

## Developing Attitudes Toward an Entrepreneurial Career through Mentoring: The Mediating Role of Entrepreneurial Self-Efficacy<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

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Mentoring is reputed to support the career choices and development of individuals in various contexts. This study is one of the few that investigates the effect of mentoring on career satisfaction and retention of novice entrepreneurs. We surveyed 360 novice entrepreneurs who had been supported by a mentor. Our analyses demonstrate the direct effect of mentoring on entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE), which mediates the relationship between satisfaction of being an entrepreneur and the intention of staying in the profession. Moreover, mentoring not only has an indirect effect on satisfaction; it seems to have a negative direct effect on intention. This result could possibly be due to the awareness of novices regarding the limitations of their initial business project. Given that entrepreneurs are closely tied to their business project, mentoring should come earlier in the entrepreneurial process in order to influence career satisfaction and retention of novice entrepreneur.

### **Keywords**

Mentoring, entrepreneurial career, career satisfaction, entrepreneurial self-efficacy, intention to stay entrepreneur

In the past few years, many programs have been implemented to support novice entrepreneurs in the years following the start of their business. One of the objectives of these programs is to increase the success rate, which is found to be between 35% and 45% in 5 years following the start-up (Ministère du Développement économique, Innovation et Exportation [MDEIE], 2008; van Praag, 2003). One of the processes proposed involves pairing a novice entrepreneur with an experienced business person who provides advice and ways of thinking, to help the novice avoid costly and even fatal mistakes (Cull, 2006; St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Sullivan, 2000). For example, the American SCORE program supported more than eight million small business managers through its network of over 12,000 volunteer mentors. In Europe, other similar initiatives exist such as that supported by the Business Link in England, the *Mentor Eget Företag* program in Sweden or *France Initiative* (in France), with nearly 5,000 volunteer mentors only for the latter, to name just a few of these programs.

Mentoring is recognized as a practice allowing the *protégé* (or mentee) to make informed choices and persevere when faced with difficulties. Despite the role mentors play in resolving personal and

professional dilemmas and their influence in making career choices more concrete for their mentees, research focusing on the development of novice entrepreneurs' careers through mentoring seems to be absent from the literature. And yet, during the period following the business start-up, novices encounter many difficulties. Such difficulties are likely to push them to abandon their plans and find other jobs (Reynolds & Curtin, 2009). We argue that entrepreneurship implies a career choice (Sinclair, 2008) and that entrepreneurship research should not only focus on studying the intention of becoming an entrepreneur but also on career retention, a neglected topic in entrepreneurship literature. Therefore, it is relevant from a theoretical and practical standpoint to investigate this area of research.

To understand the effect mentoring may have on the novice entrepreneur's career, we draw a theoretical model based on social cognitive career theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002). It has been recognized that, through SCCT, social support may foster task-specific self-efficacy, which, in turn, may act as a mediator for career satisfaction and retention (Hackett, 1997). The purpose of this article is to investigate the usefulness of SCCT to further our understanding of the effect of mentoring as a social support for the entrepreneur's satisfaction and retention through the improvement of entrepreneurial self-efficacy (ESE). Consequently, we will first look at the literature on mentoring before exploring the influence of this type of support on the novice's career using SCCT. Next, we will test our model with novice entrepreneurs who have taken part in a mentoring program. The results will be presented and discussed before making recommendations for future studies and entrepreneur support programs.

### **Mentoring as a form of support for novice entrepreneurs**

As suggested by Paul (2004), mentoring is distinct from coaching, tutoring or a buddy system since it is more focused on a quest for meaning than skill building. For a mentoring relationship to be

present, as proposed by Haggard et al. (2011), three components must be present: there must be a reciprocal relationship with development benefits for the mentee, especially career-related benefits, as well as regular and substantial interaction with a long-term perspective. Trust and perceived similarity are needed in order to build a strong relationship in the dyad (Son & Kim, 2013; St-Jean, 2012).

Mentor functions refer to the different roles played by the mentor in the mentoring relationship (Kram, 1985). Mentor functions help the mentee develop the relationship's outcomes (Wanberg et al., 2003). They are therefore considered as an adequate measure of the mentoring's quality, whether given or received. The various mentor functions studied in large organizations can be separated into three categories: psychological functions, career-related functions, and role modelling (Bouquillon, Sosik, & Lee, 2005; Scandura & Williams, 2001). St-Jean (2011) developed an instrument which measures the mentor's functions grouped within three categories: psychological, career-related, and role model functions. The psychological functions include four dimensions: reflector, reassurance, motivation, and confidant (see Table 1). The career-related component includes the dimensions of: integration, information support, confrontation, and guide. And, as noted, the last category is role-model function.

For a novice entrepreneur, the benefits of a mentoring relationship seem to be many and varied. The main benefit is without a doubt the learning that occurs when talking with an experienced entrepreneur (i.e. the mentor; St-Jean & Audet, 2012; Sullivan, 2000). Studies have

**Table 1. Mentor's function proposed by St-Jean (2011)**

Reflector	The mentor gives the mentee feedback on who he is and his business project. The mentor reflects the image the mentee projects to others, somewhat like a mirror does. This function provides the mentee with a kind of personal progress report where strengths to be bank on and weaknesses to be worked on are identified.
Reassurance	The mentor reassures the mentee during difficult times. He acts as a pressure valve enabling the mentee to evacuate accumulated stress and put problems into perspective.
Motivation	The mentor motivates and encourages the mentee. The mentor helps the mentee build self-confidence and gives him incentives to persevere.
Confidant	With time, the mentee may confide in the mentor just as he would in a friend. The mentoring relationship may also transform into friendship.
Integration	The mentor facilitates the integration of the mentee in the business community by presenting him to business contacts who may be of need in the future.
Information support	The mentor gives the mentee information. He transfers various types of personal knowledge including on business management, laws to be aware of, useful information on the industry, and so on.
Confrontation	The mentor confronts the mentee's ideas to help further his reflection. This confrontation appears in a problem-solving context where the mentee's beliefs, attitudes, or habits prevent him from reaching his goals and makes him part of the problem rather than the solution.
Guide	When problem solving, the mentor helps the mentee improve problem comprehension, widen problem vision and context. When necessary, the mentor also makes suggestions and gives advice towards a solution.
Model	The role model function focuses on the mentor as a person. During meetings, the mentor presents excerpts from his life and the mentee takes what applies to him and learns the lessons that need to be learned according to his particular situation. The mentor may also be a source of inspiration, or at least, of comparison.

shown that novices increased their opportunity identification abilities (Ozgen & Baron, 2007), got in touch and networked with useful persons and developed greater self-confidence or ESE (Nandram, 2003). One must remember that novice entrepreneurs manage their own company and their salary does not depend on the decision of a superior. The mentor's influence on the mentee's career is therefore related to motivational aspects, such as satisfaction or feelings of competence. Dyer (1994) claims that entrepreneurs forge their identity by first taking on the general role of an entrepreneur, simply by having created a company. They then develop more specialized roles by

identifying, for example, with someone who enjoys starting up companies to resell them (*serial entrepreneur*) or with a developer of new technologies, and so on. Dyer (1994) mentions that dilemmas sometimes arise between the desired role and that imposed by the constraints of running the business. Furthermore, throughout the various stages of an entrepreneur's career (from start-up to retirement), the entrepreneur will identify with specific roles that will refine themselves and evolve according to personal, family or business-related dilemmas. Mentors could intervene with novice entrepreneurs that are in the midst of developing specific roles and solving dilemmas by offering feedback, advice and serving as role models. Mentors could influence the attitudes of their *protégés* by confronting the choices they have made. Acting as role models, mentors may also influence the subjective standards perceived by their *protégés*.

### **Mentoring and SCCT**

SCCT has been developed mainly with the intention of bringing together conceptually related constructs in order to more fully explain outcomes common to a number of career theories as well as to account for the relations among seemingly diverse constructs (Hackett & Lent, 1992). According to SCCT, occupational and academic performance (and persistence) is greatly influenced by ability, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and performance goals (Lent et al., 2002). Of particular importance, Lent and Brown (2006) suggest that social support (e.g. mentoring) is fundamental in the development of task-specific self-efficacy, both of which are related to job satisfaction. Thus, according to SCCT, job satisfaction and the intention to stay in the profession (a measure of persistence) should both be influenced by self-efficacy and social support, among others things.

Self-efficacy, a central concept in SCCT, refers to the belief an individual has in his own ability to accomplish specific tasks undertaken (Bandura, 1997). One's perception of self-efficacy does not

depend on the number of skills one possesses, but in the *belief* of what one is able to do with one's own skills in a variety of situations. Those who believe in their abilities will perceive difficult tasks as challenges rather than threats to be avoided. According to social-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), four processes can influence an individual's sense of self-efficacy: (1) enactive mastery (or experience of mastery), (2) role modeling and vicarious experience, (3) social persuasion, and (4) judgement of one's own physiological states, such as arousal and anxiety. Mentoring is mainly related to the processes of modeling and vicarious experiences as well as social persuasion, but also, to a lesser extent, to enactive mastery. Let us first examine the role of modeling and vicarious experience process. Mentors are recognized as role models for mentees; in fact, this component is one of the three mentor functions (e.g., Bouquillon et al., 2005). It has also been established that role models influence the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986) and, more generally, attitudes (Henderson & Robertson, 2000). Krueger (2000) concludes that mentors are useful in the development of the mentee's self-efficacy, and Johannisson (1991) states that the presence of mentors or role models may also influence self-efficacy. Social persuasion has been associated with mentor psychological functions in situations where the mentor encourages and provides feedback on mentee skills (e.g., Kram, 1985; St-Jean, 2011). These mentor functions may thus develop mentee self-efficacy through social persuasion (Bandura, 1986). Finally, a mentor exercises career-related mentor functions by giving advice and suggestions (e.g. Kram, 1985) and, in an entrepreneurial context, by discussing with the mentee strategies or objectives and by guiding the development of certain skills (St-Jean, 2011; Sullivan, 2000). Although the very nature of the mentoring relationship does not foster the development of *in situ* skills directly, the relationship may provoke cognitive changes that may have repercussions on the mentee's future actions which imply a certain level of enactive mastery (Bandura, 1986). Thus, if the mentee gains knowledge

and develops new cognitive skills through mentoring, this could, in turn, increase his sense of self-efficacy. Given that received mentoring is observed through mentor functions and seems to be related to three of the four processes that develop ESE, we suggest the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** Mentoring received (through mentor functions) positively influences ESE.

### **Entrepreneurship, self-efficacy, job satisfaction and career retention**

Studies have shown the influence of ESE on the intention to start a venture (Lee, Wong, Foo, & Leung, 2011) or on the following start-up (Dimov, 2010). In our case, since novice entrepreneurs have already started their company, we studied the intention to *remaining in business* rather than the intention to *start a business*. However, because self-efficacy in employees has been shown to influence retention and the intention of remaining in the profession (McNatt & Judge, 2008), there is reason to believe that self-efficacy could also influence the novice's intention of remaining in the profession of entrepreneur. Furthermore, research indicates that self-efficacy also positively affects job performance (Robertson & Sadri, 1993) and career retention (Zimmerman & Darnold, 2009). In a context of heavy workloads, as is the case in entrepreneurship (Buttner, 1992), novices have higher intentions of leaving the profession than more experienced entrepreneurs (Jones, Chonko, Rangarajan, & Roberts, 2007). The development of self-efficacy may help novices feel that they can take on heavy workloads and consequently decrease their intention of leaving the profession. This leads to the following hypotheses:

**Hypotheses 2:** ESE positively influences the intention of staying in business

Within the SCCT framework, Hackett (1997) stresses the importance of the concept of self-efficacy on career choice and development. She states that “research findings strongly suggest that efficacy beliefs not only exert a strong, direct influence on career decision making and career choice, but self-efficacy also significantly affects the development of core vocational choice predictors such as interests, values and goals” (p.234). A meta-analysis conducted by Judge and Bono (2001) has demonstrated the significant contribution of core self-evaluation traits such as self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control and emotional stability on job satisfaction. All of the self-evaluation traits were positively related to job satisfaction. In a study comparing self-employed individuals with wage and salary workers, Bradley and Roberts (2004) have found that self-employed individuals experience higher job satisfaction than others. The authors also report that a portion of the job satisfaction for self-employed individuals could be explained by higher levels of self-efficacy and lower levels of depression. It is also demonstrated that self-efficacy moderates the relationship between career commitment and career satisfaction (Ballout, 2009). Hence, if the mentee’s self-efficacy increases following a mentoring program, his satisfaction should also increase. This leads to the following hypothesis:

**Hypotheses 3:** ESE positively influences job satisfaction

Studies have shown that an individual who is satisfied with one’s choice of occupation is more inclined to want to continue along the same path (e.g. Mau, Ellsworth, & Hawley, 2008). Moreover previous studies have shown that job satisfaction is strongly correlated to the intention of staying in business (Brigham, De Castro, & Shepherd, 2007; Hellman, 1997). Thus, everything leads us

to believe that the entrepreneur's level of job satisfaction could influence his intention of staying in business. This leads us to the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 4:** Job satisfaction positively influences the intention to stay in business.

Studies of mentoring programs developed in large organizations have demonstrated that the mentor is likely to directly influence work satisfaction, as well as retention in the organization and the profession (Ramaswami, Dreher, Bretz, & Wiethoff, 2010; van Emmerik, 2004; Xu & Payne, 2014). As for entrepreneur mentoring relationships, it is reported that novices also seem to feel more like "real" entrepreneurs when they are in contact with a mentor (Kent, Dennis, & Tanton, 2003) and have more satisfaction in carrying out their entrepreneurial tasks, since they can develop their skills (Gravells, 2006). More generally, it is demonstrated that social comparisons influence turnover intentions and career satisfaction and can be moderated by the competitiveness inside a managerial team (Eddleston, 2009). Support from spouses, either through listening or encouragement, positively influences the job satisfaction (Parasuraman, Purohit, Godshalk, & Beutell, 1996). By analogy, it is possible that the mentor, who also listens and offers encouragement, could also influence the entrepreneur's job satisfaction. These observations lead to the following hypotheses:

**Hypotheses 5:** Mentoring received (through mentor functions) positively influences intention to stay in business.

**Hypotheses 6:** Mentoring received (through mentor functions) positively influences job satisfaction in entrepreneurs.

## **Theoretical Model**

To sum up, we postulate that entrepreneurs will develop their ESE through mentoring which will lead to increased job satisfaction and a strong feeling of wanting to stay in business. In order to verify these hypotheses and test the model in which ESE is a mediator between mentoring and career satisfaction and retention, a methodology will be proposed in the next section.

## **Methodology**

### *The studied program*

The business mentoring program which is at the heart of the present study was created in 2000 by the *Fondation de l'entrepreneurship*, an organization dedicated to economic development in the province of Québec, Canada. It is offered to novice entrepreneurs through a network of 70 mentoring cells spread out across the province. These cells are generally supported by various economic development organizations such as *Centres locaux de développement*, *Sociétés d'aide au développement des collectivités*, and local chambers of commerce. These organizations ensure the local or regional development of the program, while subscribing to the business mentoring model developed by the *Fondation*. More precisely, local organizations employ a cell coordinator in charge of recruiting mentors, organizing training sessions for them, promoting the program to novice entrepreneurs, pairing participants, and supervising the ensuing mentoring relationship. The novice entrepreneurs may benefit from mentor support for a minimal price, a few hundred dollars annually, and in some cases freely. In order to supervise local development correctly, the *Fondation* provides development workshops on the mentor-mentee relationship to give novice entrepreneurs a clear idea of the mentor's role.

### *Chosen sample for analysis*

The studied population is a group of mentored entrepreneurs from the business mentoring program of the *Fondation de l'entrepreneurship*, who have had at least three meetings with their mentor, or who still maintain a relationship, and who had a valid e-mail address. This population represented 981 individuals. Mentees were contacted by e-mail to participate in the study, and two follow-ups were made to nonrespondents; 360 participants have accepted to participate (a response rate of 36.9%). Some respondents were excluded of our analysis because of missing variable. Since a portrait of the population was not available beforehand, a comparison with the early respondents (who replied after the first contact) and later respondents (after follow-ups) was conducted as suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977). No significant differences were found between demographic variables, business-related variables, or those measured in this study, which suggest that the sample does represent the studied population.

The sample contains 162 men (51.6%) and 152 women (48.4%)<sup>1</sup>. They were paired with 275 male mentors (81.4%) and 63 female mentors (18.6%). Mentees are quite educated since 173 (55%) of them have university degrees. The average age is 39.8 (standard deviation of 8.97) and age varies between 23 and 70. When starting their business, 24% had no experience in the field of their business, 33.2% had less than a year, 46.2% had less than 3 years, and 61.6% had less than 5 years. As for business experience, the majority (51.1%) had no experience, 63.4% had less than 1 year, 73.6% had less than 3 years, and 82.9% had less than 5 years of experience. Businesses had few employees, an average of 4.48 (standard deviation of 9.69, median of 2). Business turnover is mainly under Can\$100,000 annually (62.8%), 88.9% have an annual turnover of less than Can\$500,000, and only 8.6% exceed Can\$1 million. As for gross profit, including salary and bonuses for heading the business, the situation is just a grim. The vast majority (68.1%) declare annual profits under Can\$25,000, 83.5% make less than Can\$50,000 and only 6.3% make more

than Can\$100,000. Industry sectors are varied, with a slight concentration in professional services (62, for 23.0%), in manufacturing (39, for 14.4%) and in retail (32, for 11.9%). Mentoring relationships lasted 16.07 months on average (standard deviation of 14.4, median of 13). Meetings with the mentor lasted 68.52 minutes on average (standard deviation of 14.4, median of 67), and there were a little under one meeting a month (0.807), median being one meeting a month. The majority of respondents were still in their mentoring relationship at the time they participated in the study (58.6%).

### **Questionnaire and measures**

The questionnaire was done online through a professional web-based survey provider. It was administered in French and we translated all of the measures that were previously developed in English. Translation was done by two bilingual researchers separately and then compared to each other. No major differences were founded. The online questionnaire was pretested and no changes were necessary.

***Mentor functions.*** For mentor functions, we used the measure developed by St-Jean (2011) involving 9 items, such as psychological (i.e., he reassures me), career-related (i.e., he puts me into contact with people he knows) and role model components (i.e., he reveals his successes and failures to me), which correspond to the three categories of mentor functions. St-Jean (2011) reported good validity and reliability of the scale through confirmatory factor analysis and test-retest. The Cronbach's alpha for this measure is 0.898, which surpasses acceptable limits (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

***ESE.*** We used the 3-item measure developed by Anna, Chandler, Jansen, and Mero (2000; e.g., I can influence and lead, I can run my business without any problems, etc.). These authors reported

good validity through a confirmatory factor analysis and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.710. Cronbach's alpha on this sample is 0.860.

***Satisfaction in Career Choice.*** The selected career choice satisfaction measure is the one recently used in an entrepreneurship context (see Hmieleski and Corbett (2008)). The measurement is based on the work by Spector (1985). It includes 4 items measured using the 7-point Likert-type scale: I have a feeling that my work has no meaning (inverted), I like the tasks related to my job, I am proud when I carry out my work and my work is enjoyable. Hmieleski and Corbett (2008) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. In this sample, we had Cronbach's alpha of 0.721.

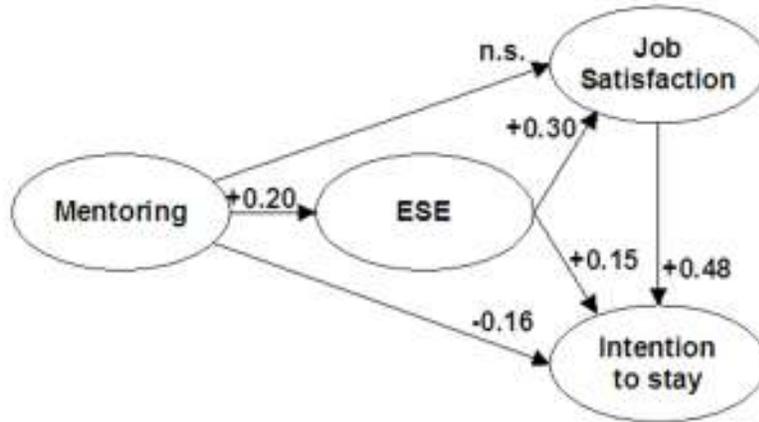
***Intention to stay in the profession.*** This measure was developed based on the intent to stay in the profession by Wallace (2001). It includes 4 items measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale: I would not want to stop working for myself, I plan to quit the business world (inverted), I plan to remain an entrepreneur for as long as possible, and I am thinking of stopping working for myself next year (reversed). Previous works using this scale did not report validity evidence. However, our own analysis shows very good validity for the scale (see the confirmatory factorial analysis [CFA] result). Wallace (2001) reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, which is considered good. Our sample had a similar Cronbach's alpha of 0.817.

We performed a CFA on all the variables used in this study and the model fit indices show good validity ( $\chi^2 = 254.9111$ ,  $df = 164$ , root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA]=0.04672, comparative fit index [CFI]=0.9839; Boomsma & Hoogland, 2001).

### ***Method***

A structural equation model was tested using LISREL for all hypotheses (see Figure 1). Polychorical correlation matrixes were used and scale variances for each of the latent variables were set by fixing one of each of the observed indicators for every latent variable to 1.0. Cases

with missing observations were excluded leaving a total of 255 cases in the study. Using self-reported data, measuring both predictors and dependent variables may result in common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). To reduce possibility of CMV, we have done many recommended a priori remedies (confidentiality, ordering of dependent and independent variables, negative wording in measures, etc.). We also performed



**Figure 1.** Structural analysis of the effect of mentoring on the entrepreneurial career.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1-Mentoring	5.39	1.15			
2-ESE	5.95	0.94	.16**		
3-Satisfaction	6.10	1.09	.06	.16**	
4-Intention to stay	5.89	1.62	-.10	.17**	.45***

Note. *ESE* = entrepreneurial self-efficacy.

\* $p \leq .05$ . \*\* $p \leq .01$ . \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

Harman’s single factor test as a post hoc test. Results indicate that our data converges into five factors, and that the first one explains only 25.6% of the variance. Furthermore, our data show

negative correlation (see Table 2), which is unlikely to appear in data contaminated with CMV. All combined, this strongly suggests that risks of CMV are reduced with our data.

## **Results**

Table 2 presents the averages, standard deviations and correlations between the latent variables. The model was tested using second-level structural equations rather than amalgamated constructs. All relationships between the manifest variables the latent variables are significant with  $p \leq .001$ . The model's fit indices are very good, with a  $\chi^2$  of 254.9111 for 164 degrees of freedom ( $p = .000$ ), RMSEA at 0.04672, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) at 0.06900, CFI at 0.9839, and a normed fit index (NFI) at 0.9563. Overall, the model exceeds the recognized acceptability limits (Kline, 2004).

In Figure 1, all structural relationships are significant at  $p \leq .01$ , with the exception of the relationship between mentoring received and job satisfaction. Furthermore, they are all positive, except for the link between mentoring and the intention to stay in business (standardized  $\beta = -.16$ ), where an inverse relationship was expected. In order to assess the mediation effect in the proposed model, we ran a model featuring only the direct effect of mentoring on job satisfaction and intention to stay in the profession, added to the relationship between career satisfaction and intention, and compared it with the full mediation model (Table 3). All relationships are significant in the direct effect model, with a negative relationship between mentoring and intention to stay in the profession. Chi-square is lower than the full model, but not significantly different. Also, model fit indexes are not significantly different (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002), which suggests the adequacy of our two models. However, the full model shows that when considering the mediation effect of

ESE, mentoring is no longer having a direct and significant effect on job satisfaction, confirming a full mediation effect of ESE. Also, with ESE the effect of mentoring is positive on intention to stay in the profession, while the direct effect is negative. Thus, the mediation model is quite more informative regarding the effect of mentoring on career satisfaction and retention of novice entrepreneurs.

**Table 3. Model comparison (full mediation vs direct effect)**

	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	CFI	RMSEA	GFI	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$
Model 1 (Full)	254.91	164	0.9839	0.0467	0.8043		
1 vs 2						61.97 (n.s.)	48
Model 2 (Direct)	192.94	116	0.9837	0.0511	0.8259		

*Note.* CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; GFI = goodness-of-fit index; n.s. = not significant.

In the full model, all other structural relationships are significant and positive, which confirms Hypotheses 1-4. Thus, mentor functions positively influence ESE (standardized  $\beta = .20$ ; Hypothesis 1), which, in turn, influences the satisfaction of being an entrepreneur (standardized  $\beta = .30$ ; Hypothesis 2) and the intention to stay in business (standardized  $\beta = 0.15$ ; Hypothesis 3). Moreover, the satisfaction of being an entrepreneur positively influences the intention to stay in business (standardized  $\beta = 0.48$ ; Hypothesis 4). However, as previously mentioned, mentoring does not directly influence job satisfaction, which invalidates Hypothesis 6, and negatively affects the intention to stay in business, which does not confirm the posit relationship (Hypothesis 5).

## **Discussion**

As expected, mentorship allows the development of ESE, as other researchers have suggested (Gravells, 2006; Nandram, 2003). This confirms the mentor's role in developing proximal benefits for the novice entrepreneur, as was shown with mentoring in large organisations (Wanberg et al., 2003). However, mentoring does not allow the direct development of job satisfaction as an entrepreneur and even reduces the intention of staying in business in the future. Although these results initially appear to be contradictory, an explanation could be put forward. We propose that mentoring increases novice entrepreneurs' confidence in their capacity to clarify their business vision and increase some of their management skills. These benefits could, in turn, increase the mentee's ESE. This increase in ESE may lead the mentee to consider that he or she has good potential for success, among others place in a wage employment. This new reality, coupled with the fact that the mentorship network coordinators invite mentors to work on the person instead of the project and recommend having mentees find answers to their own problems, mentors can only marginally influence the project's results. The intention of mentees to stay in business may therefore decrease when faced with a business project with limited chances of success and over which mentors have little or no influence. To support this hypothesis, a study by Kahneman and Lovallo (1993) demonstrated that entrepreneurs tend to have a positive view (sometimes unreasonably so) of the future of their businesses. The authors mention that these decision-makers tend to have an inside view—that focuses on the current situation and reflects their personal involvement in it rather than an outside view—one that compares the current situation dispassionately with the results of relevant past ones. Mentoring could provide entrepreneurs with this outside, more realistic view of the future of their business and discourage them from continuing on with their business plans. Since we know that strongly overconfident entrepreneurs

are more likely to fail (Koellinger, Minniti, & Schade, 2007), being paired with a mentor may help to reduce this cognitive bias. Consequently, despite the increased confidence mentees develop in their entrepreneurial skills, their intention to stay in business could be lessened. This hypothesis is quite plausible considering that 68% of respondents in the sample have incomes of under Can\$25,000, including salaries, profits and bonuses paid to the entrepreneur, and that 83.5% have incomes under Can\$50,000.

In accordance, we believe that mentoring should occur before the launching of the business and not when the entrepreneur faces difficulties, as with the studied program for this study. In this phase of the start-up process, novice entrepreneurs will identify and decide to exploit an opportunity. As it was previously demonstrated, novice entrepreneurs do not have the same opportunity recognition patterns than experienced entrepreneurs, because of different cognitive schemas or self-images (Baron & Ensley, 2006). Mentors will be able to help enhancing the opportunity recognition process of novices in suggesting the exploitation of a more profitable opportunity, which will lead to a better performance of the SME and, probably, an increasing of the intention to stay entrepreneur in the future for them. However, other hypotheses may be worth considering. For example, close contact with a mentor, acting as a role model, could lead mentees to review their career choices. For instance, mentees may more clearly understand the difficulties in balancing personal life and their business project or the limits of working without supervision. They may also become aware that they do not have the level of skills or aptitudes required to succeed. In short, they could simply realize that entrepreneurship as a career is not the right choice for him.

This research confirms SCCT's usefulness in entrepreneurship. Using this theory to test a model explaining the modification of attitudes related to entrepreneurial careers in a mentoring context,

we were able to understand the central role of ESE as a mediator variable. These results indicate the contradictory effect of role models, such as mentors, on the attitudes of entrepreneurs. Bearing in mind that governments wish to support entrepreneurship by increasing the number of entrepreneurs and their success, these results could be considered negative. However, because mentoring seems to increase self-efficacy and, at the same time, reduce intention to remain within the profession, we advocate the fact that this type of mentoring should be introduced very early on in the entrepreneurial process. Since entrepreneurship is not a career choice that suits everyone, the mentor's effect, from the individual's standpoint, may be considered positive. By allowing novice entrepreneurs to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses on the one hand, and what being an entrepreneur entails on the other, the model favours acceleration and confirmation of career choice. This suggests a closer and more refined study of the effect of role models, such as mentors, in entrepreneurial career development for future research.

From a career-counselling practice standpoint, this research suggests mentoring as an efficient tool in helping potential entrepreneurs with their career choice. Recently, we noticed that the intention to start a business is high amongst youth (St-Jean & Tremblay, 2014) but their lack of entrepreneurial experience may lead to unrealistic career plans. This may partly explain why the majority of start-ups fail within the first 5 years (MDEIE, 2008). As observed, on a sample of novice entrepreneurs owning small businesses that seem to have a low growth potential, being paired with an experienced business person appears to lower the intention to remain in the profession. Thus, career counsellors may use mentoring as an effective tool in building well-adjusted expectations toward the entrepreneurial career.

### ***Limitations***

Among the limitations of this study, we must underscore the cross sectional nature of this study. A longitudinal assessment of the change occurring on the variable over time is needed. Indeed, although SCCT allows us to postulate the relationship among variables, we cannot prove a causal relationship between mentoring, ESE, and career outcomes like job satisfaction and retention. Also, our study only takes into account the mentee's perspective, but mentoring is a dyadic relationship. When measuring mentor functions from the perspective of the mentee, we view only one side of the coin and this limitation can certainly be overcome by measuring the mentor's self-reported function. Finally, we used a partial model of SCCT, putting aside the entrepreneur's outcome expectations, goals, and personal inputs (psychological dimensions, personal background, etc.), among other things. A more complete model should be used in the future to fully understand the development of positive career outcome for the entrepreneurs.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the usefulness of SCCT in the study of entrepreneurial career. Our model shows that a relationship exists between the satisfaction with one's work as an entrepreneur, one's intention to stay in business and the effect of mentoring on ESE. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the effect of ESE on these components (work satisfaction and intention to stay in business) during career development. This is a worthwhile contribution that allows us to confirm the usefulness of career theories in the context of the novice entrepreneur. Our results are similar to those obtained in contexts other than entrepreneurship but highlight the negative influence of mentoring on the intention to pursue an entrepreneurial career. We may suggest the hypothesis that mentoring could bring an outsider's view concerning the realism of the mentee's business venture and thus discourage the mentee from continuing in an entrepreneurial career. From a

career-counseling practice standpoint, this research suggests mentoring as a potential efficient tool in helping entrepreneurs with their career choice.

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### **Note**

1. We had missing values for sex of the mentee.

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