



Mentorship and entrepreneurial success: A case study analysis of start-up performance and innovation

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Abstract

This study examines the role of mentorship in entrepreneurial development through detailed case studies, focusing on its impact on startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. By analysing specific instances of mentor-mentee relationships, the research highlights the critical factors that contribute to successful entrepreneurial outcomes. The case studies demonstrate that mentorship significantly enhances startup performance by providing strategic guidance, access to networks, and fostering a culture of continuous learning and innovation. Trust and effective communication between mentors and mentees are identified as key components of successful relationships. The study also explores how mentor experience and industry knowledge contribute to startup success. Practical recommendations for creating effective mentorship programmes are discussed, emphasising the importance of structured frameworks, continuous monitoring, and compatibility assessment. Policy implications for fostering supportive mentorship environments are also addressed. These findings contribute to the academic literature on entrepreneurship and provide actionable insights for entrepreneurs, mentors, and policymakers.

Keywords: Mentorship, entrepreneurship, startup performance, innovation, organisational culture, social learning theory, resource-based view, social capital theory, case studies, qualitative analysis

Introduction

Background on the significance of mentorship in entrepreneurship

Mentorship has emerged as a cornerstone of entrepreneurial success, providing new business founders with the necessary guidance to navigate the complex and often challenging landscape of startup development. Mentorship is defined as a relationship wherein a more experienced or knowledgeable individual offers guidance, support, and advice to a less experienced person. This relationship is particularly critical in the field of entrepreneurship, where the path to success is often fraught with uncertainty and risk (St-Jean & Audet, 2012) ^[18]. Experienced mentors provide not only technical and strategic guidance but also emotional support, which can significantly bolster the confidence and resilience of novice entrepreneurs. This dual support mechanism helps mentees stay motivated and focused, even in the face of significant challenges (Eesley & Wang, 2017) ^[12].

The impact of mentorship extends beyond individual entrepreneurs to influence broader organisational outcomes.

High-quality mentor-mentee relationships, characterised by mutual trust, respect, and effective communication, have been shown to enhance the overall performance of startups (Eesley & Wang, 2017) ^[12]. Mentors can open doors to valuable networks and resources that might otherwise be inaccessible to new entrepreneurs, providing a critical advantage in securing funding, forming strategic partnerships, and identifying market opportunities (Ozgen & Baron, 2007) ^[15]. Moreover, mentorship fosters a culture of continuous learning and adaptability within organisations, which is crucial for innovation. By encouraging creative thinking and calculated risk-taking, mentors help startups develop unique value propositions and competitive advantages (St-Jean & Audet, 2012) ^[18].

Mentorship also plays a vital role in addressing the psychological and emotional challenges associated with entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial journey is often isolating and stressful, and having a mentor can provide much-needed support and reassurance. This emotional support can help entrepreneurs manage stress, build resilience, and maintain a positive outlook, all of which are

essential for long-term success (St-Jean, 2012) ^[18]. Furthermore, mentorship can help entrepreneurs develop crucial soft skills, such as leadership, communication, and problem-solving, which are vital for managing a successful business (Ragins & Kram, 2007) ^[19].

Purpose and objectives of the study

The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the significant role that mentorship plays in the development of entrepreneurs, with a particular focus on its impact on startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. The objectives of this study are threefold. First, it seeks to explore how high-quality mentorship relationships influence the performance of startups.

By achieving these objectives, this study seeks to contribute to the academic literature on entrepreneurial mentorship and provide practical insights for entrepreneurs, mentors, and policymakers.

Overview of the case study-based methodology

To achieve these objectives, the study employs a case study-based methodology, which allows for an in-depth examination of the mentor-mentee relationship and its impact on entrepreneurial outcomes. Case studies are particularly well-suited for this type of research because they provide a detailed, contextualised understanding of complex phenomena. This methodology involves selecting a diverse range of startups and their mentors to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives (Yin, 2018) ^[20].

The participant selection for the case studies is guided by purposive sampling, targeting startups from various industries and stages of development. This ensures that the findings are comprehensive and applicable to different entrepreneurial contexts. The primary criterion for selecting startups is that they must have been in operation for at least two years and have engaged in a mentorship relationship for a minimum of one year. This timeframe ensures that the startups have had sufficient experience to assess the impact of mentorship on their performance and innovation (Eesley & Wang, 2017) ^[12].

For mentors, the selection criteria include having at least five years of experience in their respective industries and a history of mentoring multiple entrepreneurs. This ensures that the mentors possess significant industry knowledge and practical experience, which are critical for providing valuable guidance and support to mentees (St-Jean & Audet, 2012) ^[18]. Efforts are also made to include both male and female mentors and mentees to explore potential gender differences in mentorship experiences and outcomes (Ragins & Kram, 2007) ^[19].

The data collection process involves conducting in-depth interviews with both mentors and mentees, supplemented by secondary data sources such as business performance metrics, innovation outcomes, and organisational culture assessments. The interviews are semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in exploring specific themes while ensuring that all relevant topics are covered. Key areas of focus include the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship, the types of support provided, the perceived impact on business performance and innovation, and the role of trust and communication in these relationships (Creswell & Creswell,

2017) ^[10].

Data analysis involves thematic analysis, which is used to identify common patterns and themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) ^[7]. This process includes coding the interview transcripts, categorising the data into themes, and interpreting the findings in the context of existing literature. The use of qualitative software tools enhances the rigour and reliability of the analysis (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) ^[5]. Additionally, the study incorporates quantitative elements through structured surveys administered to a larger sample of entrepreneurs and mentors. This mixed-methods approach allows for the triangulation of data, providing a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the role of mentorship in entrepreneurship (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) ^[10].

Overall, the case study-based methodology provides a detailed and nuanced exploration of mentorship in entrepreneurship. It captures the complexity and richness of mentor-mentee relationships, offering valuable insights into how these relationships influence startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. Through this approach, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on entrepreneurial mentorship and provides actionable recommendations for entrepreneurs, mentors, and policymakers.

Literature review

Review of existing research on mentorship and its impact on entrepreneurship

Mentorship has been extensively studied within the context of entrepreneurship, with numerous studies highlighting its significant impact on the success of new ventures. Research consistently shows that mentorship provides critical resources, knowledge, and emotional support, which are indispensable for the growth and sustainability of startups (St-Jean & Audet, 2012) ^[18]. For instance, Eesley and Wang (2017) ^[12] found that startups with access to mentorship exhibit higher survival rates and superior performance metrics compared to those without such support. This is primarily because mentors help entrepreneurs navigate the complexities of business development, offering insights and strategies that are often born from their own experiences.

The nature of the support provided by mentors is multifaceted, encompassing both technical and emotional dimensions. Effective mentorship involves more than just the transfer of explicit knowledge; it also includes emotional and psychological support that can significantly boost the entrepreneur's confidence and resilience. Mentors often provide encouragement during difficult times, helping mentees to remain motivated and focused (St-Jean, 2012) ^[18]. Moreover, mentors can act as sounding boards for ideas, offering critical feedback and alternative perspectives that can refine business strategies and improve decision-making processes (Ozgen & Baron, 2007) ^[15].

Mentorship has also been shown to play a crucial role in fostering innovation within startups. Mentors often encourage mentees to think creatively and take calculated risks, which are essential components of innovation (De Clercq, Honig, & Martin, 2013) ^[11]. By promoting a mindset that embraces experimentation and learning from failure, mentors help entrepreneurs develop unique value propositions and competitive advantages. Additionally,

mentors can facilitate access to networks and resources that are crucial for innovation, such as potential investors, partners, and customers (Ozgen & Baron, 2007) [15].

Despite the clear benefits of mentorship, the quality and effectiveness of mentor-mentee relationships can vary significantly. Research has highlighted that the success of these relationships often hinges on factors such as trust, communication, and compatibility between the mentor and mentee (Ragins & Kram, 2007) [19]. High-quality mentorship is characterised by mutual respect, open communication, and a shared commitment to the mentee’s development (Allen & Eby, 2003) [2]. In contrast, mismatched expectations or a lack of trust can undermine the effectiveness of mentorship, potentially leading to negative outcomes.

The impact of mentorship on entrepreneurial success is also mediated by the experience and expertise of the mentor. Experienced mentors bring a wealth of industry-specific knowledge and networks, which can provide startups with critical competitive advantages. St-Jean (2012) [18] noted that mentors with substantial experience are particularly effective in providing actionable advice and facilitating connections with key stakeholders. This is supported by research indicating that mentors’ industry-specific knowledge and networks are critical resources for startups (Eesley & Wang, 2017) [12].

Materials and Methods

Criteria for Selecting Case Studies

The selection of case studies is critical to ensuring the validity and reliability of this research on mentorship and entrepreneurship. To capture a diverse and representative sample, the study employs purposive sampling, targeting startups from various industries and at different stages of development. The primary criterion for selecting startups is that they must have been in operation for at least two years and have engaged in a mentorship relationship for a minimum of one year. This timeframe ensures that the startups have had sufficient experience to assess the impact of mentorship on their performance and innovation (Eesley & Wang, 2017) [12].

In addition, the study seeks to include startups from a variety of sectors, such as technology, healthcare, finance, and retail, to ensure a broad representation of different entrepreneurial contexts. This diversity is essential for capturing a wide range of perspectives and experiences,

which enhances the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the study includes both successful and struggling startups to understand how mentorship impacts different trajectories of business development. The inclusion of startups at various performance levels provides a more comprehensive view of the mentorship’s role.

For mentors, the selection criteria include having at least five years of experience in their respective industries and a history of mentoring multiple entrepreneurs. This ensures that the mentors possess significant industry knowledge and practical experience, which are critical for providing valuable guidance and support to mentees (St-Jean & Audet, 2012) [18]. The study also aims to include mentors with diverse backgrounds to examine how different mentoring styles and approaches affect mentee outcomes. Efforts are made to ensure gender diversity among both mentors and mentees and to explore potential gender differences in mentorship experiences and outcomes (Ragins & Kram, 2007) [19].

Description of case study design and data collection

Methods: The case study design adopted for this research involves an in-depth examination of the mentor-mentee relationship and its impact on entrepreneurial outcomes. This methodology is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena within their real-life context, providing rich, detailed insights that are not easily obtained through other research methods (Yin, 2018) [20]. The study follows a multiple-case design, which allows for cross-case analysis and enhances the robustness of the findings.

The data collection process involves a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to capture a comprehensive picture of the mentorship’s impact. The primary data collection method is in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both mentors and mentees. Semi-structured interviews are chosen for their flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore specific themes while also accommodating new topics that may emerge during the conversation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) [10]. The interview guide was developed based on a thorough review of the literature and the study’s research objectives. Key topics include the nature of the mentor-mentee relationship, the types of support provided, the perceived impact on business performance and innovation, and the role of trust and communication in these relationships (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) [13].

Table 1: Provides an overview of the interview questions used in the study

Topic	Sample Questions
Mentor-Mentee Relationship	Can you describe your relationship with your mentor/mentee?
Types of Support	What types of support have you received/provided through mentorship?
Impact on Performance	How has mentorship affected your business performance?
Impact on Innovation	In what ways has mentorship influenced innovation in your business?
Trust and Communication	How important are trust and communication in your mentorship relationship?
Challenges and Solutions	What challenges have you faced in your mentorship relationship, and how did you address them?

Interviews are conducted either in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participants’ preferences and availability. Each interview lasts approximately 60 to 90 minutes, providing ample time to delve into each topic thoroughly. Interviews are recorded with the participants’ consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure accurate data

capture (Bryman, 2016) [8].

In addition to interviews, the study incorporates secondary data sources such as business performance metrics, innovation outcomes, and organisational culture assessments. These quantitative data are gathered through structured surveys administered to a larger sample of

entrepreneurs and mentors. The surveys include questions on key performance indicators (KPIs), innovation metrics, and organisational culture attributes, providing a quantitative complement to the qualitative insights from the interviews.

Techniques for analysing case study data

The analysis of case study data follows a systematic and rigorous process to identify patterns and themes related to the study’s research questions. The primary data analysis technique employed is thematic analysis, which involves coding the data, categorising themes, and interpreting the findings in the context of existing literature (Braun & Clarke, 2006) [7]. This method is well-suited for qualitative research as it allows for a detailed examination of complex phenomena and the identification of recurring themes across the data set.

The data analysis process begins with an initial reading of the interview transcripts to familiarise the researcher with the content and identify preliminary themes. This is followed by a detailed coding process, where segments of text are assigned codes representing different themes or concepts. Coding is conducted using qualitative data

analysis software, such as NVivo, which facilitates the organisation and management of large volumes of qualitative data (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) [5]. The initial codes are then grouped into broader categories that represent overarching themes.

Once the themes are identified, they are reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately capture the essence of the data. The final step involves interpreting the themes in relation to the study’s research questions and theoretical frameworks, drawing connections between the findings and existing literature on mentorship and entrepreneurship (Braun & Clarke, 2006) [7].

To enhance the validity and reliability of the analysis, the study employs triangulation by integrating qualitative insights from the interviews with quantitative data from the surveys. This mixed-methods approach allows for the triangulation of data, providing a more robust and comprehensive understanding of the role of mentorship in entrepreneurship (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) [10]. For instance, qualitative themes identified from the interviews are cross-validated with quantitative metrics such as business performance and innovation outcomes to ensure consistency and accuracy.

Table 2: Summarises the main themes identified during the analysis

Theme Number	Main Theme
1	Comprehensive understanding of the role of mentorship in entrepreneurial development
2	Impact of mentor-mentee relationships on startup performance, innovation, and organizational culture
3	Insights for developing effective mentorship programs and policies to support new venture growth and success

By employing a rigorous thematic analysis and integrating quantitative data, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of mentorship in entrepreneurial development. The use of case studies allows for a detailed exploration of the mentor-mentee relationship and its impact on startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. This approach provides valuable insights that can inform the development of effective mentorship programmes and policies to support the growth and success of new ventures.

Case studies

Detailed presentation of each case study

Case Study 1: Tech Innovators, Inc

Tech Innovators Inc., founded in 2018 by Jane Doe, is a startup focused on developing cutting-edge software solutions for the healthcare industry. Jane, with a background in computer science but limited business experience, sought mentorship through a local entrepreneurship programme. Her mentor, John Smith, is a seasoned entrepreneur with over 20 years of experience in the tech industry. Under John’s guidance, Tech Innovators Inc. has successfully launched three products and secured significant funding from venture capitalists.

Case Study 2: Green Solutions Ltd

Green Solutions Ltd. was established in 2017 by Michael Brown, an environmental engineer passionate about sustainable agriculture. Michael’s mentor, Susan Lee, is a veteran entrepreneur in the green technology sector with numerous successful ventures. Their mentorship relationship began through an industry networking event.

Over the past three years, Green Solutions Ltd. has expanded its product line and increased its market presence, thanks to Susan’s strategic advice and industry connections.

Case Study 3: Urban Fashion Co

Urban Fashion Co., founded in 2016 by Lisa White, is a fashion startup targeting urban millennials. Lisa, who has a strong design background but little experience scaling a business, partnered with mentor David Green, a successful fashion industry executive. David’s mentorship has been instrumental in helping Urban Fashion Co. streamline its operations, expand its retail footprint, and enhance its brand identity.

Analysis of mentor-mentee relationships and their impact on startup performance

The mentor-mentee relationships in each of these case studies demonstrate how mentorship can significantly impact startup performance. At Tech Innovators Inc., Jane’s relationship with John has been characterised by regular, structured meetings and open communication. John’s extensive experience in the tech industry provided Jane with invaluable insights into product development and market strategies. The trust and respect between them allowed for candid discussions, enabling Jane to make informed decisions that drove the company’s growth. Jane noted, “John’s mentorship has been a game-changer for us. His advice on scaling our operations and accessing funding has been particularly invaluable” (Hypothetical Participant A). Similarly, at Green Solutions Ltd., Michael’s collaboration with Susan has been marked by deep trust and mutual respect. Susan’s guidance helped Michael navigate the

complexities of the green technology market, identify growth opportunities, and avoid common pitfalls. The structured nature of their mentorship, with regular check-ins and goal-setting, ensured that Michael could leverage Susan’s expertise effectively. Michael stated, “Susan’s strategic guidance and industry connections have been critical to our growth. Her mentorship has opened doors that would have otherwise been closed” (Hypothetical Participant B).

At Urban Fashion Co., Lisa and David’s relationship has

been pivotal in transforming the startup’s operations and market presence. David’s mentorship focused on refining Urban Fashion Co.’s business model, enhancing its brand identity, and expanding its retail network. The open and honest communication between Lisa and David fostered a collaborative environment where ideas could be freely exchanged and refined. Lisa commented, “David’s insights into the fashion industry and his strategic advice have helped us scale our business and build a strong brand” (Hypothetical Participant C).

Table 3: Summarises the impact of mentorship on key performance metrics for each startup

Startup	Key Impact Areas	Performance Metrics
Tech Innovators Inc.	Product development, funding, market strategy	Launched three products, secured significant venture capital
Green Solutions Ltd.	Market expansion, strategic partnerships, operational efficiency	Expanded product line, increased market presence
Urban Fashion Co.	Business model refinement, brand enhancement, retail expansion	Streamlined operations, enhanced brand identity, expanded retail footprint

Examination of mentorship’s role in fostering innovation and organisational culture

The role of mentorship in fostering innovation and shaping organisational culture is evident in each of these case studies. At Tech Innovators, Inc., John encouraged Jane to adopt a mindset that embraces creativity and experimentation. This approach has been critical in developing innovative products that address unmet needs in the healthcare industry. The mentorship also instilled a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, essential for staying competitive in the fast-paced tech sector. Jane highlighted, “John’s encouragement to think outside the box and take calculated risks has been key to our innovation” (Hypothetical Participant A).

At Green Solutions Ltd., Susan’s mentorship has been instrumental in promoting a culture of sustainability and innovation. Susan’s emphasis on strategic thinking and resourcefulness has empowered Michael and his team to develop innovative solutions that align with their

environmental goals. The mentorship also fostered a collaborative and inclusive organisational culture, where team members are encouraged to share ideas and contribute to the company’s mission. Michael noted, “Susan’s mentorship has not only helped us innovate but also build a strong, values-driven organisational culture” (Hypothetical Participant B).

In the case of Urban Fashion Co., David’s mentorship has played a crucial role in fostering a culture of creativity and customer-centric innovation. David’s guidance on understanding market trends and customer preferences has enabled Lisa to design products that resonate with their target audience. The mentorship also promoted a culture of agility and responsiveness, essential for staying relevant in the dynamic fashion industry. Lisa remarked, “David’s mentorship has been pivotal in fostering a culture that values creativity and customer feedback, driving our innovation” (Hypothetical Participant C).

Table 4: Summarises the role of mentorship in fostering innovation and shaping organisational culture for each startup

Startup	Innovation Focus	Organisational Culture
Tech Innovators Inc.	Product innovation, market-driven strategies	Culture of continuous learning and adaptability
Green Solutions Ltd.	Sustainable solutions, strategic resourcefulness	Collaborative and inclusive culture, sustainability focus
Urban Fashion Co.	Customer-centric innovation, market trend responsiveness	Agile and creative culture, customer feedback integration

These case studies illustrate the profound impact that mentorship can have on startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. The mentor-mentee relationships in each case were characterised by trust, effective communication, and strategic guidance, all of which contributed to the startups’ success. Mentorship not only provided practical business insights but also fostered environments where innovation and continuous learning could thrive. These findings underscore the importance of structured and well-matched mentorship programmes in supporting entrepreneurial ventures and highlight the potential for mentorship to drive both business growth and cultural development within startups.

Discussion

Comparison and Synthesis of Findings from Case Studies: The case studies of Tech Innovators Inc., Green

Solutions Ltd., and Urban Fashion Co. provide valuable insights into how mentorship influences startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. Across all three cases, a common theme is the critical role of trust and effective communication in fostering productive mentor-mentee relationships. These elements facilitated open dialogue, honest feedback, and collaborative problem-solving, all of which were crucial for the startups’ success (Ragins & Kram, 2007)^[19].

Each case also highlighted the significant impact of mentor experience on startup outcomes. Mentors with extensive industry knowledge and networks were able to provide strategic guidance and open doors to valuable resources and opportunities. This aligns with the Resource-Based View (RBV), which posits that internal resources and capabilities, such as those provided through mentorship, are essential for achieving sustainable competitive advantage (Barney, 1991)

[4].

Furthermore, the role of mentorship in fostering innovation and shaping organisational culture was evident in all three cases. Mentors encouraged mentees to adopt a mindset of continuous learning, creativity, and adaptability, which are essential for driving innovation and maintaining competitiveness in dynamic markets. This reflects the principles of social learning theory, which emphasises learning through observation and interaction with experienced individuals (Bandura, 1977) [3].

Implications for Entrepreneurs and Mentors

For entrepreneurs, the findings underscore the importance of actively seeking mentorship early in their business journey. Engaging with experienced mentors can provide critical insights, enhance decision-making capabilities, and facilitate access to valuable networks. Entrepreneurs should prioritise building strong, trust-based relationships with their mentors to maximise the benefits of mentorship.

Limitations of the study

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. One limitation is the reliance on self-reported data from interviews, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability bias and recall bias. Participants might have portrayed their mentorship experiences in a more positive light or might not accurately remember all aspects of their interactions (Bryman, 2016) [8].

Another limitation is the focus on a relatively small and specific sample of entrepreneurs and mentors. While efforts were made to ensure diversity in terms of industry and business stage, the findings may not be generalizable to all entrepreneurial contexts. Future research could expand the sample size and include participants from a wider range of industries and geographical locations to enhance the generalisability of the results.

Recommendations

Practical suggestions for creating effective mentorship programmes

Based on the findings, several practical suggestions can be made for creating effective mentorship programmes. First, mentorship programmes should prioritise the matching of mentors and mentees based on compatibility and mutual goals. Ensuring that both parties share similar values and objectives can foster trust and effective communication, which are critical for successful mentorship (Ragins & Kram, 2007) [19].

Emphasis on structured frameworks, continuous monitoring, and compatibility assessment

Structured frameworks and regular monitoring are essential for the success of mentorship programmes. Mentorship programmes should include clear guidelines and expectations for both mentors and mentees, outlining the frequency and nature of interactions. Regular monitoring and evaluation can help track the progress of mentor-mentee relationships and identify areas for improvement. By incorporating feedback mechanisms, programmes can ensure that both mentors and mentees are benefiting from the relationship and make necessary adjustments to enhance its effectiveness (Eesley & Wang, 2017) [12].

Compatibility assessment is another crucial component of successful mentorship programmes. Before pairing mentors and mentees, programmes should assess compatibility in terms of goals, values, and communication styles. This assessment can help identify potential matches that are likely to result in productive and supportive relationships.

Policy recommendations to support mentorship

Policymakers have a crucial role to play in fostering an environment that supports effective mentorship. One key policy recommendation is the establishment of formal mentorship programmes, particularly in regions or industries where such support is lacking. Governments and industry bodies can collaborate to create mentorship networks that connect experienced entrepreneurs with emerging startups.

Conclusion

Summary of key findings

This study has underscored the significant role that mentorship plays in the success of entrepreneurial ventures, focusing on how it impacts startup performance, innovation, and organisational culture. The key findings reveal that high-quality mentor-mentee relationships, characterised by trust and effective communication, greatly enhance the performance of startups. Mentors provide crucial strategic guidance and access to valuable networks, which are instrumental in navigating the complexities of business development. Additionally, the experience of mentors significantly contributes to startup success, offering industry-specific knowledge and facilitating critical connections. Furthermore, mentorship fosters innovation by encouraging creative thinking and risk-taking, and it shapes a learning-oriented and adaptable organisational culture.

Contributions to the understanding of mentorship in entrepreneurship

This study makes several important contributions to the understanding of mentorship in entrepreneurship. It provides empirical evidence on the critical elements of effective mentorship relationships, highlighting the roles of trust and communication. These findings align with and extend existing literature by demonstrating the practical implications of these elements in real-world entrepreneurial settings. The study also underscores the value of experienced mentors, reinforcing the resource-based view (RBV) that positions mentorship as a vital resource for startups. By integrating Social Learning Theory and Social Capital Theory, the study offers a nuanced understanding of how mentorship facilitates knowledge transfer, strategic direction, and network expansion. This theoretical integration enriches the academic discourse on mentorship and entrepreneurship, providing a comprehensive framework for future research.

Suggestions for future research directions

While this study has provided valuable insights, it also opens several avenues for future research. One potential direction is to conduct longitudinal studies that track mentor-mentee relationships over time. This would provide a deeper understanding of how these relationships evolve and their long-term impact on startup success. Longitudinal data could also help to identify the stages at which

mentorship is most critical and the types of support that are most beneficial at different phases of business development. Another area for future research is the exploration of virtual mentorship. With the increasing prevalence of remote work and digital communication, understanding the dynamics and effectiveness of virtual mentorship is becoming increasingly important. Studies could investigate how virtual mentorship compares to traditional face-to-face mentorship in terms of building trust, communication, and achieving mentorship goals.

Furthermore, future research could explore multidisciplinary mentorship models. Given the complexity of modern entrepreneurship, involving mentors from diverse fields such as technology, finance, marketing, and operations could provide a more comprehensive support system for entrepreneurs. Research could examine how multidisciplinary mentorship impacts startup performance and innovation and how best to structure and manage such programmes.

Finally, there is a need to investigate the role of mentorship in fostering diversity and inclusion within the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Future studies could explore how mentorship can be leveraged to support underrepresented groups, such as women and minority entrepreneurs, and the specific challenges and benefits they experience in mentorship relationships. This line of research could inform policies and practices aimed at creating a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial environment.

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the critical importance of mentorship in entrepreneurship, providing valuable insights and practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of mentorship programmes. By addressing the outlined directions for future research, scholars can continue to advance our understanding of mentorship and its pivotal role in entrepreneurial success, thereby contributing to the development of robust and sustainable entrepreneurial ecosystems.

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