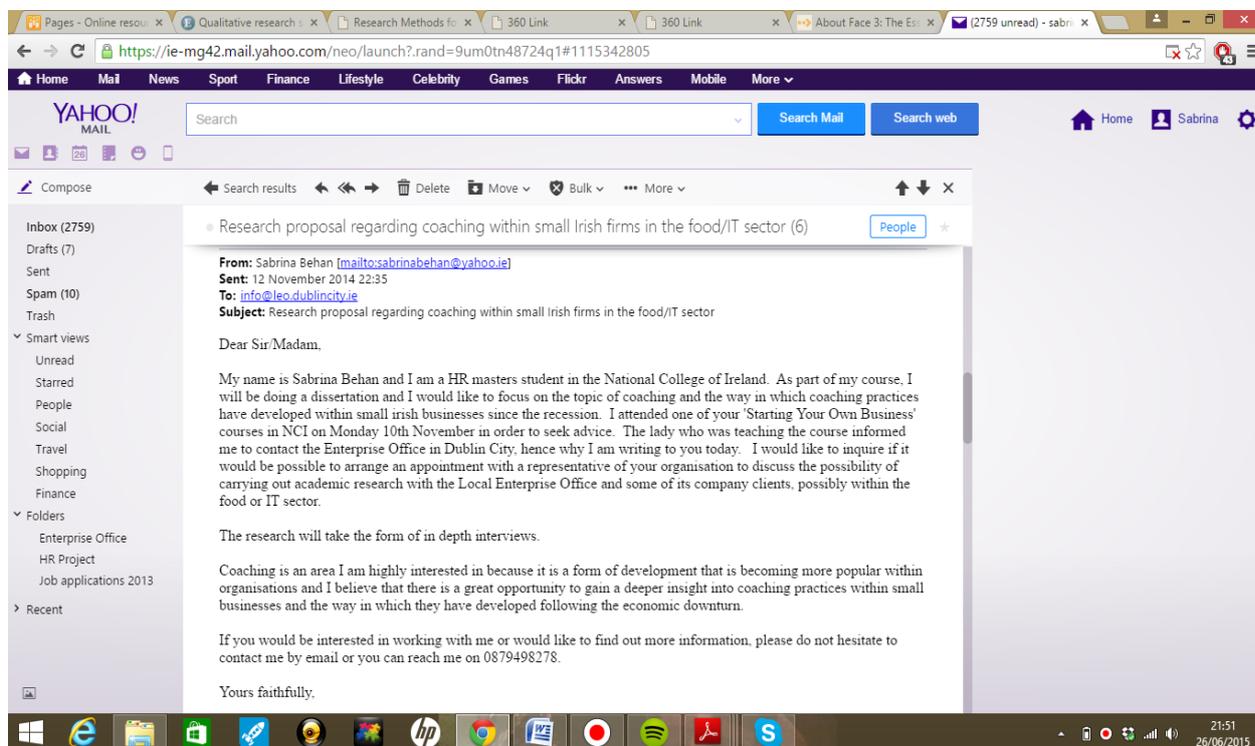
	NW Feeling-Acting  Accommodating	N Feeling Acting-Reflecting  Northerner	NE Feeling-Reflecting  Diverging	
<b>ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION</b>	W Acting Feeling-Thinking  Westerner	C Feeling Acting + Reflecting Thinking Balancing	E Reflecting Feeling-Thinking  Easterner	<b>REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION</b>
	SW Thinking-Acting  Converging	S Thinking Acting-Reflecting  Southerner	SE Thinking-Reflecting  Assimilating	

**ABSTRACT  
CONCEPTUALIZATION**

**FIGURE 2**  
The Nine-Region Learning Style Type Grid

Kolb, A. and Kolb, D. (2005) 'Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Enhancing Experiential Learning in Higher Education'. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 4(2): pp. 193-212.

## Appendix 3



## **Appendix 4**

Dear [insert name]

My name is Sabrina Behan and I am a postgraduate student who is currently doing a Masters in HRM in the National College of Ireland. For my dissertation, I wish to carry out an in depth analysis on mentoring and how it is perceived to be an efficient form of learning and development for small and medium sized businesses. I am interested to know if you would be willing to participate in this research.

The research process will involve an in depth interview. The interviewees will be asked a number of questions on the mentoring programme they took part in with the Local Enterprise Office, how the process worked, their opinions on whether they found it beneficial towards the development of their business, and so on. The interviews will be recorded and they will be strictly confidential. All the information will be saved to a usb stick that will be backed up to a locked folder that will be password protected on my laptop. The only people who will have access to this information will be the interviewer (myself), the interviewee, the Local Enterprise Office and my college supervisor.

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me on 0879498278 or you can email me at [sabrinabehan@yahoo.ie](mailto:sabrinabehan@yahoo.ie). I sincerely hope you will participate in this fantastic research as it is a great opportunity to learn more about mentoring and how it affects the learning and development process for your business and for yourself.

Yours sincerely,

Sabrina Behan

## Appendix 5

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a Yahoo! Mail inbox. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <https://ie-mg42.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=9um0tn48724q1#1115342805>. The Yahoo! Mail interface includes a search bar, navigation tabs (Home, Mail, News, Sport, Finance, Lifestyle, Celebrity, Games, Flickr, Answers, Mobile, More), and a user profile for 'Sabrina'. The inbox list on the left shows folders like 'Inbox (2759)', 'Drafts (7)', 'Sent', 'Spam (10)', 'Trash', 'Smart views', 'Unread', 'Starred', 'People', 'Social', 'Travel', 'Shopping', 'Finance', 'Folders', 'Enterprise Office', 'HR Project', 'Job applications 2013', and 'Recent'. The main content area displays search results for 'Research proposal regarding coaching within small Irish firms in the food/IT'. The selected email is from Eibhlin Curley (LEO) to 'sabinabehan@yahoo.ie', dated 14 Nov 2014. The email body contains the following text:

Hi Sabrina

Mentoring  
<https://www.localenterprise.ie/DublinCity/Start-or-Grow-your-Business/Mentoring/>

Send in a proposal with what you want to do, how many clients, how long, starting when etc.

Regards

Eibhlin Curley  
Assistant Head of Enterprise

Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil Bhaile Átha Cliath| Bloc 4, Urlár 1 |Oifigí na Cathrach |Baile Átha Cliath 8  
**Local Enterprise Office Dublin City**| Block 4, Floor 1|Civic Offices |Wood Quay|Dublin 8  
T +353 1 222 5611| E eibhlin.curley@leo.dublincity.ie|  
[www.localenterprise.ie/dublincity](http://www.localenterprise.ie/dublincity)

The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows various application icons and the system tray with the date 26/06/2015 and time 21:53.

## Appendix 6

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Yahoo! Mail interface. The browser's address bar shows the URL: <https://ie-mg42.mail.yahoo.com/neo/launch?.rand=9um0tn48724q1#9963726448>. The page header includes navigation links for Home, Mail, News, Sport, Finance, Lifestyle, Celebrity, Games, Flickr, Answers, Mobile, and More. The Yahoo! Mail logo is visible, along with a search bar and buttons for 'Search Mail' and 'Search web'. The user's name 'Sabrina' is displayed in the top right corner.

The main content area shows an email in the inbox. The email is from **Eibhlin Curley (LEO)**, dated Jan 13. The recipient is 'Sabrina Behan' and the CC list includes 'Alan McDonnell, Greg Swift (LEO)'. The email body contains the following text:

Hi Sabrina

Please send us the text for an email that we can send to Mentorees and we will send the email to our database of people who received mentoring last year. How many do you need? Do you want to hold the interviews here? You could book one of our mentoring rooms and try schedule your meetings over a couple of days. You will need to coordinate the times. We would like to get a copy of the feedback, analysis and your recommendations.

Regards

Eibhlin Curley  
Assistant Head of Enterprise

Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil Bhaile Átha Cliath| Bloc 4, Urlár 1 |Oifigi na Cathrach |Baile Átha Cliath 8  
**Local Enterprise Office Dublin City** |Block 4, Floor 1|Civic Offices |Wood Quay|Dublin 8  
T +353 1 222 5611 | E [eibhlin.curley@leo.dublincity.ie](mailto:eibhlin.curley@leo.dublincity.ie)  
[www.localenterprise.ie/dublincity](http://www.localenterprise.ie/dublincity)

The left sidebar shows the email folders: Inbox (2759), Drafts (7), Sent, Spam (10), Trash, Smart views (Unread, Starred, People, Social, Travel, Shopping, Finance), Folders (Enterprise Office, HR Project, Job applications 2013), and Recent.

The Windows taskbar at the bottom shows various application icons, including Internet Explorer, File Explorer, and several utility programs. The system tray in the bottom right corner displays the time as 21:55 and the date as 26/06/2015.

## **Appendix 7**

### **Interviewee 1**

**Interviewer:** Very good and em, when did you...when was the kind of, the lightbulb moment or the deciding factor when you kind of felt that you needed.....

**Interviewee 1:** Mentoring?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, you needed mentoring .

**Interviewee 1:** Well actually, I...I eh asked for the mentoring programme, it was on a separate project .

**Interviewer:** Mmm hmm.

**Interviewee 1:** It was actually nothing at all to do with the newsagency business. It was just an idea that I came up with, em, about a kind of a coin exchange system in the airports. Em, so I...I just, I was in touch with Enterprise Ireland just about it, you know?

**Interviewer:** (nods) ok very good

**Interviewee 1:** So that's actually how I was put in touch with the mentor and eh, but it was matched up very well because he, he actually is in retail now himself even though it's not his background per se. Em, you know he's a business man, he's lots of experience and we were able to have good, good chats and exchange ideas and you know he's been very helpful. Not just on the project I was working on but just all angles and areas and aspects of business, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Fantastic

**Keiran:** So it's been very beneficial from that perspective. We keep in touch you know?

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and that's good. I'd say you must find it very helpful in particular that you still kinda keep in touch, particularly if you feel like you might want advice on something.

**Interviewee 1:** Yeah, it's something I actually regret that I didn't do a lot sooner. Why I waited twenty years to get in touch with somebody on that is, with the benefit of hindsight, it was actually silly you know?

**Interviewer:** mmm hmm

**Interviewee 1:** Em, because people go through, like all the mistakes that I made, you know people go through all that. Eh, so if at all possible you should try and benefit from that you know? From....to listen and hear what people have to say, he was gone through all the mistakes that you're either going to make or that you've made you know? So em, yeah from that perspective yeah, very very beneficial.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, and did you feel that you kind of, your experience with mentoring, did it kind of meet all, like what you hoped to gain from it going into it?

**Interviewee 1:** It did actually, yeah and it even exceeded it because as I said I initially was looking for mentoring on this particular project but I never really kind of thought about a mentor just in business in general.

**Interviewer:** Yeah

**Interviewee 1:** Eh, you know because I had a lot of experience in that kind of stuff but em, as I said its always good to have somebody who has a lot more experience than you eh, and to try and benefit from that so he's been very helpful, he's been very generous with his time and stuff

**Interviewer:** mmm hmm, yeah.

**Interviewee 1:** And it's another reason why I was very happy to meet yourself you know because for that reason, he's been very generous with his time.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, fantastic very good. And em, was a lot of your interactions face to face during the process?

**Interviewee 1:** Yeah, it was all pretty much face to face. Eh, we kinda met up for, I think we were scheduled to meet up for an hour or something and I think we ended up spending about three hours or four hours together because we didn't realise the time talking about so many different things. Em, so, so yeah it was all face to face.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, fantastic and I think, I suppose you probably found yourself like that's really like that's the most efficient and effective way to kind of, to learn from it.

**Interviewee 1:** Yeah no it is, and and to a certain degree its its I would nearly see it as a social thing in a sense that you know, I just love talking about business and that kind of stuff.

**Interviewee 2**

**Interviewer:** And I'd say, em, in a kind of something that you touched upon a couple of minutes ago actually, um, you said earlier that the main difference you found working with Noel in the Enterprise Office here and a big difference with him compared to the Spanish Office was that he....he made you look at the business in a different perspective and he kind of gave you that bit more advice really and was that.....It sounds like that was the main kind of....um.....path that the mentoring process took?

**Interviewee 2:** Basically, no. What he did was I wanted someone who had a lot of knowledge of digital marketing which he does. He has a huge amount, he's really really good at that end. So he gave me a lot of information about...on that end which was interesting and good. But then we looked more, a little bit more at the business you know? And I....and he says 'have you looked at this, have you looked at that' and in the end, at the end, it was just right at the end, he turned around and says 'this is not gonna work with these guys because they're too flaky' and he says 'I don't think so' but he says 'it's up to you'. You know it was never 'Evelyn don't do this business because it's really bad'. He wanted me to come to that conclusion. So but he let me, it was all my business. What I was going to do with it or not. It was my call. I had to decide 'ok I'm going to go ahead with this or no I'm not gonna go ahead with it' and in the end after looking at it a little bit more I says 'yeah, you're perfectly right Noel, this...I would be.....these guys are going to drive me mad'. You know, literally drive me mad and they're going to stop my business from being successful. You know? And I could, I realised that. So, what he made me do was to sit back and think again. Now, I've been thinking thinking and thinking and at last I've come up with another idea.

**Interviewer:** (nods) Yeah.

**Interviewee 2:** Which is an idea that doesn't depend on anyone and which is a low investment, very low investment, it's just my time basically and it's not going to let's say.....you know.....in the worst case scenario if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out, it's not a big deal because I'm not going to put my house into it.

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Interviewee 2:** Which is basically the big problem if you're putting, you know a lot of money into a business, you know you really can't risk it not working. So, so this and I actually got this idea from where I'm working at the moment. I'm working as a.....I'm managing the Epos Electronic Point of Sale database. Well I'm actually setting up the whole Epos system for a

very big shop in Ballsbridge and em, they, you know I can see all the different lines of products they have and you know, how they're working and it's given me a lot of insight into retail. So basically I'm not going to open a shop, I'd rather shoot myself. No, but basically they have em, they sell lots of different things. They sell gifts. Children's gifts and children's toys and stuff like that and you know, a little bit of everything. They have a big mix and they have, they sell candles and they have three different lines and I can see their really upmarket or very limited lines and I says 'oh my god', you know and I know they're hand poured in Ireland and hand made in Ireland and I don't know. And I says 'my god', they....they're gonna have a hard time making that profitable because of the high costs of labour here in Ireland you know? And eh, the lines are very limited. Even the Max Benjamin or one of these big ones, they have you know but they haven't got a huge amount of different types of candles. They have very limited lines. So I sorted the Spanish company who manufacture candles and they actually hand pour them. The cost of labour in Spain is €3.6 an hour.....

**Interviewer:** Wow.

**Interviewee 2:** Compared to the €8. I don't know what we have here. You know? And the Social Security costs would be a lot lower. So basically these guys have and I've just received a package of samples from them and I've tried them out, they're really really good and I said 'ok so this might be.....' and they have a huge line you know? They have a really big different.....they have loads of different types, loads of this, fabulous. So it's you know, I feel there is a little...a kind of a niche market and I mean everyone loves Spain, everyone loves the smells and the south of Spain and this type of thing so I think there might be a niche there. So I decided to go with that you know? But it took me a long time and in the end I was nearly going to throw in the towel and say 'oh stuff it, I can't find anything I think I can do'. But with this I think.....its.....I've worked in logistics so the logistics of bringing it in and all this type of thing is.....doesn't you know.....it's something I can control, I feel comfortable with and I've worked in sales so I've seen how a shop works. You know, all they want is something to sell. If it sells fast, they're happy. So it's basically that. So you just have to go up with a product and say 'here, I have this product, are you interested in it?' Ok, yes I am. So, I mean Noel has been super helpful because he's made me stop and think. He's made me stop and think and say 'ok what can I do that doesn't involve a huge amount of risk moneywise and that is more in keeping with what I can do. You know? Basically because it's in Spain I can actually, you know I don't have to have a big stock, I can go and just say 'ok, you know get a few orders and then bring them in a few days. Distribute them, end of story.

**Interviewer:** That sounds fantastic and it sounds like that your working relationship with Noel was....it sounds like it was a very good relationship, very cooperative and very strong. Em, can I just ask....would you keep.....during the process would you keep, would you have kept in contact with him a lot?

**Interviewee 2:** Well I haven't been....I was in contact with him a little bit afterwards. I haven't been in contact lately sorry because I'm so busy.

### **Interviewee 3**

#### **How did you find the mentor-mentee relationship?**

Semi formal relations. Personal and one to one. The mentor understood her situation and the needs of the business. He was very cooperative but there were times when he would tell her what she should be doing rather than showing her. It took Interviewee 3 a while to accept the changes she needed to make at first as it's easy to be tunnel visioned on what is right for your business.

#### **What are your views on mentoring as a form of learning?**

It's a good way to learn whether you're starting a business or you have been running one for the last year or 2 years. It's good to have that validation from someone to say 'you're doing this right'. Validation is key.

#### **After you completed the mentoring programme, did the process affect the development of the business, do you think?**

It changed Interviewee 3's focus. It made her focus more on the brand, customer relationship management and most of all, her employees. She became more aware of their limits and she realised they have limits and that she needed to see things from their point of view. They take 2 weeks holidays now when before they didn't and they have a bit more leeway when they didn't have it previously. The employees are now involved in doing the invoices which has also had an impact. The other main focus for her was consolidating the business.

**What do you think the future holds for mentoring in the workplace? Do you think it will undergo any significant changes?**

Interviewee 3 thinks the support out there for businesses is incredible. So much support in starting a business. It is incredible as there is so much support in starting a business and running it. Interviewee 3 could not praise the Enterprise Board enough. She feels face to face interaction is better as you get a connection you don't always get through e-mentoring. If the opportunity was there, she'd take up e-mentoring as would many but whether face-to-face mentoring will decline is unknown. It is about supply and demand.

**Interviewee 4**

**Interviewer:** Of course, yeah. Very good and em, so when you started through the process um of the programme um....how did you...um.....how did you experience it. Like, how often did you meet with um, someone from the Enterprise Office?

**Interviewee 4:** Em....(laughs). Em, I met with someone from the Enterprise Office eh, towards the end of November. Em....it was a woman, she was very positive about the product. She actually left me alone after 15 minutes...em....to show the product to people in the office and eh, she came back in and said 'listen, I've no problem seeing your product in shops like Harrots and Brown Thomas by the end of next year which was really amazing....

**Interviewer:** Wow. That's very very good.

**Interviewee 4:** Which gave me a lot of courage like 'this is the right thing'.

**Interviewer:** Absolutely.

**Interviewee 4:** But like a few months ago....actually let's say a month and a half ago, I went back and talked to someone else eh...about the grants, for example, available and um, the information I got first turned out not to be correct. I didn't know a part had to be repaid. I'm actually also a little bit surprised that there's no clear....em....as I say, there was a lot of information missing online. Em, and also if I get a five or ten thousand euro grant from someone....if.....it makes a big difference if I have to pay it back or not. I know it's security, money isn't wasted I totally understand that but if I was....yeah. I dunno, I thought it was awkward not knowing in advance 'do I...can I keep only 30% of the money or do I have to repay everything or....?' So, um...plus also my communication via email with the Local Enterprise Office wasn't always too confident. My folder got mislaid for over a month....

**Interviewer:** Oh no!

**Interviewee 4:** i missed out on the first grant. Um...I only got all of the information I needed about the second grant em.....application grant quite late or I thought 'ok, I won't be able to get all the information I need'. Em....yeah and I'm still not sure if I need it or if I'll go for it or not.

**Interviewer:** Of course.

**Interviewee 4:** So...I'm more interested actually in finding an angel investor. Um...I know they want their money back completely but I think it would be more help as well.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, for your kinda situ....for your business and where.....

**Interviewee 4:** Yeah, for the business.

**Interviewer:** Absolutely and that's understandable. That's unfortunate that em...the, the communication and eh....I know like, so you emailed a few times, did you ever em...was the majority of the communication em, via email? Was there....was there any kind of frequent kind of face to face meetings?

**Interviewee 4:** No, I first had like a first consultation, I'm not sure what you'd call it but em...then I mostly communicated with the Enterprise Office via email. Em, generally that was all fine. Um, then I needed some more information about the grants....

**Interviewer:** Of course.

**Interviewee 4:** And I was told very quickly you first have to apply and then you have to....then you might be able to talk to someone.

**Interviewer:** Yes, ok.

**Interviewee 4:** Which annoyed me a lot because it's really frustrating when you're trying to set up a business; like I...you know, I don't have the money in my bank account to maintain the current lifestyle I have, like for the past three years I hardly had any social life for example because I can't afford it and now I feel I have an idea that could be really big with the proper support. So, I was a little bit annoyed with that answer so I told them 'listen, I want to talk to someone because I don't want to waste my or your time and money. I mean if I don't need to make an application, then I don't want to put the time into this'.

**Interviewer:** Exactly.

**Interviewee 4:** I first need to know how the rules and what I can get through the grant before I even want to try to....

**Interviewer:** Exactly, all the terms and conditions before you start, as you said.

**Interviewee 4:** (nodding) yeah. Now um, what's maybe a strongly worded email but eh, I was contacted by one of the managers apparently of LEO straight away um....they called me they explained simply 'you're absolutely right, you can talk to someone and they never should have sent that email out'. So maybe it was a new person there or whatever but anyway, they talked to me in person.

**Interviewer:** Oh, that's good.

**Interviewee 4:** So that was twice that I talked to someone in person mostly via email and then one mentor session.

#### **Interviewee 5**

**Interviewer:** Absolutely. They definitely will. And can I ask Jana, has....your mentor just in the short time that you talked to him. Or sorry, is it a him or her?

**Interviewee 5:** Her.

**Interviewer:** Oh her, my apologies. Um, is she....has she...has she talked about how.....about promoting your idea, particularly with regards to anything like craft fairs or anything like that?

**Interviewee 5:** Of course. Yeah, of course we spoke about these things like that. Uh, that was perfect, perfect talking and uh, very good for me.

**Interviewer:** Of course.

**Interviewee 5:** Getting feedback. Um, actually she told me something about this for example, scarves to make it something like collections as well so we spoke a bit about collections, etc. How to promote it and then the fair, etc. And uh, promoting in some stores or to go...to go to meet people with for now, my scarves and just try to get some feedback and if some store will be interested to sell my...my scarves or what we spoke about, of course (laughs).

**Interviewer:** (laughs) no, that's fantastic.

**Interviewee 5:** So, but it's a little bit crazy story because uh, of course I went to a few stores. Uh, designer stores and craft stores with my scarves. Mostly I spoke not with owner because they....they don't, they are not despotic all day so I get some contact or I gave my contact details depending on the situation.

**Interviewer:** Mmm hmm.

**Interviewee 5:** They're results. That's important. Results for now is zero. Really really really zero. Even people like it, people are amazed but something is wrong or maybe something was wrong. I can't tell because the product is just....amazing. It's really amazing. Price? It's not important, price because people are ready to buy anything for any price. It's when somebody see the value of it, it's price is ok. So....so I has to think a little bit about myself because it's mostly about this person who drew this craft or doesn't matter what.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee 5:** And um, when I watch a little bit....how to say.....um, behind what happened this time. So could be or I'm sure it was, it was, I'm sure it was something wrong with me. Um...uh....because you have to have uh, good confidence of yourself in what you're doing. You have to be, of course I believe but....but I think that my behaviour was a little bit like um, I wasn't really sure. I was scared and people really just feel it.

**Interviewer:** Mmm hmm.

**Interviewee 5:** 'Oh, she's not really. She looks like she's sort of weak, she...she doesn't believe her product's really good or something'. You know, you feel from these people. So uh, it was mostly about my self confidence.

**Interviewer:** Of course.

**Interviewee 5:** So I had to work with it and still I work it and I think it's much better now.

**Interviewer:** Well that's fantastic.

**Interviewee 5:** It has to be otherwise I am lost in this business (laughs).

**Interviewer:** Absolutely but it's definitely....that's good to hear that it's you know, you're working on that and I certainly understand....

**Interviewee 5:** Yeah, I'm just honest and I'm able to....to tell you ok I was an idiot. I was a real idiot. Why not? I was. Ok, so it's a lot of factors what's really important in this business. It's not only about that you have some....some wonderful handles and some...some mindless idea that you are able to craft something, to do something. It's not enough.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, absolutely. It's the whole person in general.

**Interviewee 5:** Exactly.

**Interviewer:** Fantastic and um, can I ask is there em.....from when you were talking to your mentor, was there em....as she was em, you know she was discussing em, you know she was giving you information and talking through em...she was starting to talk through the idea....um, was there anything, any kind of feedback she gave you that was....that kind of, that kind of stood out the most or that you really, or that kind of really surprised you?

**Interviewee 5:** Oh, what kind of feedback do you mean?

**Interviewer:** Just anything with....it could be on anything from maybe with....to do with em, your idea or with what you've done so far or....

**Interviewee 5:** Ok, I understand now. Um, one feedback was uh, very amazing for me. Uh, she told me 'that's amazing, that's beautiful'. She likes it, correct English (laughs).

**Interviewer:** (laughs) you're alright.

**Interviewee 5:** Ok so, about that which I spoke before about what is this product and other things such as personality.

**Interviewer:** Yep.

**Interviewee 5:** So I think at this time I was really like scared thinking 'hahaha, I don't know. Jesus, just tell me how I do, how I have to do that' and then more and more.....

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Interviewee 5:** Yeah but uh, she....she liked this product and um, the next step was to....to get feedback from people outside.

**Interviewer:** Of course.

**Interviewee 5:** But in this time when I was still like 'uhhhhh'.....

**Interviewer:** You were still learning before?

**Interviewee 5:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was scared and afraid of everything and I...this self confidence, I don't know where but not here (laughs). So....so the feedback from people was like 'ah!' You know?

## **Appendix 8**

Tell me a bit about yourself and the background behind your business?

When did you realise you might need some help with the business? What was the driving point in seeking help?

What made you decide to go for mentoring? Had you had any previous experience with mentoring? (if they mention previous jobs, ask to expand on that)

What were your expectations for the mentoring programme? What did you hope to gain from it?

Describe the learning process of the mentoring programme from your perspective. What form of learning or what learning method was most helpful to you? Experiential learning? On the job learning?

How did you find the mentor-mentee relationship?

What are your views on mentoring as a form of learning?

After you completed the mentoring programme, did the process affect the development of the business, do you think?

What do you think the future holds for mentoring in the workplace? Do you think it will undergo any significant changes?