

Exploring the relationship between work and learning within small business development

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Keywords

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Abstract

Continuous learning has been identified as a key element for SMMEs to succeed in their drive to build productive capacity, to compete, to create jobs and to contribute to poverty alleviation in South Africa. Without the necessary business skills and insight, emerging entrepreneurs will not be able to run their business successfully. Therefore, emerging small business owners especially those in rural areas attend the general, basic, government-subsidized courses provided by non-profit organizations.

To ensure that learning is being transferred to the workplace, the Western Cape Business Development Centre (WCBDC) applies the concept of mentoring as a follow-up programme. In layman's term, a business mentor refers to someone who is experienced in business, trustworthy and professional, trained and up-to-date in their advice.

The goal of the research was to evaluate the impact of the WCBDC's mentoring program on the development of marketing skills of an established small business. I did a case study on one of the successful small businesses in Saldanha, The Marine and Industrial Coaters (MIC), whose owners have attended the Western Cape Business Development Center's (WCBDC) entrepreneurial development program and then enrolled for its business mentoring programme.

Since the mentoring programme commits a substantial amount of resources to mentoring and requires a lot of time from the WCBDC, it is of interest to see whether the expected goals of the mentoring programme – to enhance the entrepreneurs' business skills and to lead entrepreneurs to business growth – are achieved. I have focused on the development of marketing skills and found that the entrepreneurs' marketing knowledge and skills did developed as a result of the programme. More efforts need to continue to sustain the existing momentum. However, success in implementing the mentoring programme will depend on essential factors such as self-directed learning, facilitative and multiple mentoring, application of both psychosocial and career mentoring functions, and shared accountability and responsibility of both mentee and mentor.

Declaration

I declare that exploring the relationship between work, learning and mentorship within small business development is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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May 2009

Signed: _____



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Section 1 – Introduction

1.1 Background and Rationale

In the wake of South African apartheid, changes abound. The opening up of this new democratic nation to the global economy (and vice versa) has been embraced, with the reformulation of economic development policies to maximize opportunity and growth. In the Saldanha Bay/Vredenburg area, located 130 kilometres northwest of Cape Town in the South Africa's Western Cape province, these policies have marked the commencement of a transformation from an economy based on fishing, farming, and the export of raw iron-ore to an economy that boasts one of the most modern steel production plants in the world, a steel processing plant, a heavy minerals processing plant, and a port with a quay three and a half times the length it was only five years ago.

With the study area designated as an Industrial Development Zone (IDZ), many posit that these dramatic changes are not an end, but rather the starting point for a globally competitive regional economy. Concomitant with the new macroeconomic strategy Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), is the fervent promotion of Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs). Such policy concentration on the establishment of SMMEs in global economic integration raises the question of how our local experiences react and adapt to these economic development challenges.

The South African Government has a firm belief that the future of our economy is in the hands of entrepreneurs and small businesses. Therefore, it is essential that all stakeholders stimulate the development of small businesses, which are likely to be the job creators of the future. Through the National Small Business Enabling Act of 1995 and the National Small Business Act of 1996 the South African government acknowledges the economic potential of a strong Small, Micro and Medium Enterprise sector (SMMEs) and is committed to its promotion and growth. The government aims not only to increase the number of new ventures, but also to create an enabling environment to ensure the survival and growth of small businesses. According

to Van Eeden, et al. (2003:13) the National Small Business Act of 1996 has been instrumental in the creation of an enabling environment by means of its provision made for financial and non-financial governmental assistance to all emerging entrepreneurs. For South Africa to increase economic growth and employment creation, it needs a higher proportion of entrepreneurs to progress beyond the start-up phase.

The SMME sector is perceived to be a vehicle by which the lowest income people in our society gain access to economic opportunities. However, lack of education and training is one of the problems that lead to a low entrepreneurial activity in South Africa. According to Orford, et al. (2003:15) experts in South Africa isolate education and training as South Africa's main weakness with regard to an enabling environment for entrepreneurship. The response of the Saldanha Bay community to the country's cry for entrepreneurial orientation and development was the establishment of the WCBDC in February 1998. The WCBDC was a result of teamwork between the Saldanha Bay community, established businesses, industry and the provincial and local governments. The objective of the WCBDC is to establish sustainable business in order to enhance economic growth.

The current situation at the West Coast is that many turn up with a dream of starting their businesses and enroll for the initial basic entrepreneurial development program, which includes:

- Generate ideas for new businesses;
- Testing feasibility and viability of business ideas;
- Writing of business plans;
- Simple knowledge of marketing;
- Doing Market Research;
- Acquaintance with product costing;
- Elements of book keeping;
- Familiarization with project financing by banks;
- Understanding characteristics of and competencies for successful entrepreneurs.

There is a need to look at the current practices of entrepreneurial development within South Africa. Pretorius and Van Vuuren (2003:519) investigated the programmes being used in South Africa to develop entrepreneurial development by the Department of Trade and Industry via its three implementation arms: the IDC, SEDA and Khula. They have found that the core focus of the programmes includes finance, growth, expansion and competitiveness (through export) that are more relevant for existing businesses than for emerging entrepreneurs. There is a general tendency for Khula, the DTI and the IDC programmes to focus on the larger and existing ventures, and very few programmes are aimed at Micro and Small businesses.

The Chairperson of the local Business Chamber in Saldanha believes that the potential of the WCBDC's entrepreneurial development programme will contribute directly to the development of entrepreneurial orientation. According to the WCBDC many of the newly established businesses in Saldanha/Vredenburg area have successful and exciting business start-ups. During this start-up phase, small businesses that have products or services with promising markets potentially enjoy great community support and good publicity within the local newspaper until contractual jobs have been granted. These contracts help them to survive the first growing pains.

1.2 Statement of the problem

The problem, however, is that most of these newly established small businesses remain in the survival stage and struggles to develop their businesses to move beyond the survival stage.

1.3 Research Question

Does mentoring foster and accelerate learning in the workplace?

1.4 The Case Study

1.4.1 The small business

The Marine and Industrial Coaters (MIC) were established in September 1999 with two shareholders namely, Charles Davids and John Abrahams, both having a 50% share in the business. Their core business is Industrial and Marine Corrosion Protection, which falls under the scope of the Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services SETA (MERSETA) - more specifically within the Metal and Engineering, and Auto Chambers. Currently there is no existing South African qualification within this trade although it is a well-known and highly respected trade within other countries. As MIC only embarks on contractual jobs, they employ 15 regular contract workers to honor their commitments.

Working experience of all these men varies from 5 to 12 years and, they are all skillful and experienced within this trade. Major contracts that were awarded to the MIC include the following corporate businesses: DUFERCO Steel Processing; SEA HARVEST Corporation; St. Helena Bay Fishing and; Coastal and Civils. Their jobs varied from Trawler Fleet maintenance to acid proofing and coating. Their current ongoing smaller contracts within the industrial field come from Saldanha Steel and within the Marine industry from Sea Harvest. Although the business owners of MIC have not yet encounter temporary unemployment, they are not always in a situation to employ all the contract workers at a regular basis. Their biggest problem is to get a long-term major contract that will help them to expand their business. All the previous and current contracts are only suited to keep the business alive and in a survival stage. Both the owners have attended the entrepreneurial development program of the Western Cape Business Development Centre (WCBDC) – refer to Annexure 1. Participants of the entrepreneurial development program are then encouraged to participate in the mentoring programme to ensure that the learning that took place in the entrepreneurial development program are transferred to the workplace.

The Western Cape Business Development Centre, therefore, uses the business development cycle, or the 5 stages of a business as it is commonly known, as a tool of reference for the mentoring programme in the development of the small business - refer to Annexure 2.

1.4.2 The Mentoring Programme

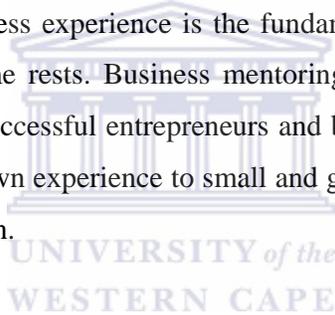
The mentoring programme that follows the entrepreneurial development programme is being identified as a learning approach to enhance the learners' knowledge, understanding and develop the business skills in an incremental process. Key to the mentoring programme is that the Centre enrolls as business mentors persons with substantial business experience who can then translate their experience to guide the emerging entrepreneurs.

Some of these seasoned business persons are members of the Saldanha and Vredenburg Business Chambers, and senior employees of big businesses. The business chambers and big businesses have representation on the WCBDC's Board of Directors. These board members are professionals from different business fields, and they therefore represent a huge pool of skills. They are all concerned with the common issues such as ways of expanding existing businesses, finding and generating niche products and services and do thorough market research of what is needed to uplift the local community economically.

In addition to the availability and access to the huge pool of skills, the WCBDC has also developed a well-established linkage programme with other role players within the local community that will support the mentor in developing the business skills of the entrepreneurs. The support structure includes: the business chambers of Saldanha and Vredenburg; Sector Education Training Authority (SETA); Department of Labor; the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS); the local media and, the local financial Institutions.

The support structure has committed itself to the process of forming an incredible and powerful network base, which can help and empower people from previously disadvantaged communities to enter the mainstream economy as entrepreneurs rather than job seekers. The WCBDC has established an effective coordination system to use the support structure effectively within its mentoring programme. Although the primary function of the support structure is to render advice and referral services, participants of the support structure will also be used as expert coaches within the mentoring programme and will work closely with the mentors to monitor the learners' personal progress as well as their businesses' growth. The WCBDC will ensure that expertise is to be matched to the need of the entrepreneur so together the expert (technical) and business mentor aim to stimulate the growth of the emerging SMME.

The benefit of business experience is the fundamental bedrock on which the mentoring programme rests. Business mentoring is the way that the Centre employs to enable successful entrepreneurs and business managers to pass on the benefit of their own experience to small and growing businesses within the region of its operation.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a stylized building with columns and the text "UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE" below it.

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WESTERN CAPE

Section 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Understanding the concept of mentoring

Mentoring and the mentoring relationship are important elements of entrepreneurial development, because it contributes to the developmental process of the working life of adults. My statement enjoys the support of Sloan and Taylor when they defined “mentoring as the offering of guidance for an evolving professional life” (Sloan and Taylor, 2003:321). It is imperative that I explore the viewpoints of various writers to gain a better understanding of the ways that mentoring and the mentoring relationship can be influential in the development of emerging entrepreneurs.

Scholars provide varied interpretations and emphases in their definitions of a mentor or mentoring relationship. Merriam describes mentoring as “a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person, a relationship in which the older member is trusted, loving, and experienced in the guidance of the younger” (Merriam, 1983:162). Based on the research of Merriam, mentoring helps to shape the “growth and development of the protégé” (Merriam, 1983:162). Darling reinforces the purpose of mentoring whereby skills should be transferred from one person to another, but it appears that “experience” rather than age should be the qualifying factor for being a mentor (Darling, 1985:42).

Darling (1985:42) further defines mentoring as a process of “guidance, teaching, leading, advising and influence”, which are critical aspects of the mentoring process. These aspects are also discussed by Zachary in which she states that mentoring is “facilitating learning in many ways, all the while listening, empowering, coaching, challenging, teaching, collaborating, aiding, assisting, supporting, expediting, easing, simplifying, advancing and encouraging” (Zachary, 2000:23).

The guidance dynamic in mentoring is supported by Barondess, in Sloan and Taylor, who sees mentoring as the “offering of guidance for an evolving professional life” (Sloan and Taylor, 2003:321). Therefore these inputs from the abovementioned writers lead me to the opinion that mentoring can be used

as an effective learning approach to ensure the transfer of knowledge and skills into the workplace. The element of guidance brings to the fore the relevance of past training and experience of the seasoned business person to come alongside the emerging entrepreneur and provide practical guidance. It is important to note that caution should be taken that this guidance does not develop into a dependent relationship, but should rather enable the mentee to become the driver of his own development.

The workplace experience of the mentor should be a reference of learning to the mentee. According to Wilson and Hayes mentoring should be regarded as “an integral part of learning that takes place in the work environment, and is related to career assistance, as well as supporting the mentee on developmental and psychosocial levels” (Wilson and Hayes, 2000:494). Thus, through mentoring the mentor can assist the mentee to feel at ease in the work environment, which sometimes overwhelms the mentee with the reality of the workplace. The mentor can relate to the uncertainties which the mentee may experience, due to similar past experiences.

It is clear that in mentoring age is not an essential factor, but rather the experience of the mentor is of utmost importance. Mentors with experience can relate to the mentee’s situation and shows empathy, quote real life examples to illustrate options, apply a balanced judgment of business risks, diagnose underlying problems and resolve with the mentee, prioritize alternative options and courses of action, motivate mentees to set objectives and take action, and show mentees how to tackle future problems on their own.

The field of mentoring is of course much wider, with many diverse forms of mentoring scenarios. Therefore, I want to specifically focus on the business mentoring aspect, and the next section will therefore deal with business mentoring.

2.2 Business Mentoring

The debate on how ordinary people as can become successful entrepreneurs is a critical juncture. I have found that there is a trend for emerging entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas, to instead participate in shorter practical business development courses. Therefore, the focus point for this research study is how business mentoring as a learning approach can transfer learning, obtained in these shorter business development courses, to the workplace and ensures business growth. This section explores the functions and potential of business mentoring.

After analysis of several studies Kram categorized the functions that emerged from business mentoring relationships into two broad categories, namely “career functions and psychosocial functions” (Kram, 1988:22). In her analysis Kram mentions that on the one hand “career functions are those aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes and preparing for advancement in an organization”, and on the other hand, “psychosocial functions are aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity and effectiveness in a professional role” (Kram, 1988:22).

The theory on career and psychosocial functions of mentoring is also discussed in the literature of Gibson (2004). In her analysis on business mentoring Gibson stated that “career and psychosocial functions are not necessarily distinct; and where elements of both functions are combined, the potency and benefit of the mentoring relationship is increased” (Gibson, 2004:261-262). The readings of Kram and Gibson bring me to the opinion that business mentoring, especially for emerging SMMEs, should focus on the technical and work related tasks (career functions) as well as emphasizing the interpersonal relationship aspects (psychosocial functions).

Crow and Matthews also support this two-dimensional approach of career and psychosocial functions in business mentoring, arguing that the focus should move beyond the mere task and result oriented teaching or coaching of the mentor so as to also include the “psychosocial aspects of the individual’s development” (Crow and Matthews,1998:27). For Crow and Matthews, it is imperative that business mentors should “act as confidant willing to play part

of an adversary if needed, to listen and to question so mentees can broaden their own view” (Crow and Matthews,1998:27). It is evident that the psychosocial function serves a purpose of building the self-esteem of the mentee as a business person.

The two dimensional approach is critical in the context of new start-up businesses where entrepreneurs are self employed and experience various business challenges, and often have to build networks and relationships with numerous business entities, as the business demands different knowledge and skills at various times in the life of the business. The benefit of the two dimensional approach of business mentoring is that it focuses holistically on the mentee’s development, which is a positive break from the traditional one-sided technical approach to business mentoring. It is especially the psychosocial functions of business mentoring, with its human interpersonal elements, which need to be emphasized.

The rationale for this is based on the strong entrepreneurial focus towards empowering people from previously disadvantaged communities in a South African context. As starting a small business is a new field of learning, emerging entrepreneurs from previously disadvantaged communities need help and guidance, a confidential assessment of their ideas and options in a positive, non-threatening manner before they go along and implement their ideas. Therefore, both the career and psychosocial functions are relevant in the mentoring process of emerging entrepreneurs, which will enable business growth, improve profitability, and to improve survival. The next section will focus on the business mentoring approaches, which correlates to the career and psychosocial functions of mentoring.

2.3 Business Mentoring Approaches

Many emerging small businesses do not have the need for, or are often unable to, employ a fulltime management specialist in the areas of marketing management, financial management, information technology management and human resources management. This is precisely the situation that creates an opportunity for emerging entrepreneurs to develop a multiple of skills needed for business growth.

The first approach to be highlighted is multiple mentoring. This approach implies that the mentee will receive mentoring from various mentors depending on the skills the mentee needs. It should be noted that the entrepreneur may make use of services of specialists in the non-core activities of the business. However, to understand the business and to be in control of the business growth, the entrepreneur needs to develop the multiple skills required for business success.

2.3.1 Multiple Mentoring

The theory of multiple mentoring as an approach to mentor and coach emerging entrepreneurs make sense in the small business context as the business owners do not have the luxury of many employees. It is now up to the business owner to develop more than one skill as needed within the business. Mumford (1998) supports the idea of “multiple mentoring” as he emphasizes the need for “various mentors” to provide in the career and technological skills required by small businesses (Mumford, 1998:49).

Mumford argues that multiple mentoring relationships, which focus on the “concurrent development of different and targeted skills”, enable the mentee to develop a diversity of skills and knowledge in a short time frame (Mumford, 1998:49). It appears that, on the one hand, Mumford makes the case for several mentors working together to develop the entrepreneur, while each mentor addresses the area of need in which the mentor is an expert. Mezas and Scandura, on the other hand, make the case for simultaneous “vocational” and “psychosocial development” for mentees (Mezas and Scandura, 2005:521).

It is clear that multiple mentoring has been introduced in business mentoring because of the many wide range of development areas for upcoming entrepreneurs. In South Africa, most upcoming entrepreneurs from the previously disadvantage communities, are ordinary people. Currently, various writers (such as Young, 1997; Canon, 2000 and Catford, 1998) are debating whether some of the business skills can be transferred to ordinary people. They have commented that ordinary people have the ideas, the imagination and the ability to galvanise resources but often lack the management skills to

build a long term successful organization. However, it has been indicated that many small businesses fail due to poor management and lack of business skills (Van Eeden et al., 2003:13). It is therefore most important that small business owners obtain expert advice from more than one mentor or coach.

2.3.2 Facilitative Mentoring

Gibbs cautions expert mentors or “coaches not to provide all the answers to mentees”, because “mentees will not take responsibility to work through their problems if they know answers are forthcoming” (Gibbs, 1992:49). To ensure that each expert mentor in the professional life of the mentee knows what the expectation is, a facilitative approach is needed. This facilitative approach will ensure the smooth operation of multiple mentoring.

Murray promotes the facilitative approach of business mentoring, arguing that “facilitated mentoring is a structure and series of processes designed to create effective mentoring relationships, guide the desired behaviors change of those involved, and evaluate the results for the mentees, the mentors, and the business with the primary purpose of systematically developing the skills and leadership abilities of the less-experience members of a business.” (Murray, 1991:5). It is appears that Murray argues that facilitative mentoring should be applied in connection with multiple mentoring.

The role of facilitative mentoring is to ensure personal development as a business person. Hargrove comments that the “developmental facilitation has to do with the creation of practical areas for the development of new ideas, tools and methods” (Hargrove, 1995:220). Hargrove is supported by Johnson who describes the developmental facilitative approach that “mentoring means to facilitate, guide, and encourage continuous innovation, learning, and growth to prepare for the future” (Johnson, 1997:13).

Another essential factor in the facilitative approach, is that the control of the learning process needs to be placed in the hands of the mentees, which Zachary refers to as the “learner-centered approach” (Zachary, 2000:xv). Zachary expands on the facilitative approach, by placing the emphasis on the “learner-centered focus of adult learning”, whereby it is required from

business mentors to “facilitate the learning relationship rather than the mere transferring of knowledge to the learner” (Zachary, 2000:xv).

When I study this facilitative approach of business mentoring, it is evident that the mentor who plays the role of learning facilitator is vital in the psychosocial function of mentoring. Mumford refers to the need of a mentor for “psychosocial guidance” (Mumford, 1998:49). For Kram, facilitative mentoring will benefit the small business entrepreneur in the areas of “personal development, life quality, networking, knowledge transfer, confidence, decision-making, profitability, and accelerated business growth” (Kram, 1988:22).

The link between multiple mentoring and facilitative mentoring provides for an ideal network which can offer guidance and support to meet at least some of the mentees developmental needs. However, it is also important to acknowledge the role that fellow upcoming entrepreneurs can play in a mentee’s professional development. Therefore, the third approach that I will discuss is the peer mentoring approach. The next section deals with some ideas on this approach.

2.3.3 Peer Mentoring

From the writings of Mezas and Scandura, I understand that peer mentoring has essentially to do with persons on similar levels of their development, who mentor each other. This point is confirmed by Mezas and Scandura when they describe “peer mentoring as a process involving lateral or peer relationships at similar organizations, with peer mentoring being quite popular in instances where organizations downsize and reduce hierarchical layers” (Mezas and Scandura, 2005:523).

Therefore, peer mentoring could pair individuals in different organizations, such as small businesses, NGO’s, etc. The emphasis, in the peer mentoring relationship, is on “developmental work relationship”, and not so much a traditional hierarchical relationship (Mezas and Scandura, 2005:523). I also noticed a distinction between peer mentoring, in comparison to multiple and facilitative mentoring. This distinction lies in the fact that peer mentoring has

the unique potential to facilitate the functioning of both career and psychosocial development. Kram supports this notion when she mentioned that “peer relationships provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers” (Kram, 1983:623).

The value of peer mentoring is also noted by Mezas and Scandura who stated that “peer mentors provide psychosocial support, personal feedback and information” (Mezas and Scandura, 2005:523). As small business development is a new playing field, emerging entrepreneurs should form learning partnerships with other newcomers in the same economic sector. Kiltz et al argue that learning should include “the development of a learning community with a strong inquiring element” (Kiltz et al, 2004:136). Forming such learning partnerships with fellow upcoming entrepreneurs will help enlarging the necessary network which is foundational in developing the business.

Reflecting on the three different approaches to mentoring, namely the multiple mentoring, facilitative mentoring and peer mentoring, I am inclined to embrace a holistic approach to mentoring that will include all three these approaches. It is therefore imperative that the mentee form mentoring relationships with businesspersons who can help them develop their various business skills in an experiential learning environment.

The next section deals with the mentoring relationship.

2.4 The Mentoring Relationship

It is important for me that the mentoring relationship embodies both the career and psychosocial functions. According to Kram, some mentors prefer to focus on one of these functions whilst others engage into a dual functioning relationship which she refers to as a “classical mentoring relationship” (Kram 1986). Aryee et al. elaborate on this issue of mentoring preference where some mentors prefer to focus solely on “career-orientated functions” (Aryee et al, 1996:98). In their writings mentoring relationships that are career-oriented, are referred to as “secondary mentoring” (Aryee et al, 1996:98).

Thus, it is evident that secondary mentoring is related to the process of multiple mentoring. Mentees can form many secondary mentoring relationships with different mentors at different stages in their professional life as their developmental needs arise. The role of the secondary mentor is career task-oriented and the relationship is of a shorter duration, and more at ease as I see the task of the secondary mentor to transfer a skill to the mentee.

Another essential factor to consider is whether the relationships should be formal or informal. Hofman argues that in the context of small businesses development, the relationship needs to be formalized (in Waters et al, 2002). Kram, on the one hand, argues that “formalized relationships tend to be more task/career focused” and will hamper the so much needed psychosocial support (Kram in Waters et al., 2002:109). Chao, on the other hand, has found that “mentees involved in informal mentoring relationships have reported to receive a remarkably greater measure of support on a career level (e.g. coaching) than did mentees who were engaged in formal mentoring relationships” (in Gibson, 2004:265).

However, there is an interest that both formal and informal mentoring approaches tend to be useful, depending on the learning situation. Nigro (2003:36) promotes such “collaborative approaches” between the formal and the informal. What appears to be most important in the mentoring relationship is discussed by Zachary who stated that “commitment and engagement” are key elements that will ensure the establishment and maintenance of a healthy mentoring relationship (2000). Several writers expound on the main features of such mentoring relationships, of which Jacobi (in Caldwell and Carter, 1993:57), provide some useful features:

“Mentoring relationships are helping relationships usually focused on achievement... mentoring includes any or all of three broad components: (a) emotional and psychological support, (b) direct assistance with career and professional development, (c) role modeling... Mentoring relationships are reciprocal relationships. The mentor as well as the mentee derives benefits from the relationship... Mentoring relationships are personal... Relative to their mentees, mentors shows great experience, influence, and achievement

within a particular organization or environment” (Jacobi in Caldwell and Carter, 1993:57)

I am convinced that mentoring relationships, which can embody both career and psychosocial functions, and where mentees can engage in classical and secondary mentoring relationships, whether it be formal or informal, will be beneficial to upcoming entrepreneurs. However, it is important that both mentor and mentee value the relationship and commit themselves to mentoring relationship.

It is clear to me that small business entrepreneurs can benefit tremendously from engaging in mentoring relationships. Kram mentions in her review that mentoring relationships will bring forth “personal development, improved quality of life, better networks, knowledge transfer; increased confidence, improved decision-making, increased profitability and accelerated business growth” (Kram,1988:22).

The next section will deal with the benefits of mentoring.

2.5 The benefits of mentoring

All learning programmes should be beneficial to the learners especially if the programme will add value to their workplace learning. The knowledge of having a person in support in anyone’s development makes it so much easier. As Zachary writes in her excellent section on feedback that "there is no greater contribution to mentee learning than the gift a mentor provides by giving and receiving ongoing, honest, constructive feedback” (Zachary, 2000:130). Zachary further elaborates on the benefit of feedback, by stating that feedback “expands the mentee’s capacity to develop others, and this enriches the learning experience and develops competence and confidence” (Zachary, 2000:130).

Other benefits of the mentoring relationship have been identified by Parsloe (1995:76), namely the “advantage of reassurance” or having a backup figure, a qualified sounding board, “assistance with lateral thinking” and “understanding career and organizational dynamics”, and an opportunity to identify the needed skills and experiences.

The benefits of mentoring with reference to the psychosocial function are also found in the readings of Ferrari by noting, “individuals with mentors have better psychological health (Rhodes et al., 1992, 1994), are more satisfied with their social support networks (Rhodes et al., 2002), have higher career goals and self-esteem (Fagenson, 1989; Dreher & Ash, 1990; Chao et al., 1992), and experience reduced role stress and role conflict” (Ferrari, 2004:295). It is clear that upcoming entrepreneurs who enter in sound mentoring relationships will only benefit from it.

However, it is not only the mentee that will benefit from the relationship. In the case of mentors, Mumford notes that the “mentee’s improved performance may build the mentor’s self-esteem and confidence in his or her own management ability, increase job satisfaction, and helps to develop skills, knowledge and insight” (Mumford, 1995:23). Thus, it is clear that mentoring has advantages for both mentees and mentors.

The following section (section 3) of this research study will focus on the research design, methodology and actual research that was done in order to evaluate the impact of a mentoring programme on an existing business in Saldanha Bay, called the Marine and Industrial Coaters (MIC)

Section 3 - Research Design and Methodology

My research essay mainly comprised of a qualitative literature study on mentoring as a learning method, as well as a practical case study. According to Strydom qualitative research has as its main characteristic the “narrative” as a means to gain evidence. Strydom argues that qualitative research has its roots in the “naturalistic approach” (Strydom, 1998: 54). This approach holds the point of view that natural phenomena must be studied, which I understand as the study of the spontaneous and natural behaviour of people in their natural environment.

Denzin and Lincoln support Strydom’s statement when they say that qualitative research “explores phenomena (people, things) in their natural contexts and attempts to understand which meaning people attach to their context” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998:3). Thus, it is clearly a study of people in everyday life. Therefore people’s own words, feelings, terms, experiences and behaviour are very important.

The aim of the research was to explore the existing theory of mentoring as a learning approach to foster and accelerate learning in the workplace. The aspect of investigating existing theory, as well as exploring possible new knowledge, is emphasized by Herbert when describing the four aspects of research. According to Herbert, research can be classified according to the “field of investigation (such as social research); approach to research (quantitative and qualitative); contribution to knowledge (investigating new or existing knowledge); and objective of research (such as only doing a literature research)” (Herbert, 1990:1).

This study also aims to contribute to the existing knowledge of mentoring as a learning approach and the first leg of the study was the literature review on mentoring. The literature resources, which were used, consisted of books, journals, internet resources and articles, which obtain the most current discussions and debates on mentoring. The selected literature resources

provided me with the important theories and debates on mentoring, which assisted in the answering of the research question.

The second leg of the study, i.e. the case study involved the techniques of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires to obtain qualitative information of the implementation of an entrepreneurial development programme on the West Coast. Silverman in Seale, mentions that case studies are “limited to a particular set of interactions,” but “still allow one to examine how particular sayings and doings are embedded in particular patterns of social organization.” Seale also argues that “case studies allow one to examine how particular sayings and doings are embedded in particular patterns of social organization” (Seale, 2000:107).

In his classic book on case study research, Yin argues that case research and survey methods are better suited than other techniques for analyzing “contemporary events” (Yin, 1994:9). Case study research is superior to survey methods at answering the “whys” and “hows” because the case analysis can delve more deeply into motivations and actions than structure surveys (Yin, 1994:9).

Yin also states in his book that case studies can be either single or multiple-case designs. Single cases, as my research study, are used to confirm or challenge a theory, or to represent a unique or extreme case (Yin, 1994). Single-case studies are ideal for revelatory cases where an observer may have access to a phenomenon that was previously inaccessible. Yin states that single-case designs require careful investigation to avoid misrepresentation and to maximize the investigator's access to the evidence.

I have made use of semi-structured interviews and questionnaires which have served to be flexible tools to gain qualitative and in depth information on the value of the entrepreneurial development programme. I have noticed that this flexibility of semi-structured interviews is supported in the reading of Seale (2000:128).

My qualitative research was based on a single case study of one of the most promising small businesses in Saldanha Bay at the West Coast in South Africa. There is widespread interest in the promotion of small business development in many countries and how these small businesses might influence the global economy. For my research I have decided to determine the impact of the mentoring approach, which was adopted by the local business service center at Saldanha Bay, on transferring learning to the workplace.

The research has focused more specifically on the impact that the mentoring learning approach had on the development of marketing skills of a promising small business' owners, which was identified by the WCBDC. The MIC, the small business, shows promising possibilities of growing into a well-established service provider of industrial and marine coatings. From their start-up date in September 1999 these entrepreneurs has shown great commitment towards their goal of being one of the lead providers in their sector and had to struggle a lot to get contractual work from corporate companies. They had to compete with the existing well-established major players in the coating field, which have long working relationships with the big corporate companies and the local municipality.

My research respondents that I have selected to interview included the following eight people (two owners of MIC, two of the contractual labourers of MIC, two staff members of the WCBDC who have been working with MIC since its early days, the chairperson of local Business Chamber and a peer entrepreneur):

The WCPP respondents:

1. Charles Davids (Co-owner)

Charles has a 50% partnership in MIC and has been working the industrial and marine coating sector for 9 years. He is competent in all the technical work and supervises the sandblasting aspect of the work.

2. John Abrahams (Co-owner)

John owns the other 50% in MIC and has been working the industrial and marine coating sector for 12 years. He is also competent in all the technical work and supervises the painting and coating aspects of the work.

3. Shane Witbooi (Employee)

Shane is being working for MIC since its early days and fulfills the role as a Sand Blaster.

4. Ivan Fortuin (Employee)

Ivan is also working for MIC since its early days and fulfills the role as a Spray Painter.

The WCBDC respondents:

5. Gertruida Marais

Gertruida, the WCBDC Manager, is responsible for supervising all the activities as well as for fundraising and the establishment of partnerships to fulfill the needs of the client, The SMME.

6. Joanne Cupido

Joanne fulfils the role of Business Linkage and Client Coordinator. She was in the teaching profession for several years before entering the business development environment. Her understanding of adult development phases makes her a valuable asset for the WCBDC. She facilitates linkages between Corporates and SMMEs regarding business opportunities and tendering, as well as the mentoring programme of the centre. She is also responsible for client coordination and finance sourcing.

The Business Chamber's respondent

7. Piet van Tonder

Piet is the Chairperson of the local Business Chamber. He has more than 20 years experience in the business development environment. He is very

involved with the WCBDC and is passionate of the development of the small business sector at The West Coast area of South Africa.

8. Isaac Williams (Peer Entrepreneur)

Isaac is also an owner of a small engineering company. He has attended the business skills program of the WCBDC and was within the same cohort as the MIC's owners. His company is also showing promising signs for a successful business. As a co-learner, he knew what was learned and expected from them. Initially I had unstructured interviews with the company owners (Charles and John) and their mentor (Joanne Cupido).

9. The Mentor

As there was not a mentor from the established business available to mentor MIC' owners, Joanne from the local business service WCBDC agreed to fulfil this role as she is the marketer for the centre and facilitator of the mentoring programme.

My objective was to gather as much information as possible concerning the mentees' and mentor's experiences and on their expectations of the mentoring program. I have also designed semi-structured interviews, which were used in follow-up sessions with the mentees and mentor as well as with the other identified interviewees. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to focus more on the points of interest, but also to allow some flexibility.

Five questionnaires were mailed to the various respondents, and they were assured continued confidentiality. M. Kelly (in Seale; 2000:118) states that "the preservation of confidentiality and the privacy of people involved in social research are key factors to ethics in research work". Participants in research will not reveal their feelings, opinions and attitudes about their job unless confidentiality is assured. Therefore, I have agreed to the interviewees that I will use fictitious names when I present my paper.

My purpose with questionnaire 1 was to determine whether the mentees agreed that transfer of learning did take place to the workplace after attending

the Entrepreneurial Development Programme, and what progress was made in terms of the growth of the business.

Questionnaire 2 focused on the Entrepreneurial Development Programme and why the programme is considered to be innovative and effective in facilitating the growth of emerging SMMEs.

Questionnaires 3 and 4 aimed respectively at the responses of the mentees and mentors review on the mentoring programme and relationship.

Questionnaire 5 focused on the role of the Business Development Centre and other support structures to help small business development, and how to effectively apply the support structures within the mentoring programme.

I gave the respondents two weeks to complete the questionnaires and made arrangements to have a second round of informal interviews. These interviews, which lasted for approximately one month, took place at the convenience of the respondents. The interviews were completed using the semi-structured interview approach where the interview themes and questions were prepared beforehand. The semi-structured approach was selected in order to have an adequate focus for the discussions.

The primary objective of the semi-structured interviews was to determine how the respondents experienced the mentoring process.

Specific areas zoomed in were: mentoring types and mentoring relationships, and the impact of mentoring.

This was obtained by asking the following questions:

- Were they exposed to any mentoring training?
- Did they have any previous exposure/experience in terms of mentoring?
- Who were involved?
- What is mentoring?
- Why is mentoring considered as important
- What impact the mentoring had?

During the interviews the respondents were also asked to locate MIC on a time line in terms of five different business development stages: pre-start-up; start-up; stage 1 (Initial Sales – Revenues / No Breakeven); stage 2 (Revenue / Breakeven); growth (Revenue / Profit or Stability). Respondents identified the key events that divided the different stages from one another and thus indicated how they conceptualised MIC history in terms of the five stages (See Annexure 2). However, during the interviews space was given to follow new leads and other interesting topics emerging from the conversations.

I have transcribed the interviews to provide records of the conversations. The content of these discussions were analysed where I have looked for trends and patterns that re-appeared in the various conversations. Therefore, in my analysis I have considered the consistency of comments and the specificity of responses in follow up probes. I have also made notes on the intensity of the respondents' comments during the conversations.

Some limitations which I have experienced during this research were the difficulty in analysing the open-ended data. Added to this, some important information has been missed because not all the spontaneous remarks by the respondents were recorded. This missed information was also not recorded within the answers of the questionnaires. However, I have made notes during the open-ended interviews and flagged them for potential use in my data analysis. In addition, the validity of the information was covered as most interviews took place within groups.

Section 4 – Findings and Data Analysis

Section 4 deals specifically with the evaluation of the case study on the mentoring programme at Marine and Industrial Coating (MIC) on the West Coast. The writer will first provide a background to the case study, and thereafter the goals, results and outcomes will be discussed, as well as a critical evaluation of the findings within the framework of the theoretical discourses discussed in section 2.

4.1 Background on the Evaluation of the Mentoring Programme

In April 2002, twelve emerging entrepreneurs participated in the entrepreneurial development program (EDP), which was organized by the Western Cape Business Development Centre (WCBDC). This is a five-day intensive programme with the following content: Generate ideas for new businesses; testing feasibility and viability of business ideas; writing of business plans; simple knowledge of marketing; doing market research; acquaintance with product costing; elements of bookkeeping; familiarization with project financing by banks; understanding characteristics of and competencies for successful entrepreneurs. A mentoring programme option is then introduced to further the development of business development competencies within a given business development framework (see Annexure 2) as well as to enhance the comprehensibility of the theoretical course.

In order to study the impact of this mentoring programme on learning, Marine and Industrial Coating (MIC) was selected as a case study. The two owners of Marine and Industrial Coatings, who was part of the April 2002 cohort, opted to follow through with the mentoring programme. Interviews were held with the two MIC mentees, their mentor (an employee of the business development center), two MIC employees and a co-learner (attended the same EDP course and also fulfills a peer mentoring relationship with the mentees) from February 2003 to April 2003. The interviewees also answered questionnaires, which were developed after initial interviews. The questionnaires aimed to identify the expectations, the learning and impact of the mentoring programme provided by the business development center. Both the interviews and

responses to questionnaires took place while the mentoring relationship was still intact. Answers in questionnaires were also further discussed for more elaboration and clarification during follow-up interviews throughout the research period (February 2003 to April 2003).

4.2 The envisaged potential of the mentoring programme

During informal discussions before the research, it was decided that the focus of the research would be on the evaluation of the development of the marketing skills through the mentoring approach. In other words, the impact of the mentoring programme needs to be investigated, by specifically looking at the achievement of the marketing goals of the programme. It would therefore be important to highlight the goals of the mentoring programme.

The following goals and outputs of the mentoring programme at Marine and Industrial Coating are as follows:

- Understanding of Marketing and the importance thereof;
- Planning and doing a thorough market research;
- Development of a market plan;
- Implementation plan & initial market penetration;
- Building of a network with experienced businesspersons;
- Check out new markets

These goals clearly falls in the ambit of more formal business and marketing training, and it was important to evaluate how a more informal process, such as business mentoring, could be implemented within such a formal structure. This combining of informal approaches (mentoring) with formal approaches (coaching), is clearly indicated in the theory under section 2, where I refer to Nigro (2003:36), who promotes such “collaborative approaches” between the formal and the informal. It becomes especially critical when one considers the fact that the marketing training component was only covered in 1 day (as part of the 5 day entrepreneurial development programme). Such a short training programme will not be effective without the inclusion of a longer mentoring follow-up programme. It was therefore a positive approach by the Western

Cape Business Development Centre (WCBDC) to introduce the mentoring programme after the 5-day training for the small business entrepreneurs.

In the next part of section 4, the impact of the mentoring is discussed.

4.3 The impact of mentoring

Responding to the question about the impact and value of mentoring in the small business training, Piet van Tonder (Chamber Manager) explained, “Mentoring is a two-way street, and the benefits for both the mentor and mentee can be plentiful. For the mentee, it can stimulate more informed action, result in more job satisfaction, and carry over into personal and professional relationships. Mentoring can help the mentees manage responsibilities more effectively, feel more connected to their business, become more knowledgeable about the business. It also welcomes support structures to meet challenges, growth and development. I am very certain that the benefits of mentoring for these two learners include: accelerating leadership development, developing bench strength, promoting a learning culture within their business, identifying problems, alleviating job stress, managing knowledge and increases communication between the two learners” (Interview, Piet: 4 April 2003)

Looking at what the mentees and their employees perceive the impact of the mentoring on their business might have been, they believe that their business did grow because of the mentoring programme. “Charles and John are now more enthusiastic about their business each time they came from a meeting with their mentor” (Interview, Shane: 23 March 2003). The mentees were given a small business development framework to self assess their development within certain business skills. This is associated with technical skills or career functions within the business. Career functions refer to those “aspects of the relationship that enhance learning the ropes” (Kram, 1988:22). Each business skill has 5 stages of development within this business development framework (e.g. marketing skills).

Isaac commented: “the mentees had the technical knowledge from their studies but lacked the experience to understand how this knowledge would be

utilized in their working life. Joanne helped them understand the link between studies and work” (Interview, Isaac: 4 March 2003. During each conversation I would ask questions that were indicators of whether the programme experience was positive. For example: “Do you think that, or hope that, your relationship with your mentor will continue beyond this point?” A response that I have received was when Charles said; “we have used the development framework to assess our current marketing skills. The outcome, in agreement with our employees, was found to be on level 3. John and I have decided that our mentoring relationship with Joanne will continue until we have reached level 5 on the development framework”. (Interview, Charles: 24 March 2004)

While elaborating on the different levels of the Business Development Framework, some useful new knowledge and insight has come to the fore, which will be discussed in the next part of section 4.

4.4 New knowledge and insight

Clutterbuck argues that, “mentoring has remained a pivotal concept in attempting to facilitate meeting learners’ expectations and helping them to achieve their goals” (Clutterbuck, 1985:9). As Zachary writes in her excellent section on feedback that "there is no greater contribution to mentee learning than the gift a mentor provides by giving and receiving ongoing, honest, constructive feedback. Expanding the capacity of a mentee to do the same promotes competence, inspires confidence, and enriches the learning experience." (Zachary, 2000:130)

Joanne has assessed the mentees’ knowledge and understanding of marketing during their initial informal discussions and probe for ways to establish their market as well as advertising their business more passionately. Their first task was to read more material on marketing and use it to develop their own marketing plan. The business development centre has a resource centre, which members of the centre may use for research purposes. The mentees committed themselves to do some extra reading on marketing and look at examples of marketing plans. Both the mentees discussed their newfound insight with their employees as well as Joanne to confirm their understanding and to ensure that they keep the focus on their objectives. John said, “With open-ended

questions, Joanne made sure that we could explain our understanding of marketing and various ways to develop marketing plans in our own words. She has always guided us through marketing articles and marketing products such as existing marketing plans to understand how to gain an in-depth understanding of marketing” (Interview, John: 17 February 2003).

The learners later surprised Joanne by asking: “we would like your support to do presentations at some functions, such as the business chambers’ meetings in the district, as well as to show via photographic models our work at career exhibitions”(Interview, Joanne: 21 February 2003). This was a great marketing tool of their trade, which is a definite need for the area of operation (coastal region) and their work was also marketed to new school leavers. At these exhibitions it came to pass that there is an urgent need for an accredited qualification in the marine and industrial coating industry, which will be communicated to the relevant Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA). Corporate companies at the exhibition also took notice of this small business with some quality work and entrepreneurs with some creativity and passion about their work.

During my interviews with John, Charles and the employees it was also clear how passionate they are about their work. They talked very enthusiastically about their new contracts and how they plan to extend their business and commit themselves to: “every employee of Marine and Industrial Coatings (MIC) will be certified as competent within their trade Certified and qualified employees almost guarantee quality work”(Interview, Charles: 17 February 2003). The personnel of MIC deem quality work as their greatest marketing tool, which will ensure that more contract work will roll in. Their view on mentoring, as a learning approach is very positive and they believe that the mentoring program “has provided a stronger theoretical foundation of the aspects that were covered within the short course. New knowledge and insight were discovered, which were not addressed in the short Entrepreneurial Development programme (ETD) course” (Interview, Charles: 18 April 2003). Other comments from Joanne, Shane and John (questionnaires) that support this notion include:

“We are now more aware of the various business systems that should be in place as a basis for the development of our business” (Shane)

“The mentoring programme has also built our leadership abilities and problem solving techniques.”(John).

“I have learned a lot during this mentoring experience. Now I’m in a better situation to coordinate the mentoring programme for the Centre” (Joanne)

These new insights have led to a better understanding towards the functions of mentoring, which can be applied by the Western Cape Business Development Centre.

4.5 The functions of mentoring

The theory in Section 2 elaborates on the different functions within mentoring, and under the subsection of business mentoring a detailed description is given on the career and psychosocial functions of mentoring. The evaluation of the mentoring programme in the case study also brought to light a distinction between these two functions. This can be seen in the approach of the mentor, Joanne Cupido, and the following information is pivotal in this regard:

4.5.1 Psychosocial functions of Mentoring

The local business development center has employed mentoring as a learning approach within a supportive, encouraging and enabling environment, which built confidence and internal motivation into the mentees. This clearly refers to the “psychosocial function” of mentoring, which Kram describes as the “aspects of a relationship that enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity and effectiveness in a professional role” (Kram, 1988:22).

Gertruida Marais, another respondent, also found that the mentoring programme did exactly this in the lives of the mentees. She said “the mentees took a renewed leap of faith in themselves and started trusting in their own

capabilities”. Joanne Cupido echoed this positive change within the mentees by the following words: “when the mentees first entered my office, their eyes were filled with uncertainty and self doubt. I had to work with their self-belief at first to create an atmosphere conducive to learning.” Crow and Mathews (1998:27) refers to business mentors as “confidants who are willing to be a sounding board” towards the development and growth of the mentee, and this seems evident in Joanne’s relationship with the mentees John and Charles.

Both the mentees, John and Charles, made in the early stages of the mentoring programme, a commitment to a learning partnership between themselves. In their initial meetings with their mentor, they have come to learn more of each other. Zachary (2000) stated: “mentoring is a process of engagement...commitment by and engagement by mentoring partners is a key element in establishing, maintaining and experiencing successful mentoring relationships”. John mentioned that both he and Charles so eagerly wanted the business to succeed that they were afraid to disagree. “Luckily, Joanne picked this up and talked us through our disagreements” (Interview, John: 5 February 2003).

Joanne has helped the mentees to set realistic expectations that all of them (including her) would be able to honor. This included setting a realistic meeting schedule to which both parties made a commitment. “Our initial meetings were more frequent (bi-weekly) as the purpose of it was to bond, building trust and learning to know each other better. Knowing oneself better was also part of these initial meetings, which of course was not very easy” (Interview, Charles: 5 February 2003).

Joanne mentioned that she became once again aware the importance of active listening and constructive feedback in effective mentoring relationships. “The mentees’ growth and learning speed has increased as they have started to speak freely about their thoughts and ideas. This notion of “openness and free expression of ideas and thoughts” relates to the thoughts of Hunt and Michael (1983:475), and Kram (1983:616), where they refer to the “level of trust, mutuality and intimate relationship”, which can be developed as a result of the quality of the “psychosocial function” of the mentoring.

Prior knowledge of important business processes came to the forefront as both of these mentees had a lot of experience in their field of trade” (Interview, Joanne: 4 February 2003). This information was not covered in the theoretical course. However, Joanne mentioned that she has learned that if mentees place mentors on pedestals, then open communication and creative thoughts will be hindered. Therefore, Joanne has started to read more on communication techniques to ensure that the mentees keep opening up and continuously stir their enthusiasm. Openness is a very significant characteristic of psychosocial development in business mentoring, as corroborated by Gibson (2004:269) when openness “is described as being open-minded and openhearted, and having the capacity to be surprised” (Gibson, 2004:269). This is exactly how Joanne described what happened in their initial meetings. The mentees have surprised both her and themselves on their existing (prior) knowledge on business processes and systems they have and the creative ideas they came up with in terms of marketing.

Thus, the psychosocial function of the mentoring relationship can clearly be identified in the case study, and it also contained the “elements of professional conceptualization and emotional security”, as highlighted by Gibson (2004:261).

4.5.2 Career functions of Mentoring

The learners were given a small business development framework (see annexure 2) to self assess their development within certain business skills. This framework is associated with technical skills or career functions within business development. As indicated in the theory under section two of this study, (Gibson, 2004:261, and Kram, 1988:22), career functions has to do with learning the “technical skills” in relation to their career development, and in the small business development context this includes the elements of “sponsorship, coaching, protection, exposure and visibility”, and challenging work assignments (Gibson, 2004:261).

Each business skill as per the business development framework has 5 stages of development within this business development framework. Isaac Williams, a co-learner, mentioned the following: “Charles and John, including myself,

gained the theoretical knowledge of marketing from the short EDP course but they lacked the application and experience to understand how this new found knowledge could be utilized within their business. Joanne Cupido has helped them to make the link between studies and work” (Interview, Isaac: 3 March 2003). Isaac also commented that he believes that this link worked best in the mentoring relationship where the mentor and mentees were in the same discipline. Therefore, Joanne as the marketer of the business development centre is the ideal coach in terms of marketing. Not only has she the expertise and knowledge of marketing, but also understand the business development framework, which was used as a developmental tool in learning progress.

Both the mentees, John and Charles, indicated that their mentor, Joanne, helped them learn about the various aspects of marketing. Comments made by Charles and John:

“We have developed the ability to actively seek, identify and create effective contacts with others and to maintain those contacts for mutual benefit” (Interview, Charles: 7 March 2003).

“I had very little knowledge of marketing. Joanne has helped us understand the various concepts of marketing, which we have learned on the EDP course, in a much simpler manner” (Interview, John: 7 March 2003)

During the initial stage of the development of their market intelligence and skills thereof, the mentees have learned how to determine goal posts as per the business development framework, which will be easy to achieve. Each time when they have reached a goal, they were encouraged by Joanne to celebrate their success, no matter how small they perceive it. Learning within this framework allows for incremental learning to be celebrated when achieved and it accompanies possible business growth.

The next part deals with the mentoring roles as applied by the Business Development Centre.

4.6 Mentoring roles

The approaches or mentoring roles that the personnel and extended staff of the local business development centre employed are a combination of facilitative, expert and peer mentoring.

4.6.1 Facilitative Mentoring

The business development center uses the term paternal mentoring, which relates to the facilitative approach as discussed in the literature review. Joanne Cupido took on the role as “paternal” mentor, as she could not find an appropriate mentor for the mentees. This masculine title used by the business development center, might be due to the fact that males usually fulfill this role of business development facilitator. Joanne was the first woman at the center to take on this facilitative role.

It was evident that the facilitative approach applied by Joanne contained the elements of guidance, encouragement towards innovation, learning and growth, which are associated with Johnson’s understanding of “developmental facilitation” (1997:13). Joanne has used the business development framework as a self assessment tool. Thus the case study is also characterized by mentees involvement “in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning” (Knowles in Zachary, 2004:4-5).

The fact that Joanne is a woman may have clearly influenced the facilitative approach to mentoring, as men in general appear to be more authoritative, whilst women may be more facilitative. In this regard, Joanne then clearly serve as an example of Aubery and Cohen’s explanation of mentoring that should be less authoritative and more facilitative towards the discovering of knowledge in the context of a learning relationship. It would therefore be important that the center revisit their term of paternal mentoring and develop a concept of mentoring, which is more gender neutral.

4.6.2 Expert Mentoring

Expert mentoring relates to the concept of multiple mentoring as discussed in the literature review. Literature supports this approach where “a multitude of

specialized supports and coaching have been recommended to help ease the transition from start-up to sustainability for entrepreneurs, including: leadership and management training; educational scholarships and fellowships; mentoring schemes; twinning arrangements at local, national and international levels; development of information systems; and models of good practice. Based on these factors, a more realistic option for people will be the “multiple mentoring relationships” (Catford, 1998:96).

This approach was used in the case study when a newspaper liaison officer was brought in to guide the mentees on writing an article on their core business. The officer did more than just write an article for the business. He also explained the mentees and their employees various ways of using the media as a marketing tool for their business. Reflecting on the input of the newspaper liaison officer, the following comments were made:

“Charlton coached the mentees in a very simplistic way how to use the local newspaper very effectively as a marketing tool” (Interview, Joanne: 4 April 2003).

“Charlton gave us a lot of examples on how to use the local newspaper effectively to market MIC. When Charlton facilitated a brainstorming session with our employees, we were impressed with the creative ideas which the guys suggested to market our company via the local newspaper” (Interview, Charles: 7 March 2003).

This example indicates that the mentees will be working with several mentors within their career to develop various instrumental business skills. According to the literature study, this would be important as entrepreneurs are often only focused on being successful, whilst they “lack the other tools, training and resources to develop their full capacity” (Canon, 2000:1899).

This multiple mentoring approach in the case study is therefore also in line with the Small Business Act of 1996, which actively promotes the development of entrepreneurial skills in critical areas, through accessing of relevant networks and resources of WCBDC. This multiple mentoring approach also confirms the critical areas of marketing, merchandising, pricing,

etc., which are included in the WCBDC Entrepreneurial Development Programme course outline.

The case study, in a broader sense, also confirms the value of multiple mentoring where various experts have been brought in to develop the entrepreneurs in areas such as financial skills, business-planning skills, marketing skills etc. It should, however, be stated that the brief of this study focused mainly on mentoring the entrepreneurs in the area of marketing. Concerning the specialized area of marketing, my observation is that the multiple mentoring was limited and not fully utilized to develop the entrepreneurs in the different facets of business marketing.

4.6.3 Peer Mentoring

Much research has been devoted to traditional hierarchical mentoring relationships. However, less is known about the effectiveness of other types of mentoring relationships, such as peer mentoring. Past research has suggested that different types of mentors, such as peers, may be beneficial for mentees in a number of ways. As small business development is a new playing field, emerging entrepreneurs should form learning partnerships with other emerging entrepreneurs.

Forming such partnership with fellow entrepreneurs is ideal in this small business sector as the total of learners is increasing everyday. Kram supports this notion when she mentioned “peer relationships provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers” (Kram, 1983:623).

Additionally, traditional hierarchical mentoring may involve more of a one-way helping dynamic, while peer relationships involve more of a mutual exchange. John mentioned that it was good to have Isaac’s support throughout the mentoring programme. Comments that refer to peer mentoring include:

“We have used Isaac as a sounding-board to verify our ideas. His presence also provided emotional support” (Interview, Charles: 7 March 2003).

Isaac also mentioned that he enjoyed working with John and Charles, as they are very dedicated to achieve their goals.

“John and Charles are typical the kind of people with whom I like to socialize” (Interview, Isaac: 4 March 2003).

Therefore, peer mentoring has essentially to do with persons on similar levels of their development, who mentor each other. This point is confirmed by Mezias and Scandura when they describe peer mentoring as a “process involving lateral or peer relationships at similar organizations, with peer mentoring being quite popular in instances where organizations downsize and reduce hierarchical layers” (Mezias and Scandura, 2005:523).

There is also a distinction between peer mentoring, in comparison to multiple and facilitative mentoring. This distinction lies in the fact that peer mentoring has the unique potential to facilitate the functioning of both career and psychosocial development. Kram supports this notion when she mentioned: “peer relationships provide some career and psychosocial functions, they offer the opportunity for greater mutuality and sense of equality, and they are more available in numbers” (Kram, 1983:623).

4.7 Mentoring support by employees

(No literature was found in this regard)

Throughout various stages in careers, individuals are likely to develop a series of developmental relationships. Support coming from employees is seldom recognized, but through empowering and participation it can become a mighty tool in the achievement of company goals. It would be important to relate the dynamic of employee support in the mentoring relationship to the aspect of peer mentoring. Peer mentoring has been discussed extensively in section 2 of this study, with specific reference to the value of support that “people who function on the same level” can give to each other. (Mezias and Scandura, 2005:523). Thus, I am of the opinion, that the lack of literature on mentoring support by employees can be bridged by the complimenting value of peer mentoring.

In linking the aforementioned observation to the case study, it would be important to note that John and Charles have made a decision to make their employees part of the mentoring process. The knowledge gained from their monthly sessions was communicated to the employees at staff meetings. Ivan commented:

“We are somehow also part of the mentoring programme as we also give insight into ways on how to implement this newfound knowledge on marketing the business more effectively”(Interview, Ivan Fortuin: 23 March 2003).

With some sessions with the newspaper liaison officer on this marketing tool, everybody in the business gave some input at the end product, which was advertised in the newspaper.

“As more of us participated in this process of this newspaper article, a greater sense of business ownership amongst the employees developed” (Interview, Ivan: 23 March 2003).

The employees also became interested in the mentoring programme of the owners as they saw the value of the programme during this experience. All employees decided to commit them to the mentees to act as peers of the mentoring programme and support the following through on action items. I can therefore make the assumption that the other employees are also developed through the mentoring programme. This clearly links to the “developmental” nature of mentoring relationships, as indicated by Mezias and Scandura (2005:523).

It is therefore important to now to discuss the value of mentoring relationships.

4.8 Mentoring relationship between mentor and mentees

The research work of Darling has guided my understanding of a mentor as “a person who leads, guides, and advises a person more junior in experience”. (Darling; 1985:42). Thus, simply stated, mentoring is a process that enables an individual (mentee/protégé) to develop personal and professional growth as a

result of a special relationship with another individual (mentor) who serves as a guide. The mentor is often more experienced in career development, self-confident, and considered approachable by the mentee.

It is also significant to note that the focus of the relationship is on the person or mentee, rather than the teaching of specific career skills and procedures that may be considered helpful in the person's career. The mentees were told by their mentor that “a successful mentoring relationship takes work, patience, and open communication” (Interview, Joanne: 4 April 2003).

Therefore, it is imperative for both parties to define their goals and expectations early on and continually track the progress made, to ensure that those goals are being met. In the case study the mentees have mentioned that the relationship began with a quite intense number of meetings over the first 6 months, in response to significant changes and developments in their working circumstances. Some major milestones have been reached such as the first two contracts of the business, and they have agreed that the initial “formal” need had been met, and although they may keep in touch through email or phone, they no longer needed to arrange to meet so regularly. The formal type of relationship has changed to informal as certain agreed deliverables have been met and some successes were made.

The mentor and mentees agreed to take some time to reflect and in a few months time, they will make contact to evaluate the business growth. They felt that this arrangement was important to see how independent the mentees have grown over the time when the relationship was still formal. The mentees have also promised the mentor to use the business development framework on a continuous basis, “during her time of absence”, to assess the development of their business skills.

Section 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Improvements to the mentoring programme

In the previous chapters the writer attempted to gain a broader understanding of the key theories and debates on mentoring, and more specifically business mentoring in the context of the small business entrepreneur. Furthermore, I have also explored how these theories link to a specific case study, and found some interesting and thought-provoking parallels between theory and praxis.

It is evident from the case study that the mentoring programme played a significant role to consolidate the theory of the business development course, which the mentees completed prior to the mentoring. The mentoring programme was short, but significantly successful, which could be ascribed to the mentor's ability to fulfill both psychosocial and career functions of mentoring. Added to this, the mentor also imported another resource person who added value to the programme with specialized marketing expertise, and ensured that the mentees develop in the marketing needs of their small businesses. This links to the multiple mentoring as discussed in previous chapters. The following recommendations should be considered for the improvement of the mentoring programme:

Recommendation 1: Establish a Nurturing Mentoring Relationship

Given the fact that aim of the mentoring programme is to transfer, accelerate and foster learning from one context to another, the centre's personnel has to continually implement a strategy that is based on a nurturing mentoring relationship. This mentoring relationship needs to be characterized by learning and relationship building, in order to achieve the desired outcomes of the mentoring programme. Piet van Tonder (chamber chairperson) stated that the two key concepts of mentoring are learning and relationship. "Learning is really the purpose, the process and the product of a mentoring relationship. In order for the relationship to be a true partnership the relationship must continuously be nurtured; otherwise, the learning process is undermined." (Interview, Piet van Tonder: 4 April 2003).

Recommendation 2: Move from an Authoritative Approach to a Facilitative Approach

From her new experience, Joanne Cupido has quickly learned that “wisdom is not passed from an authoritarian teacher to a supplicant student, but is discovered in a learning relationship in which both parties stand to gain a greater understanding of the workplace and the world” (Aubery and Cohen, 1995:161). The mentor should be less authority figure and more facilitator. The more the mentor is engaged in facilitating the learning relationship, the more the facilitator engages the mentee in the learning process by creating a climate conducive to learning.

Joanne Cupido emphasized that the key to a successful mentoring relationship is the ability to be a good listener. “You just need to really listen and figure out what the mentees’ value system is and personal motivators are. Then you can help by showing them that there might be a conflict between what their value system is and what they really want. The mentees may disagree with you initially, but all of a sudden, it might become apparent to them” (Interview, Joanne: 4 April 2003).

Joanne Cupido confirmed this change to a facilitative approach by commenting the following:

“I see myself as an enabler of, and resources for, learning, rather than as a didactic director. I am engaged in a democratic, learner-centred enhancement of the mentees learning, and control for setting the direction and methods of learning rests as much with John and Charles, as with me. Our relationship, therefore, has developed into a learning partnership as we share responsibility for learning setting and learning priorities” (Interview, Joanne: 21 February 2003).

Recommendation 3: Develop a Shared Accountability and Responsibility for the Learning Process of Mentoring

As the learning relationship evolved, the mentoring partners shared accountability and responsibility for achieving the mentees’ learning goals. Shane mentioned, “John and Charles are now assuming responsibility of their

mentoring relationship. They started to take ownership for their growth, invest in the mentoring relationship, and create a vision for their journey of discovery. The mentoring experience has opened them to new possibilities and perspectives. They are now more willing to consider new ideas to market their business” (Interview, Shane: 18 April 2003).

It is clear that a successful mentoring relationship is, however, not determined by how much one can get out of it, but how much one can put into it. Such an approach would undoubtedly go a long way towards bringing about a significant turnaround of the current successful SMME rate.

5.2 Conclusion

My own perception is that the mentees gained greater understanding of the entrepreneurial development programme as a result of the mentoring programme. The mentoring programme provided the mentees with an opportunity to apply the acquired learning into a practical business context. In addition, the mentoring programme has also contributed to a positive organizational climate and promoted a more clear understanding of professional responsibilities and expectations. All involved in the development of the emerging entrepreneurs believe that this case study is a success story where a short course could be just as effective as a longer course, providing that it is supplemented with an effective mentoring programme. Further complimenting evidence to this opinion is the fact that the mentees experienced growth in their businesses and they gained confidence as upcoming entrepreneurs. I am well aware that this is only a single case study, and one cannot generalize and apply the outcome of this case study to all other contexts and small business scenarios. However, this study has assisted me in broadening my knowledge on business mentoring, and a further deepening of this debate is envisaged with further studies.

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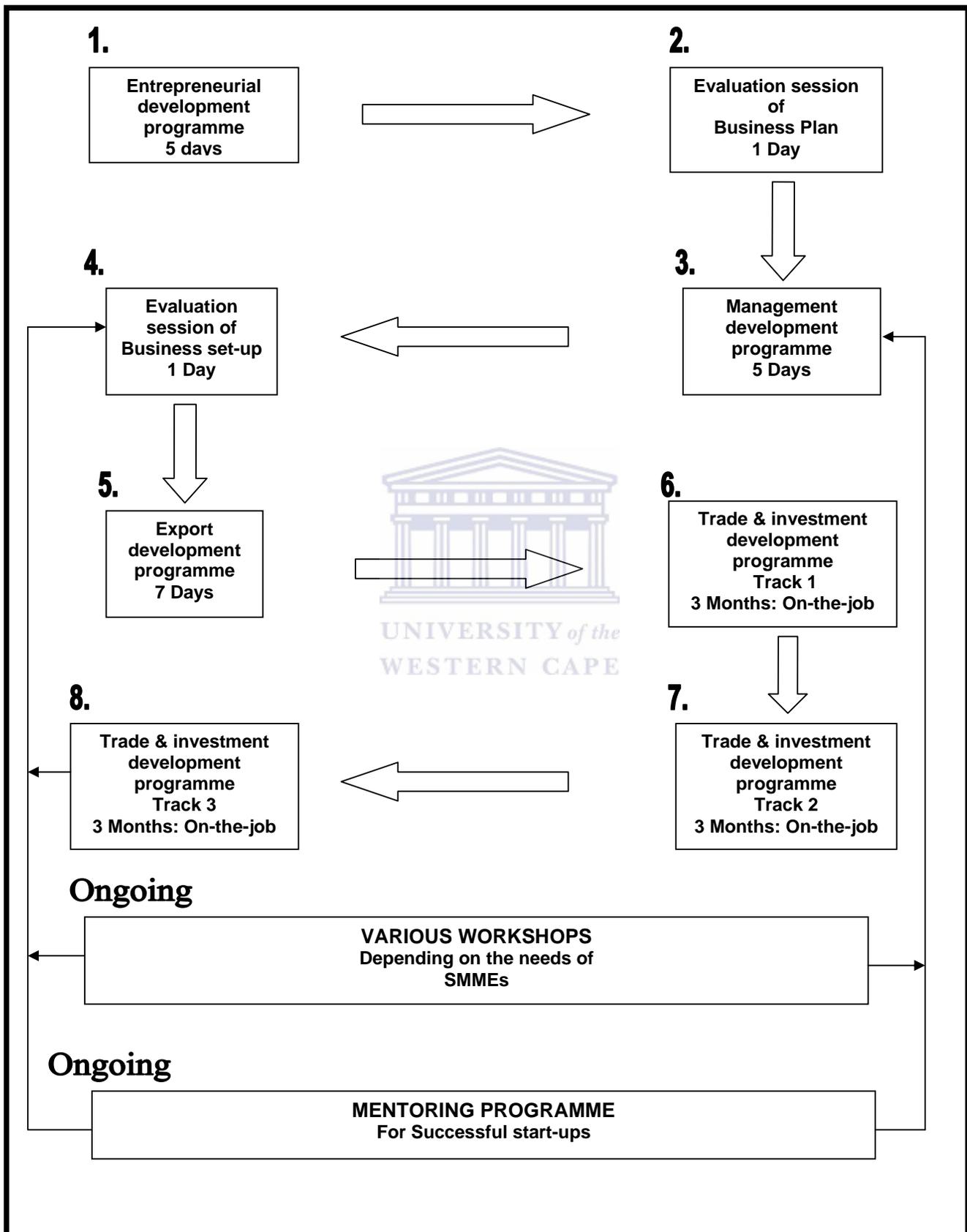
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Annexure 1 – Entrepreneurial Development Programme (EDP)



Annexure 2

The Business Development Framework (5 stages of a business)

	Pre-Start-Up	Start-Up	Stage 1 (Initial Sales – Revenue/No Breakeven)	Stage 2 (Revenue/ Breakeven)	Growth (Revenue/ Profit or Stability)
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> business concept building the business plan (include market research) assess viability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> business plan evolution measure, evaluate, modify 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> measure, evaluate, modify (market feedback) priorities are marketing, financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diversity product/service based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> realize market opportunities growth as soon as possible
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> must be visionary self-starter/motivated some business acumen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> leader with broad business skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> formal, well-heeled Board/Advisors key position – sales/marketing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more professional managers key position – finance person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional CEO (entrepreneur could fill role or stick with earlier role if marketing/technical)
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> financial plan (if necessary) personal support professional services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> start-up capital detailed financial plan (if necessary) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> working capital, access to capital private investors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> venture capitalists bank debt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional CFO more sophisticated finance whole spectrum of capital
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> networking/relationship building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> marketing plan & implementation beta-testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementation, initial market penetration market intelligence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consolidate position increase market share check out new markets/products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> new markets and products
Operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> too early 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> infrastructure processes/procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consistency in product delivery, improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> higher volume formalize systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> geographical spread including distribution

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quality infrastructure development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and sales
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> define skill set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> skill requirements how to recruit government requirements/policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “fight fires” scenarios team effort key task: recruiting employee loyalty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “maintenance” functional responsibilities key task: training/upgrading 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “prevention” mature delineation of roles and responsibilities key task: structuring, planning, development
R&D	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> product development define product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> refining/modifying beta-testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> final refinement development of next generation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> incorporate customer feedback modify/change products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more sophisticated level of incorporating customer feedback and modify/change products

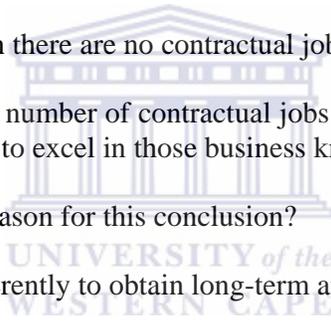
Source: Industrial Research Assistance Program, National Research Council of Canada
(<http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/insbrp-rppe.nsf/vwGeneratedInterE/rd00406e.html>)

Annexure 3: Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1

Transfer of Learning – Marine and Industrial Coaters (MIC)

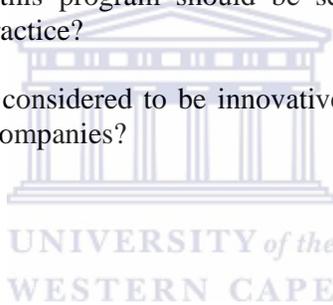
1. Did you understand the entrepreneurial development program major focus areas / outcomes in terms of knowledge and skills?
2. Have you possessed any of the knowledge and skills before taking the class?
3. Can you currently apply any of those knowledge and skills?
4. How often do you apply the knowledge and skills on marketing your business and how do you go about it?
5. How many contracts did you have the past three years and what is the duration per contract?
6. What do you do when there are no contractual jobs available?
7. Do you think that the number of contractual jobs the past three years gave you enough opportunities to excel in those business knowledge and skills?
8. What would be the reason for this conclusion?
9. What can you do differently to obtain long-term and major contracts?



Questionnaire 2

Entrepreneurial Development Program

1. Who is the program for (target group)?
2. How was the program funded?
3. What was the commitment required by participants in the program?
4. What was the duration of the program?
5. How could results achieved be measured for the beneficiaries?
6. What are the strengths of the training program?
7. What were the content of this training and development program?
8. Why do you think this program should be selected as a case study that demonstrates good practice?
9. Why is the program considered to be innovative and effective in facilitating the growth of client companies?



Questionnaire 3

Mentee's review

1. How long have you had a mentor?
2. How did you choose your mentor?
3. Why did you choose a mentor?
4. How would you describe your mentoring relationship with your mentor? (e.g. formal/informal)
5. What skills were you looking for in a mentor?
6. What skills does your mentor have?
7. What benefits do you feel you have gained from this mentoring relationship?
8. Could you gained these benefits from any type of training or development? If yes, please describe.
9. At the start of this mentoring relationship did you agree any terms of reference or ground rules?
10. What review processes if any, did you build into this relationship?
11. How effective were these processes?
12. What if anything, would you like to change about this mentoring relationship?
13. What, if anything, is likely to end this mentoring relationship?

About the Mentoring process:

1. What are the main skills needed by a mentor?
2. What are the key features of a successful mentoring relationship?
3. How would you sell the benefits of mentoring to others?
4. What training/guidance if any, do you feel people should have before they enter into a mentoring relationship?
5. Are you willing for this information to be written up as a case study?

Questionnaire 4

Mentor's Review

1. How long have you been a mentor?
2. How many people have you mentored before mentoring MIC?
3. Why did you choose to become a mentor?
4. How would you describe your mentoring relationship with MIC? (e.g. formal/informal)
5. What training did you received before you started mentoring?
6. How helpful was this training?
7. On reflection, what additional training or support would you have liked?
8. What benefits do you feel you have gained from this mentoring relationship?
9. Could you gained these benefits from any type of training or development? If yes, please describe.
10. At the start of this mentoring relationship did you agree any terms of reference or ground rules?
11. What review processes if any, did you build into this relationship?
12. How effective were these processes?
13. What if anything, would you like to change about this mentoring relationship?
14. What, if anything, is likely to end this mentoring relationship?

About the Mentoring process:

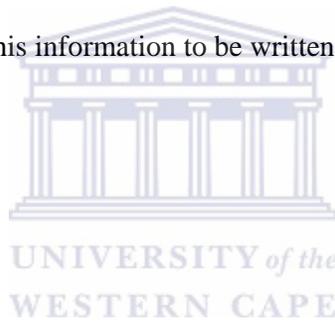
1. What are the main skills needed by a mentor?
2. What are the key features of a successful mentoring relationship?
3. How would you sell the benefits of mentoring to others?
4. What training/guidance if any, do you feel people should have before they enter into a mentoring relationship?
5. What ongoing support systems do you think mentors, should have, if any?

The relationship between the mentor and the EDP Educator/Trainer:

1. Did you discuss the mentee's progress on the Entrepreneurial Development Programme with the Educator/Trainer?
2. If yes, how did you build the information in the mentoring process?
3. If not, how did you analyze the learner's shortcomings?
4. In your view, how should the mentor and the EDP trainer integrate their programme's objectives?

**The mentor and the environment
(Local/Social/Work)**

1. How can the mentor ensure that the environment is conducive for SMME start-ups after attending the EDP?
2. Are you willing for this information to be written up as a case study?



Questionnaire 5

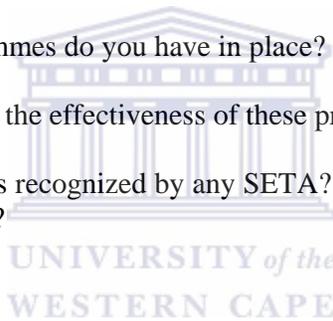
The Western Cape Business Development Centre (WCBDC)

The WCBDC:

1. When was the WCBDC developed?
2. Who was involved in the establishment of the WCBDC?
3. What are the key functions of the WCBDC?
4. What are the current problems faced by the WCBDC?
5. How do you intend to solve these problems?

Learning Programmes:

6. What current programmes do you have in place?
7. How do you measure the effectiveness of these programmes?
8. Are your programmes recognized by any SETA? If not, when do you intend to register your courses?



Learners:

9. How do you select the learners for your programmes?
10. Is there any funding available for the learners? If yes, how do they get access to it?

The Educators:

11. What are the profiles of your educators/presenters for the various business skills training programmes?
12. How do you go about selecting them?
13. What development programmes do you have in place for them?
14. Is there any interaction between these various course presenters?
15. If not, how do they link the outcomes of the various programmes?

16. How do they assess the progress of learners?

17. What recording system is in place to track the learners' development?

Mentors:

18. What criteria are in place to select your mentors?

19. How many mentors does the WCBDC currently contract?

20. How do you match the mentors and mentees?

21. How do you evaluate the successfulness of the programme?

Support structures:

22. What other support structures are in place to support the development of small businesses?

23. In what way might these support structures help small business development?

24. How does the WCBDC coordinate the effectiveness of support programmes?

