

Developing an Informal Mentoring Relationship in Career Advancement and Psychosocial of Young Graduate Entrepreneurs for Human Resource Development

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Abstract: Mentoring is a professional relationship or partnership between a mentor who shares his professional experience with a mentee for the purpose of empowering the mentee with similar business issues. This study examines the roles of informal mentors on the young graduates who are the novices in managing commercial agricultural projects. This is a qualitative study where respondents are involved in in-depth interviews to explore information and to answer the research questions. The respondents are five young graduates who are now successful entrepreneurs in their own ventures of commercial agriculture. The data of the interviews was analyzed manually to answer the research questions. This study has indentified the primary functions of an informal mentor on career success and psychosocial for Human Resource Development (HRD). HRD is a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance at the organization, process and individual levels. It can be concluded that informal mentoring has its significant influence on the entrepreneurs, particularly on the young graduates. The major implication of this study are using informal mentoring support of a selective basis can make a positive different to new firm formation, survival and growth and the educating role of informal mentoring support can be exploited to help young entrepreneurs to develop their own networks. Suggestions for improvements in start-up mentoring program are discussed.

Key words: Youth, mentee, mentor, informal mentor, mentoring, agriculture, graduates, entrepreneurs, human resource development

INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Development (HRD) is a process of developing and/or unleashing human expertise through organization development and personnel training and development for the purpose of improving performance at the organization, process and individual levels (Swanson, 1999). Economics, together with systems theory and psychology theory are among the core foundations for the field of human resource development (Swanson *et al.*, 2001). Yet, the understanding of economics as an HRD foundations has been identify in Human Capital Theory and Sustainable Resource Theory. Psychological Theory including Gestart Psychology Theory, Behavioral Psychology Theory and Cognitive Psychology Theory. While System Theory are Chaos Theory, Cybermatics Theory and Complex Adaptive System Theory (Swanson *et al.*, 2001).

According to Lynham *et al.* (2004), using the theoretical foundations of Human Resource Development (HRD) will provide organizational development professionals with a useful means of examining and

selecting sound theory of organizational development practice. These three theoretical foundations of HRD emphasize an integrated and consistent approach to HRD with performance improvement as an essential but not necessarily sufficient, outcome of HRD practice (Swanson *et al.*, 2001). This integrated theoretical perspective when coupled with the emphasis on performance improvement can provide a useful means for identifying and selecting organizational development theories that inform practice.

Venturing into agriculture is not a simple step and farming is no longer a mere physical laboring. The young people who decided to venture into agriculture need proper guidance from those who are qualified in this area. They need a continuous learning which involves the trainers (teachers, supervisors and mentors) and they are the students (also known as a trainee, protege and mentee). Mentoring is an effective way of helping the young people to progress in their chosen career and becoming successful agricultural entrepreneurs. There is no doubt that this kind of partnership is significant as many studies had confirmed the importance of a mutually

beneficial relationship played by the mentor and his mentee (Brown and Krager, 1985; Kirkham, 1993; Stones, 1984). In this field of study, a mentor acts as a teacher who guides the novice entrepreneurs to find the right direction and to equip the novices with state of art business knowledge in entrepreneurial activities.

The Malaysian government has seriously put the affair of youth in the national agenda. One of the strategic planning is the resolution to promote many young people to become the modern generation of full-time young farmers and to create entrepreneurial opportunities for them. At present, there are many successful young agricultural entrepreneurs to proof that agriculture is a profitable business, though the number involved in this area is still too small.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports defines the youth as people aged between 15 and 40 years. This is stipulated by Majlis Belia Malaysia (Malaysia Youth Council, 2007) that youth at the age range are already matured and able to think positively. Entrepreneurs are defined as risk takers, opportunists and innovative. Agriculture is a very broad field which includes farming, planting, fisheries and downstream agro-based or agro-processing industries. Commercial agriculture refers to farming activities which are undertaken in the form of large scales plantation productivities, the total cultivated land area is large, viable and developed with potential crops for sale which ensure profitable income and value added to the land used for commercial returns (Malaysian Youth Council, 2007).

Young farmers of commercial agricultural activities initially need formal support and assistance from various relevant agencies. Formal mentoring is also introduced to the new entrepreneurs. However, the mentoring process can only work on a synergetic relationship which is based on mutual trust and respect. Mentoring is enriching and satisfying when both parties (a mentor and his mentee) are honest in the relationship especially in sharing ideas. In this context, formal mentoring is a structured program on which a formal mentor is arranged to a mentee by certain agencies. On the other hand, an informal mentor is sought by the mentee personally and the desire to have a beneficial relationship will encourage both parties to prosper together.

The informal mentoring or Mentor Mentee System is considered as a very good method to be applied to the graduates who want to venture into commercial farming. Mentoring is generally defined as a relationship between a mentor and his mentee that occurs in a certain situation to achieve a specific goal (Irving *et al.*, 2003; McIntyre *et al.*, 1993; Megginson, 2000). An informal mentoring is more focused on interpersonal compatibility and comfort (Allen *et al.*, 1997; Olian *et al.*, 1993).

In the context of a business coaching, a mentor is seen to play a significant role in helping new entrepreneurs to become successful entrepreneurs. This is because the functions of mentoring are commonly related with the aspects of career advancement, psychosocial, coaching, protecting, role modeling, accepting and confirming, counseling and friendship. Many organizations recognize the importance of informal mentoring. Recent studies found that the informal mentor-mentee relationship contributes high efficiency and more effective compared to formal mentoring (Irving *et al.*, 2003).

Basically, a mentor is defined as a counselor, advisor, coach, tutor or a role model (Roche, 1979; Hunt and Michael, 1983). A mentee is like a student who is inexperienced and thirsty for knowledge (Chambers, 1988; Webster, 1989). A mentor is a role model who guides his mentee with his professional knowledge and encourages the mentee to explore himself (Shaw, 1992). A mentor may establish his role as a coach and the intensity of the relationship is varies as it depends on the context, needs, changes and the progress of the mentee. However, a mentor should portray himself as a trusted good friend not as a professional counselor (Cooper, 1993; McIntyre *et al.*, 1993).

A mentor plays a challenging role as he needs to serve many functions in helping the mentee to understand certain responsibilities; he needs to integrate himself with various techniques, to share professional knowledge, to nurture his mentee's personal needs and to concern of his mentee's personal life (Kram and Bragar, 1991; Zey, 1989). A mentor is expected to transfer his professional knowledge, expertise, skills and talents to his mentee (Arnold and Davidson, 1990; Fagenson, 1989; Reich, 1985). On the other hand, a mentee learns from his mentor for his professional or career advancement and also to ensure a positive progress of his psychosocial (such as developing self-identity, talents, efficient in managing works and can be a role model to the other persons) (Arnold, 1997; Kleinman *et al.*, 2001; Kram, 1983).

The starting point of the partnership is selecting the best match of mentor-mentee. Self-selecting is the best way which is based on mutual trust and chemistry (Cooper, 1993; Fisher, 1994; Smith and West-Burnham, 1993). This means, in self-selecting his mentor a mentee may select someone based on personal traits, personality, experience, values and commitment, knowledge and mutual interests whereas a mentor may look at the mentee's attitudes and their potential. Chemistry may then develop into trust and confidence to form a strong bond (Gardiner, 1989; Stones, 1984; Young, 1967).

A mentee must be ready and have the determination to learn from the mentor. In addition, a mentor must be committed to the partnership in order to expedite the ability to guide and to enhance the learning process (Ahern, 2003). Both parties are responsible in making progress to achieve success together and to maintain the intimacy of the relationship (Mawer, 1996; Fisher 1994; Kirkham, 1993; Hansman, 2002).

A mentor should possess the following qualities: willingness to accept the mentee; willingness to help the mentee; both the mentor and his mentee realize that it is a relationship of a teacher and his student so they have to demonstrate a positive attitude, adhere to certain code of conduct and social norms; have a personal interest and sensitive to the needs of his mentee and willingness to share positive knowledge and to inspire the mentee. In overall, a mentor guides, advises and counsels his mentee (Brooks *et al.*, 1997).

Formal and informal mentors: According to Allen *et al.* (1997) the relationship of a mentor and his mentee normally initiated spontaneously and without realizing it, a mentor already contributes towards career success of his mentee. In formal mentoring, a mentor is formally introduced or assigned to his mentee by the coordinator of a structured program with time expectation; this sometimes may cause awkwardness. However, the relationship of informal mentoring tends to be longer as it is structure free and without any formal or written obligation. It is more to help and non-profit. Meeting is not programmed and it is scheduled when necessary and the interaction can be done through various sources of communication tools such as via the internet and telephone.

The relationship of a formal mentoring is structured for certain period of time based on may be between 6 months to a year contract. The meeting between the mentor and his mentee is scheduled and pre-determined in the agreement contract which is signed by the both parties. On the other hand, the relationship pattern of informal mentoring is more casual but motivational in guiding the mentee. There is a sense of kinship in a conducive communication even without proper recognition as the present of the mentor is merely to help.

The primary function of informal mentoring is to provide a significant contribution in terms of career advancement and psychosocial. The roles of the mentor in career success are to guide and to expose. In guiding his mentee, a mentor advises, assists, recommends or counsels his mentee to learn something new as well as for career advancement. A mentor also exposes his mentee on

long term benefits by sharing his professional knowledge and indirectly provides information on types of future occupations for the mentee. A mentor also encourages his mentee to move forward in his career.

In terms of psychosocial functions, the mentor's primary role is to strengthen the friendship and be a role model. The closeness of the relationship is based on mutual helps for mutual benefits. As a role model, a mentor is seen as an idol that inspires the mentee to strive harder to be as successful as his idol. Hence, career advancement is the main concern of informal mentoring compared to formal mentoring.

Similarly, Pitts (2008) observed that people running their own businesses can't see the wood for the trees. The problem being that they find it difficult to stand back and reflect on the problems they are experiencing, getting too tied up with the urgent and immediate actions and not leaving time to take the bigger picture, strategic view into consideration. Engaging with a mentoring relationship can allow the entrepreneur to step into pools of reflection and to see situations more clearly and from different perspectives. It is particularly difficult for small businesses to find time to reflect (Bornstein and Davis, 2010; Weber and Yunus, 2010). Generally, this study is aimed to identify the roles of informal mentors on the young graduates who are the novices in managing commercial agriculture projects.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Samples of this study are five young graduates who are entrepreneurs managing five different agricultural projects commercially in Malaysia. The entrepreneurs were selected based on the following criteria: respondents are youth at the aged of 15-40 years old (as defined by the Malaysian Ministry of Youth and Sports); successful in their field of agriculture and in setting up downstream agro-based industries as well as those who gained net income more than RM3000 (USD987) per individual; posses business assets, for example have >10 acres of land; university graduates; earlier worked in the public or private sectors. All selected respondents are graduates youth with different farming activities. The respondents are HO (landscaping and ornamental plants), KA (vegetables fertilization), FZ (mango planting), SY (planting lemon grass, bananas, coconuts and goat livestock) and HK (mushroom cultivation).

This study uses qualitative methods to obtain information on personal perspectives through in-depth interviews of five young entrepreneurs and to answer the research questions. The pre-determined questions are

semi-structured. The purpose of in-depth interview is to elicit depth of information as opposed to surveys and questionnaire. In depth interview also allows the interviewer to deeply explore respondent's feelings and perspectives on a subject. The data of the interviews were then translated manually based on pre-determined themes and several sub-themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study has indentified the functions of career advancement and psychosocial as the main themes. The sub-themes of career advancement are as follows: career guidance resources as being a key to mentee success in agriculture business project and providing and offering exposure for mentee in start-up business is a crucial role for a mentor. The sub-themes for psychosocial functions indentified as: mentor being a good role model to mentee is a contributing factor in successful informal mentoring and mentee becoming a mentor is a successful outcome from the process of informal mentoring.

Career advancement functions

Career guidance resources as being a key to the mentee success in agricultural business project: Trainings and skills offered by the relevant agencies or departments would really help the individuals who decided to venture into agriculture. Several formal programs or courses on agriculture conducted at the higher learning institutes, colleges and government agencies are also beneficial and the objective is to help the young entrepreneurs in their agricultural projects and to eliminate the risks for failure.

All of the respondents agreed that attending agricultural trainings and skills programs is important for the new agricultural entrepreneurs. However, they reported that it is also necessary for the novices to have a mentor to guide them especially at the earlier part of their involvement. According to HK:

Attending courses conducted by the private and government agencies is beneficial. From the courses, we can establish a network and find new friends who have similar interests and in the same field with us. Why it is important? When we encounter any problem, we can refer to them to find the solutions or to get ideas on how to approach the problems. We can share the knowledge of current technologies and help each other in terms of promoting and marketing. At first I made 2000 bags but failed to sale almost 1000 bags. Starting from that I learnt a lot from trials and errors. The key to survive is to ask for opinions and to seek for advice from other successful people who are managing the same projects

According to KA:

Courses are important especially to the novice who knows nothing of agriculture. After I attended several courses conducted by the Agricultural Department, I went to Japan. I acquired various planting techniques, learnt how to handle machinery and a lot more. I gained lots of hands-on experiences. Unfortunately, those courses were only short term courses but in managing a project, we actually need a mentor to guide us throughout the project. For me, my father was my mentor, he guided me because he was once involved in the same project

According to HO:

In my opinion, before we venture into any project, we need to have at least the basic knowledge of the project. In researching for the information we are actually learning and we also learn from our mistakes. In my experience, my first course was at the Peninsular Malaysia Agriculture Institute, after that I further my study at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). But after the courses, I went to work for a while. I learnt about AutoCAD at Cosmopoint (College) which was relevant to learn about negotiation and how to make layout for project areas. At the institute, I met someone who was like a mentor to me and I always turned to him when I had any problem

Courses and trainings are important for new entrepreneurs who decided to expand their projects and advance to the next higher level. However, a formal mentor is commonly for a short period of time and respondents need an informal mentor who they are comfortable to work with to guide them in every aspect. Respondents agreed that an informal mentor should be someone who is easily accessible and willing to guide his mentee especially at the initial part of the business. Based on the literature reviews, it is confirmed that the primary roles of a mentor are to provide guidance and support to his mentee (Cooper, 1993; McIntyre *et al.*, 1993). A mentor is expected to share information, skills, expertise and ideas with the mentee (Arnold and Davidson, 1920; Fagenson, 1989; Reich, 1985).

Providing and offering exposure for mentee in start-up business is a crucial role for a mentor: Knowledge can also be gained informally and it also helps in managing a successful business venture. The roles of a mentor are beyond the aspects of agricultural products. All of the respondents agreed that every individual who decided

to venture into agricultural sectors must have basic business knowledge and know how to manage a farm. The following is statement by respondent SY:

The most important thing is we must have at least the basic knowledge for us to continue with the project. The knowledge will develop itself throughout the progress of the project. Apart from that we need to know how to handle the finances, managing the farm and the products particularly in terms of labeling and marketing. However, we still need someone to teach us or we can always ask someone who we are close with

The following is statement by respondent FZ:

We need to know basic business knowledge in managing a project. We cannot take things for granted, meaning we really need to have the basic knowledge before venturing into agricultural activities. We need to have the business skills such as managing the accounts, record and workers and must be computer literate. The world has changed, now everything is recorded and saved in the computer. We need to keep track of the projects, data, records of inputs and output, the monthly profits and the capital. Years ago nothing was recorded, hence, we did not know the profit and the lost. Now a days, entrepreneurs need to have a record book to document the purchasing of goods and the costs. Thus, it is also easier to analyze the ongoing project. And I have learnt about all those things from my mentor as well as from the courses that I had attended

Formal training and basic business knowledge help an entrepreneur to learn about the systematic documentation system. In the formal courses, individuals are introduced to various people who are managing the same agricultural project who then may become a mentor but it also may lead to a problem of mismatched. Formal trainings and basic business knowledge will indeed help the young entrepreneurs in setting up a proper documentation system. Formal courses will also widen participants' basic knowledge on various agricultural projects which will be beneficial in the future. However, respondents were more interested to get the niche on business from their mentor or close friends informally. The mentee would seek information from his mentor as the main source for learning on the business and agricultural projects. According to Kram and Bragar (1991) and Zey (1989), the role of a mentor is challenging because as a mentor his primary roles are not only to educate and

guide a mentee and to transfer certain technical knowledge but they also act as a sounding board for ideas, provide new insights into possible advancement of career, address personal issues and concerns about his mentee's personal life. Results of this study found that informal mentors play a significant and dominant role in the aspect of career advancement.

Psychosocial functions

Mentor being a good role model to mentee is a contributing factor in successful informal mentoring:

All of the respondents reported that they could not survive in the agricultural business without a mentor who was the source for ideas and knowledge. The mentor was an idol whom they sought for advice and guidance throughout the project. The mentor was also the strong pillar who helped them to become successful entrepreneurs. The following are the respondents SY opinions on the role of a mentor as the role model:

If we were granted 5 acres of land from the government we need to have an advisor to guide us. The advisor would advise on fertilizing the land. Young farmers need guidance because they don't have lots of experiences yet, hence they need technical and management assistance. I found my mentor to guide me from the internet. I was introduced to the mentor by a friend of mine; I visited his blog and directly contacted the blogger. He was my consultant; we need to consult someone who is knowledgeable and an expert on the same project

The following is the respondent HK opinions on the role of a mentor as the role model:

I have a mentor who taught me many things. We need to find successful entrepreneurs to become the mentors. For instance, if we decided to venture into planting chilies, we need to find a mentor who is managing the same project. When we encounter any problem, we can seek the mentor's opinion to overcome the problem. It saves time as researchers don't have to do some research because we can simply ask the mentor for ideas. But the most important things that we need to have are knowledge and a mentor. Where to get a mentor? We have to widen the contacts and networking, once we ventured into agricultural projects, we need to have a lot of friends and some friends would reintroduce us to other persons who are doing similar project. This is how we get the mentor and the networking

The following is the respondents FZ opinions on the role of a mentor as the role model:

We cannot work alone, to be successful in this sector we need to seek help or ask someone who already succeed in the area. Don't be shy or hesitate to ask and we simply cannot work alone. We really need someone to guide us and we must be more open to ask questions. When we are having a problem, we need to know who to turn to and where to get the answer. I found my mentor through my networking, a friend recommended his friend to me. My mentor is my idol

Self-selecting a prospective mentor is the best way to establish informal mentoring relationship. A mentee can establish a direct personal contact with his own informal mentor who he respects, admires and who is comfortable to work with. The both parties then need to actively maintain the relationship. The partnership between a mentor and his mentee is power free of a two-way mutually beneficial relationship, no formal structure, no formal meeting to attend to and no obligation with any agencies.

A mentor is like a sounding board, he can provide professional advice in helping the young entrepreneurs to upgrade their businesses commercially. This is due to the fact, that a mentor is always someone who is older and wiser who can educate the young ones who are in dire needs of new experience (Johnson *et al.*, 1991; Wanguri, 1996). A mentor is always defined as a role model (Roche, 1979; Hunt and Michael, 1983). As a role model, a mentor needs to have certain qualities which create a relationship based on compatible chemistry, mutual respect and values for both the mentor and mentee. According to Cooper (1993), Fisher (1994) and Smith and West-Burnham (1993) a mentee will seek for a mentor who has certain attractiveness and charismatic values. The basic chemistry will develop into a trust bond, kinship and loyalty which then establish a strong bond (Gardiner, 1989; Stones, 1984; Young, 1967). According to Bowers *et al.* (2010) in order to help their mentees grow, mentors must be prepared to be simultaneously influenced. These mutually beneficial relationships provide the mentee with both a source of support and another person in which they are personally invested.

Mentee becoming a mentor is a successful outcome from the process of informal mentoring: This study identifies a unique circle of relationship when a mentee then becomes a mentor to bring out the best of other novice. The respondents confirmed that successful entrepreneurs should share his success story with the others and assist

other persons who need their expertise and knowledge especially in organizing certain projects or managing the farm. Successful entrepreneurs should realize and take the initiative to assist the youth or young farmers especially on the technical aspects of farming and managing the farm. Those young farmers and novice entrepreneurs really need to learn on how to find the platform of agricultural projects from the initial stage until the marketing process. This is confirmed by KA:

The young people need to think out of the box. They have to develop their business, if they have the interest to venture into farming activities; they need to seek help from others. We would support them, for example in terms of a contract system. The young people need to come to us, we would support everything on lodging and basic facilities but they have to work on the project. Capital and project equipments such as plastic bags, fertilizers and seeds are provided until the end of the farming season. We would help them in marketing; at the end we would deduct the cost from the sale. We would also motivate them, help them with the plot of technology and equipments but at the end they have to manage the project on their own. Reseachres just need to observe and if the young farmers manage to survive in the period of 7-8 months, meaning they can move forward successfully

This is confirmed by FZ:

I have another project with a youth association. We managed eight acres of a villager's land by growing lemon grass, chilies and okra with the purpose to help the unemployed village boys. It is still new and to make the youth appreciate the project, those young people who are interested need to pay RM 100 (USD32) for only once in a lifetime. We started with an acre by growing lemon grass as I have the experience with the plants. The income is a bit slow but still encouraging. One thing that we have to bear in mind is the young people are not comfortable working under pressure. So, we cannot pressure them or else they are going to give up. Hence, to motivate them, we have to start with the plants which do not need extra care, start with the plants that need them to work on weekly. They will be motivated and developed the interest once they witness the fruits of their labors. At present, we managed to attract more young people and I am their mentor

KA also stated that we need to diversify the projects initiated by the government by not only focus on the young entrepreneurs. The government needs to help the existing entrepreneurs too with the condition that the entrepreneurs must take a protege under their wings and become a mentor until the protege manage to stand on his own. KA stated that:

To me, there are some weaknesses in the government projects. For example the government is targeting of producing 100 agricultural entrepreneurs. For me, this is not a good mission, it is better if the government supports the existing agricultural entrepreneurs who already have good track records, good performance and good business. They still need assistance and provision to develop their farming activities. They in return would need to take any interested youth under their wings and train them to become successful young farmers. In return, the government needs to reimburse the existing entrepreneurs with incentives such as facilities, goods, soft loan and machinery. This mutual service will attract more youth to venture into agricultural sector. But I practice this kind of mentoring privately and would always advise my mentee to have faith

The theme of this psychosocial function can thus be concluded that a mentee self-selects his mentor because there is a certain compatible chemistry that makes them comfortable to work together. This however, is not happening in the formal mentoring which relationship is normally arranged. Agricultural entrepreneurs who want to succeed should be willing in sharing their knowledge, experience, providing exposure and also lending their expertise in the hope to guide the young people to become a successful young farmer and agricultural entrepreneurs. Existing agricultural entrepreneurs need to play their roles and the partnership will be more effective if both parties engineered their efforts towards mutual benefits as practiced by KA.

CONCLUSION

Human Resource Development (HRD) is the integrated use of training, organization and career development efforts to improve individual, group and organizational effectiveness. HRD develops the key competencies that enable individuals in organizations to perform current and future jobs through planned learning activities. Groups within organizations use HRD to initiate and manage change. HRD also ensures a match between

individual and organizational needs. Therefore, this study applied the HRD theories especially for career development and individual improvement.

All respondents who were interviewed agreed that influence, motivation and guidance are the key factors that enabled them to prosper. They are also competitive in nature and robust that helped them to be successful entrepreneurs. The young farmers, who have ventured into commercial agriculture with the hope to become successful agricultural entrepreneurs should be commended for their bold decision alone. They had their own reasons which influenced them to abandon their stable wage jobs. All respondents interviewed have a strong belief on the potential and prospects of agriculture as a commercial field and profitable business.

Informal mentoring provides guidance and exposure by a mentor who acts as a role model for his new mentee. This scenario will encourage more young people to be involved in agriculture. Informal mentor exists informally on unstructured relationship based on trust, honesty, compatibility and comfort. Those who are interested and have the same interest may contact any individual personally without formal restrictions or written obligation. In other words, the novices and young entrepreneurs are free to obtain information directly from informal mentoring. However, the partnership can only work if both parties are committed in seeking and giving valuable knowledge. In formal mentoring are particularly relevant and appropriate as sources of support for young entrepreneurs. The experience of having a well-respected expert working directly with the business, helping tackle both business and personal issues is invaluable. It is important that both partners are able to frame the relationship, understand and agree expectations and recognise the best way forward.

These are the implications of the study using informal mentoring support of a selective basis can make a positive difference to new firm formation, survival and growth; the educating role of informal mentoring support can be exploited to help young entrepreneurs to develop their own networks; the educating role of informal mentoring support can also be used to develop better access to external sources of finance for new start up or young entrepreneurs and supporting start-up entrepreneurs can be beneficial for local economics seeking to diversify their economic base and increase both the number and performance of small firms. From the research, it is recommended that using earlier entrepreneurs as mentors can be beneficial if such mentors are carefully recruited, chosen and trained and a programme of start-up support needs to have measures that encourage early stage networking.

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