Entrepreneurial Development
The Impact of Mentorship in the Entrepreneurial Life-Cycle Process

Master's Thesis within Entrepreneurship
Author: Wallstedt, Erik
        Wennerström, Linus
Tutor: Ethel Brundin
Jönköping June 2009
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have contributed to this master thesis whom we would like to express our appreciation to. The first one to acknowledge is our tutor, Ethel Brundin, who has provided us with support, expertise and motivation throughout the whole research process. Secondly, we would like to thank the ten inspiring entrepreneurs who have taken their time and shared their experiences with us. They have all provided this study with very valuable insights, enabling us to conduct empirical research in a previously partly un-explored field. Thank you. We would also like to thank Almi for initiating our contact with these entrepreneurs.

We would like to express our gratitude to the ten entrepreneurs who have participated in this research.

Karl-Anders Bringfeldt, GainIT AB
Mattias Carlsson, Bluewall Construction AB
Richard Kvist, Richards Hemservice AB
Carl-Johan Forssen, CJ Ledarskap och Utveckling AB
Claes Josefsson, GTG roup AB
Agneta Andersson, HB Wätterspa & Massage
Anne Robertsson, Huskvarna Stadshotell AB
Pernilla Andersson Garcia, Reklamfirman Andersson Garcia
Pia Kjellerstedt, Resegruppen AB
Raul Carlsson, ECO 2Win AB

Erik Wallstedt and Linus Wennerström
Master Thesis within Business Administration: Entrepreneurship

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Authors: Erik Wallstedt and Linus Wennerström

Tutor: Ethel Brundin

Date: 2009-05-03

Subject terms: Entrepreneurial Development, Entrepreneurial Learning, Mentoring, Business Support, Life-Cycle Analysis.

Abstract

A sustainable development of entrepreneurship will not be possible in such a complex and challenging environment as today’s society, without the attainment of effective learning and business support capabilities (Williams, 1998). One such support is obtained through having experienced entrepreneurs mentor less experienced entrepreneurs, transferring knowledge (Clutterbuck, 2004) and facilitating learning (Sullivan, 2000). As Leonard Bisk (2002) and Sullivan (2000) among other researchers (Deakins et al. 1997) stress, there is a need to look beyond the start-up process of a firm and the use of mentorship in this early phase, and focus more on how entrepreneurs who have been in business for a while can benefit from a mentor program, an area referred to as “the nature of timing and support” (Sullivan, 2000, p. 163).

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how an experienced entrepreneur, a mentor, can help a less experienced entrepreneur, an adept, achieve entrepreneurial development during and throughout different phases of the entrepreneurial life cycle, in the most efficient manner.

An entrepreneurial life cycle can be divided into several phases, which can be used in order to examine the entrepreneur’s development process within different time periods of running a firm. Start-up support generally involves providing entrepreneurs with the crucial “tools” for survival, such as basic financial support, bookkeeping and marketing (Sullivan, 2000). Mature entrepreneurs generally request psychological benefits, such as reassurance and improved confidence as they wonder whether or not their experiences are normal and how they should be interpreted (Megginson et al. 2006). There are two types of directive mentoring styles, coaching and counseling, and two types of non directive mentoring, counseling and networking.

The main objective with our research in this thesis was to explore how entrepreneurs’ development throughout and during different phases was affected by active participation in a mentor program. To gather information we used a qualitative method, in which we interviewed ten entrepreneurs who were currently active in a mentor program, or had been active within the last 12 months. The empirical findings were later analyzed in the light of the frame of references and the authors own viewpoint, by conducting a within case/cross case comparisons.

The results indicate that a mentor can best help an entrepreneur achieve entrepreneurial development by providing non directive support, enabling the entrepreneur to draw his or her own conclusions and stimulate self reliance. This support is best delivered after the start-up and conception phase, the first phase of the life-cycle.


1 Introduction

The first chapter of this thesis will present a brief background of the research and the reason for the study. It includes a description of where the research in mentorship in the context of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial business support stands today, how and why the concepts have been merged, as well as the purpose and delimitations of the report.

Entrepreneurs account for a substantial part of the development and growth in today’s global, as well as local economy. Entrepreneurial activities are needed in order to create jobs and sustain product innovation, which in turn leads to increased living conditions and economic growth all over the world (McGrath, 1999). According to Williams (1998), a sustainable development of entrepreneurship will not be possible in such a complex and challenging environment as today’s society, without the attainment of effective learning and business support capabilities.

Previous research has shown that in order for entrepreneurs to achieve a higher level of learning, in essence develop their firm, they must actively engage in reflection over their encountered experiences. This learning can then be used in order for the entrepreneur to develop effectively in his or her business life (Cope, 2003; Skärström et al, 2009). According to Skärström et al. (2009) there is an evident need for assistance in order to reach this type of higher level learning, and one appropriate solution is, according to their research findings, through the use of an experienced entrepreneur as a mentor. According to Sullivan (2000), a mentor can facilitate the learning experience for a less experienced entrepreneur, by providing meaning and guidance in the comprehension of the entrepreneur’s encountered experiences, something which would then help the entrepreneur in his or her firm’s development process. “Experts”, in this context referred to as mentors, who have acquired this type of experientially gained knowledge previously, can then pass it on by sharing their findings with an adept. What is so exceptional with the expert’s knowledge is that by calling on their own previous experiences, they can discover patterns quicker and more efficient than the inexperienced adept (Swap et al, 2001).

Entrepreneurial development can be illustrated by the use of a life-cycle analysis (Sullivan, 2000). An entrepreneurial life-cycle can be divided into several phases, which can be used in order to examine the entrepreneur’s development process within different time periods of running a firm (Sullivan, 2000). In essence, entrepreneurial development is the transaction from one phase, for example survival, into the next one, stabilization. By dividing the development process of the firm this way, researchers are able to examine the impact of a mentor during different phases of the entrepreneurial life-cycle, something that is very important in order to understand the importance of mentorship, and when and how it is most efficiently implemented (Clutterbuck, 2004).

In this thesis we contribute to existing research on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurial development and mentoring, by empirically investigating the impact of mentorship in enhancing the capability of the entrepreneur to develop during and throughout different phases of a firm’s life-cycle.
1.1 Background

For several decades the interest for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs has grown significantly, resulting in a major growth within the field of entrepreneurial research (Landström & Johannisson, 2001). Entrepreneurship has however turned out to be a very difficult field to study, and because of its complex nature, including many different approaches and levels of analysis, there is a high degree of fragmentation in the field (Landström, 2008). To draw a general conclusion, entrepreneurial research has for a long time been focused on picking successful entrepreneurs, “winners”, and identifying their key traits and capabilities (Deakins, 1996). As a response to this, Deakins (1996) presses for a change in focus towards examining key issues in the learning and development processes of running a firm, moreover what he considers the most crucial aspect in succeeding as an entrepreneur.

Our previous research on firm failure and entrepreneurial learning has shown the need for entrepreneurs to have a mentor in their business development process (Skärström et al. 2009). Since we were not able to elaborate further on this topic of entrepreneurial mentorship while writing our thesis on entrepreneurial learning, we suggested it as an interesting subject for future research. Following this we found researchers (Sullivan, 2000; Deakins et al. 1997) calling for more empirical research within this field.

Mentoring is a development of apprenticeship, based on the passing of skills from experienced to more junior employees (Clutterbuck, 2004). This definition is rather broad, but sums up the core of what mentorship is about. Mentoring is primarily developed to increase the knowledgebase of the adept, however, often the mentors can benefit from being part of a mentor program as well (Clutterbuck, 2004). The most fundamental implication when discussing mentorship within the context of entrepreneurship is to increase the knowledgebase of an inexperienced entrepreneur, perhaps through learning from the mentors previous experiences (Sullivan, 2000). Since entrepreneurs learn mainly from experience, and these experiences are rarely ever planned, the role of the mentor is often to help the entrepreneurs learn, rather than imposing prescribed solutions and consultancy (Deakins et al. 1997). While there is always the option to put a number of entrepreneurs in a room, have an experienced entrepreneur lecture to them, and then send them out in the business world, the question remains; which is more beneficial to the entrepreneur?

Research with focus on mentoring has generally concerned organizational learning, focusing on the matching process. However, there is a lack of research on whether or not there is a relationship between mentoring and an improvement in entrepreneurial performance and organizational learning. Studies show that individuals within organizations that have received mentoring are promoted faster, but not so much concerning whether or not entrepreneurs are able to develop their firms more efficient with the help of a mentor (Swap, 2001).

There is research stating that in order for mentoring to work efficiently in facilitating entrepreneurship, it should be considered a valuable resource, which should be used with caution (Clutterbuck, 2004). We therefore see a need to examine when on the entrepreneurial life-cycle mentorship should be applied, and how it should be structured, in order for business support organizations to create efficient mentor programs and eventually for society to benefit as an indirect effect of this.
1.2 Problem Discussion

Currently there is a lot of research on the effects of mentorship during the start-up phase of a firm, however, there is little research conducted on the importance of mentorship during the later phases of running a firm. Hence, this thesis focuses on exploring how a mentor can help an entrepreneur to develop throughout and during different phases of a firm’s life-cycle, early on and later, and also how this assistance is applied most effective. Critics of start-up support believe that the possibility that the entrepreneur will fail is too high, making the cost of developing mentor programs at this early stage too high. Storey (1993), one of the most famous critics in this matter, bases his arguments on his belief that entrepreneurs in such an early stage of development do not need the type of support that an experienced entrepreneur can deliver, and that other types of support, such as theoretical support, is more efficient. Research on this matter is widely differentiated and therefore interesting for us to look further into.

As Leonard Bisk (2002) and Sullivan (2000) among other researchers (Deakins et al. 1997) stress, there is a need to look beyond the start-up process and the use of mentorship in this early phase, and focus more on how entrepreneurs who have been in business for a while can benefit from a mentor program, an area referred to as “the nature of timing and support” (Sullivan, 2000, p. 163). The phases that will be referred to in this thesis are derived from a life-cycle model developed by Churchill (1983), revised by Sullivan (2000) and finally interpreted by ourselves; the phases in chronologic order follow; conception, survival, stability, growth orientation, rapid growth and maturity.

According to Covin and Slevin (1998), when growth occurs, management complexity increases both within a firm and in its external environment. In order to keep growing, these complex problems need to be dealt with. In other words, growth needs to be managed (Covin & Slevin, 1998). Both the organization and the entrepreneur are subject to change as the firm develops. The organization needs to adapt to this change, and consequently the entrepreneur needs to develop stronger management skills and change management style in order to cope with the change that occurs during the different phases (Stanworth & Curran, 1976). This brings us to the core of this thesis where we aim to explore what impact the mentor has on the entrepreneurial development process, looking at both early as well as more mature support, support during stabile conditions as well as during growth. The area is relatively unexplored and therefore we need to incorporate findings from different fields of entrepreneurship, mentoring, and general business support.

1.2.1 Contributions to Theory and Practice

Our targeted audience within the academic setting is researchers within the fields of entrepreneurial development, entrepreneurial business support and entrepreneurial mentoring. There is a gap between theory and practice concerning the effectiveness of various types of business support, which we aim to explore and elaborate on. Since we are building on a thesis within entrepreneurial learning, and that the idea of mentoring as a support for entrepreneurs awoke during the writing of that thesis, we consider this thesis a contribution to the field entrepreneurial learning as well.

In practice this thesis contributes to the organizations that provide mentorship programs, with Almi, a Swedish business support organization, being the most relevant one for this report. It also contributes to alternative business support programs that consider mentorship as a tool in the future. Furthermore our findings contribute to the mentors and adepts who are already involved in a program.
1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how an experienced entrepreneur, a mentor, can best help a less experienced entrepreneur, an adept, achieve entrepreneurial development during and throughout different phases of the entrepreneurial life-cycle.

1.3.1 Delimitations

In this thesis we will draw general conclusions on what type of support that is most efficient and at what point of development this support should be implemented. Mentoring however, is a very broad concept, especially so within the context of entrepreneurship and therefore it is practically impossible to include all dimensions involved. In this thesis we will not explicitly investigate the mentor/adept matching process, which is claimed to have a significant impact on the outcome of a mentorship. We will not investigate the relationship from the mentors perspective.
2 Theoretical Framework

In order to reach the purpose of this thesis we need relevant theories and definitions and previous empirical findings to relate our own empirical findings to. In this chapter we will initially define the concepts entrepreneurial learning, entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, mentoring and the life-cycle approach, as this will be the working definitions throughout the paper. We will further present the theories that will be used throughout the thesis and these will be introduced in their respective sections.

2.1 Entrepreneurial Learning

Entrepreneurial learning is a widely debated topic and the quest to find an answer to the question “how do entrepreneurs learn” is still ongoing. Even though many researchers cannot agree on how entrepreneurs learn, it is generally agreed upon that entrepreneurs do learn while in the midst of the process of running their firms (Deakins, 1996). In entrepreneurial learning, researchers (Cope 2003; Sullivan 2000; Kolb, 2004) conclude that learning within entrepreneurship occurs when the entrepreneur takes notion of a mistake or incident, and alters his or her methods in the future. In this thesis we want to explore what impact a mentor has in facilitating entrepreneurial learning, and therefore a thorough presentation of the concept of entrepreneurial learning is important. Furthermore, since the mentors who mentor the adepts has gained this type of learning prior to the relationship, it is important to understand what this knowledge stems from.

It is frequently mentioned and seen in literature on entrepreneurial learning, as Rae & Carswell (2000) mentions, that most entrepreneurs are action oriented, and accordingly their learning style is experientially based (Cope, 2003). This assumption goes well with Deakins & Freel’s, Young & Sexton’s (1997) suggestions that entrepreneurs learn mainly through ‘learning by doing’; trial and error based activities as well as from solving problems. In literature on learning there are several different levels of learning discussed and the two most common focuses are on organizational and individual learning (Cope, 2003).

There are different levels of learning which distinguish between more practical, theoretical, routine, adaptive, and fundamental learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978). According to Huber (1991) the latter gives an understanding and a new cognitive ‘theories for action’ forcing an individual to question his or her established way of doing things. Cope (2003) chooses to use the terminology ‘higher-level’ and ‘lower-level’ learning when discussing the different levels of learning and the outcome of the learning process. Higher-level learning is the learning that is attained through experiences, and entrepreneurial decisions, through self-reflection and critical reflection (Cope, 2003). Entrepreneurial learning and critical reflection discussed by Cope (2003) are the outcomes from different discontinuous events occurring within the entrepreneurial process of running a firm. According to Fiol & Lyles (1985) Higher-level learning has long-term effects and is a cognitive process that involves skill development and new insights. Lower-level learning is repetitively task oriented and is triggered by reoccurring and routine based events. This level of learning will not generate questioning of underlying values and implies no capacity to “bring forward” experience (Cope, 2003). According to Fiol & Lyles (1985) Lower level learning occurs through repetition and routine and has short-term outcomes.
2.2 Defining the Entrepreneur and Entrepreneurship

In the literature revised throughout this thesis we have encountered several different definitions, from as many different authors, of what constitutes an entrepreneur. Therefore, being able to clearly identify a universally accepted definition is not possible. We are interested in entrepreneurs who have been mentored in a mentor program, also known as adepts, and are aware of the fact that the personal background, as well as current situation, differs between these relevant subjects. However, all of these entrepreneurs have started, owns, and operates a business. Based on these grounds we have chosen to define an entrepreneur as someone who has the ability to perceive and exploit previously unrecognized profit opportunities (Minniti & Bygrave, 2001).

Similar to the entrepreneur, entrepreneurship has many definitions as well. However, we have chosen Davidsson’s definition “Entrepreneurship is the creation of new economic activity” (Davidsson, 2004, p 8). This definition suits our purpose well since creation and development of-ten go hand in hand, and is a significant trademark for the entrepreneur.

2.3 Mentoring

The word mentor can be traced back to Homers myth of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca who left his son in the care of a mentor, who guided and taught the young boy for the ten years his father was away fighting the Trojans. A mentor therefore has always been considered someone who draws upon a deep knowledge base to teach and guide a less experienced adept (Swap et al, 2001).

Mentoring is a very broad term which is used to describe a relationship between two parties, where one of these passes on knowledge about a specific subject to the other party (Clutterbuck, 2004). According to Deakins et al (1997), mentoring involves principals drawn from experiential and cyclical approaches to learning. The entrepreneur learns from experience, but the mentor facilitates that learning. It is practically impossible to find a widely accepted definition of mentoring, rather the concept can be used in many different contexts and thus Gibb (1994) argues that trying to clearly define mentoring is derisory. As we find it, after revising several definitions of mentoring, the mentor seems to have two separate effects on his or her adept. One being as Deakin’s et al. (1997) definition describes, to help the entrepreneur/adept learn revolves around giving meaning to experiences. The other function is illustrated in the definition of Clutterbuck (1991), where the mentor simply transfers his or her own knowledge to the adept.

We expect to encounter both versions of the mentor/ adept relationship and therefore rule out none of the definitions above. However, based on the theme of this thesis we consider Brown’s (1990) definition to be the most suitable and inclusive;

“The process in which an experienced veteran helps to shape or guide a newcomer... true mentoring is an extended, confidential relationship between two people who have mutual personal growth and corporate success - as common goals” (Brown, 1990 p.18).

In this thesis we have chosen to focus on the type of mentoring relationship that takes place between a small or medium sized business owner, and a more experienced entrepreneur, providing that business owner with guidance and support on different levels, in different forms.
2.3.1 Formal and Informal Mentoring

There are generally two types of mentoring settings, formal and informal. Formal mentoring is defined as the process where a third party, normally a business support organization, matches mentors with adepts. Informal mentoring is the process of individuals making the selection on their own, even if a third party has encouraged the process (Bisk, 2002). In this thesis our initial focus will be on formal mentoring, since all of our respondents have started their mentor relationships via the business support organization Almi. However, as we have found out during pre-interviews with Almi, certain relationships have evolved from formal to informal. Bisk (2002) has conducted research concerning the two forms and concludes that informal mentoring generally is more beneficial and long lasting than formal. He also adds that it is not uncommon that formal mentorships evolve into informal, and that this usually occurs when the mentorship has been a successful formal mentorship (Bisk, 2002).

2.4 The Role of Mentoring

Having defined the mentor, it is also important to examine what the role of the mentor is in his or her relationship with the adept. It is important to stress that we stay open in this definition, and do not consider one role of mentoring as more correct than any other. Given this, a more suitable title to this section may be pluralistic (the roles of mentoring).

Sullivan (2000) divides the role of the mentor into two categories. The first one, career functions, refers to functions that assist the entrepreneur in enhancing skills and knowledge within politics and social fields required when operating an organization or a firm. The second category, psychological functions, are those functions that improve the entrepreneur's ability to increase his or her competences, identity as an entrepreneur, and general effectiveness in the entrepreneur's professional role (Sullivan, 2000). In the following sections many different roles of the mentor will be presented and it is important to bear in mind that mentors and adepts are human beings, hence every mentorship will have differences in all aspects.

2.4.1 Directive and Non Directive Mentoring

The following model outlines characteristics of a mentorship and will be applied on our responding entrepreneurs in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their relationship with their respective mentor.

The core model of mentoring is derived from two key relationship variables, the first one being who's in charge? If the mentor claims responsibility for the relationship, by deciding the content, timing, and direction of the discussions, by pointing the adept towards specific career goals or by simply giving strong advice and suggestion, then the relationship is directive. On the contrary, if the mentor encourages the adept to set the agenda, initiate the meetings, encourages the adept to draw own conclusions, and generally stimulates self reliance, then the mentorship is non-directive (Clutterbuck, 2004). In the mentoring map below the two types are displayed.
The second dimension of mentoring is related to the individual adept’s needs. This dimension is all about learning; either the adept is being challenged and stretched, or about nurturing, meaning the input from the mentor consists mainly of encouragement and support. The most effective mentors have the ability to move across the dimensions, with respect to the needs of the adept at different times (Clutterbuck, 2004). Clutterbuck (2004) talks about four different learning styles related to the dimensions displayed below.

**Coaching**
In coaching, the mentor is in charge of the process, thus this is a directive means of assistance. The learning goals are typically set by the coach, or by a third party, and not by the adept. Some useful techniques for a coach to apply involve questioning the adept’s thoughts and perspectives on different matters, as well as providing real life examples of how to successfully handle certain situations, based on the mentors own experiences (Clutterbuck, 2004).

**Counseling**
When a mentor acts as a counselor he or she provides a non-directive means of assistance since the mentor mainly focuses on a more passive type of support. This involves acting as a sounding-board, assisting the adept in his or her analysis of situations, and sometimes only to listen and assure the adept of the mentor’s support. This method enhances the adept’s own ability to take responsibility for his or her development and experiences (Clutterbuck, 2004).

**Networking**
A mentor can help the adept develop by informing him or her about the value of a solid network, and also learn the adept to expand the network effectively. The mentor can also introduce the adept to one or several contacts, or groups of people, in order to widen his or her network experiences (Clutterbuck, 2004).
Guiding
The guiding mentor gives very direct and straightforward answers and advice to the adept, and the mentor using this means of assistance is often very experienced and possesses a lot of knowledge relevant to the adept’s business situation. The guiding mentor often constitutes a role model for the adept, and the advice given from the mentor is therefore likely to be followed to a very large extent. Guiding is a directive form of mentoring (Clutterbuck, 2004).

2.4.2 Knowledge Transfer from the Expert

One definition of knowledge is “information that is relevant, actionable and at least partially based on experience” (Swap et al. 2001, p.97), a definition that goes well with our previous definitions. What Swap and his colleagues (2001) did in one of their studies was connecting mentoring to the above definition. According to them, knowledge takes years to develop and the process can not generally be accelerated. “Experts”, who have acquired this type of knowledge can then pass it on by sharing their findings with an adept. What is so exceptional with the expert’s knowledge is that by calling on their previous experiences, they can discover patterns quicker and more efficient than the inexperienced. This in turn enables the expert to selectively choose between the information retrieved and form a solid response. The expert normally knows when a certain rule applies, and when an unusual pattern of circumstances requires an exception. It has been shown that this rule of thumb can relatively easy be taught to inexperienced entrepreneurs, however, the ability to know when to disregard the rule and broaden the range of activities is not as easily transferred (Swap et al. 2001). According to Swap et al. (2001) there are different ways that this accumulated knowledge can be transferred from the mentor to the entrepreneur, and below are some implications from research on the field.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) suggest two different processes where tacit knowledge can be created and transferred. The first method, called internalization, includes turning explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge and is very similar to “learning by doing”. The second version is called “socialization”, defined as “a process of sharing experiences and thereby creating tacit knowledge such as shared mental models and technical skills” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995 p.62). Both of these processes normally occur under relatively informal circumstances. In the entrepreneurial context, these processes take place when an experienced entrepreneur help an less experienced entrepreneur in interpreting events, understanding technology and business processes, and identifying values and norms in everyday business life (Swap et al, 2001).

2.4.3 What the Mentor Teaches

Most research on what mentors actually teach their adepts is found within organizational learning, but is however applicable to a certain extent on entrepreneurship research. The research concerning mentoring within organizations is focused on core competencies or dynamic capabilities, and focuses on critical management skills and managerial systems. This suggests that the mentor teaches relatively straightforward knowledge to the newcomer, who in turn independently seeks information through mentoring rather than using other methods. Questions are often of the following type; how can I solve this problem in my everyday job? In certain industries it is also very common with knowledge sharing in explicit technical questions. Other fields of knowledge transfer concerns company or industry norms and values, and the latter is often easily transferred from the mentor to the adept. Values have been proven very important when matching adepts with mentors and
the importance of sharing values has been claimed one of the most crucial parts when initiating and nurturing mentorships (Swap et al. 2001).

2.4.4 **Mechanisms in Learning via Mentoring**

A beginner cannot be expected to become an expert immediately, and according to Swap et al. (2001) the time it takes to become an expert is often ten years or more. If one thinks about knowledge and expertise within an occupation, the natural process would be that a person is first an apprentice, then a journeyman, and then finally become a master in the occupation at hand. This long time period infers that the gap between the mentor and his or her adept is often very long, both with respect to knowledge as well as years in business and perhaps even age. This could result in both the mentor becoming inpatient in guiding the adept, or the adept might feel that someone with more similar level knowledge could do more for him or her than the more experienced mentor. There are four ways to explain the learning that goes on between a mentor and his adept, and why a too wide knowledge gap sometimes makes the mentorship harder (Swap et al. 2001).

**Preparedness for learning**

Having no previous experiences, and lacking the experience foundations, a adept might have no method in assimilating and taking in what the mentor instructs and teaches. In order for information to become knowledge, the learning person must possess some shared contextual and meaning with his mentor. If the new information lies outside the adepts “zone” of coping with the new information, the mentorship will be of little use. However, as experiences accrue, an effect of the mentorship could be, even though the initial learning experience is not as powerful, an increase in the adept’s ability to take on instructions and advice, and in doing so widen his or her “zone” (Swap et al. 2001).

**The importance of active learning**

Both theorists and practitioners are convinced that active learning, exposure to different patterns and situations is one of the most important aspects in developing knowledge and expertise (Swap et al. 2001, Cope, 2003). This reasoning is in line with the experiential learning approach developed by Kolb (2004), where entrepreneurs learn solely through experience. When a person actively participates in learning events, they are more likely to remember it. Active learning in the literature is claimed to increase the adept’s ability to take responsibility, claim leadership, and most importantly preparing the adept for making his or her own discoveries (Swap et al. 2001).

**Metacognition and Self-monitoring**

The term metacognition means self-aware thinking about one’s own mental processes. This includes monitoring one’s own problems, in order to understand them and recognise what additional information is necessary in order to reach full understanding. Experts, are involved in mentoring to self monitor their own understanding, and hence they are familiar with the process. This further enables the mentor to teach by asking questions, to elicit the adept’s comprehension of a problem and then reflect back to the adept in ways that encourage even deeper exploration of certain issues. This is referred to as learning by thinking, as a contrast to the learning by doing way of acquiring new knowledge. Entrepreneurs involved in this type of learning state that this type of self reflecting is very efficient, and that thinking about the answers that he or she was forced to give to the questions posed by the mentor made them really consider important issues, previously never considered. By
pushing the adept to think deeply about his or her strategies, mission, and way of describing their firm, the entrepreneurs have learned a lot (Swap et al. 2001).

Learning by observing

People learn by only observing other people, especially observing people who are trusted and powerful. Given this, when an entrepreneur is exposed to the behaviour of an experienced mentor, who he or she probably looks up to, the potential learning outcome is high. In addition to acting as a role model, by providing feedback the mentor can also draw on his or her own knowledge and relate it to the situation of the adept (Swap et al, 2001).

2.5 Other Types of Business Support

There are several alternatives to mentoring when it comes to supporting entrepreneurs, no matter what phase a firm might be in. These are important to cover in this thesis since they constitute the alternative to mentoring as a business support function. The most common support that an entrepreneur receives is the type of support that comes from prescribed theoretical solutions to problems (Sullivan, 2000). There are many types of class room courses in how to succeed as an entrepreneur, and this method is very common. For example, if an entrepreneur is about to enter a new phase, perhaps expanding into a new country, he or she is not unlikely to take a theoretical course in expansion (Deakins et al. 1997).

When it comes to start-up support a common method is to use incubators, an environment that encourages innovation and entrepreneurial thinking, with the objective to launch successful self sufficient firms.

2.6 Phases of the Entrepreneurial Development Process

In order to evaluate the impact a mentor has on the development progress of an entrepreneur, it is important to investigate what different needs the entrepreneur has during different points of time in the life-cycle (Sullivan, 2000). Sullivan (2000) has already conducted research on this topic briefly, still, as mentioned in the introduction he calls for further empirical investigation on the subject. We have chosen to incorporate a model developed by Sullivan (2000) which in turn has its roots in the life-cycle model that Churchill (1983) developed decades ago. This model has then been re-structured to fit our purpose, as well as to make it more understandable for the entrepreneurs who we interview. As Sullivan (2000) points out, this model is not definite and individual firms might deter from the stages, however it is a base to work from as we progress. As Sullivan (2000) and Clutterbuck (2004) stresses, there is a need to understand what type of support is needed at certain phases of the life-cycle, referred to as the nature and timing of support. Below is our derived life-cycle model, with examples clarifying the different phases by using the fictive business owner Anna as an example.

The Life-cycle Model

Phase 1- Conception

The Entrepreneur develops his or her good/service to a finished product, and also attains a sufficient customer base. The entrepreneur has finished all preparations for being able to deliver the finished product to the intended market.
Phase 2 - Survival
Sales of the firm’s goods/services reach a break-even point. The company generates enough financial profit to be able to put resources on development and expansion, and is also able to cover expenses without taking loans, and still survive.

Phase 3 - Stability
The company manages to keep its existing customers and its position in the market place. The company’s survival is not entirely dependent on external environmental factors that might occur (such as the current financial crisis). There are not any substantial financial problems in the organization.

Phase 4 - Growth Orientation
The company develops its resources and its sales in order to adjust for expansion. This includes all internal systems as well as management strategies. If the cash flow in this phase exceeds growth, the company might drop back to earlier phases, or go bankrupt.

Phase 5 - Rapid Growth
The company maintains a steady cash flow and has full control over its costs. The customer base is expanding and the company is increasing its market shares significantly. Professional managers can be hired in order to replace the original entrepreneur as the manager of the company.

Phase 6 - Resource Maturity
All financial profit from the expansionary processes is fully controlled, and all inefficient parts of the organization are eliminated. The company’s different departments are professionalized, and the company has well developed financial resources.

There are of course alternative models of the firm’s evolution, and the most commonly used is Greiner’s growth model. We have chosen to not use this model for some reasons; First of all, previous research within mentoring in entrepreneurship uses the Churchill/Sullivan model and not the Greiner model. The Greiner model is also very focused on management in the context of larger organizations. Moreover Greiner’s model assumes that in order to move from one phase to another, a “crisis” needs to happen which forces an organization to act on this crisis (Mindtools, 2008). We are not in particular interested in examining these types of crisis and therefore we will not use Greiner’s model.

2.7 Start-up Support
One type of support that has been thoroughly investigated is the support that is delivered during the start-up phase of running a firm. This is a type of support that can take many forms. In one of their studies, Deakins et al. (1997) qualitatively investigated the effects of business support on start-up firms and concluded that using mentoring support can have an impact on the firms future formation, survival and growth.

The use of business start-up support has been criticised in academic literature for many years. A reason for this is that the fact of the matter is that many firms never grow enough to generate new jobs and growth to the society, and even more important, many firms simply do not survive (Deakins et al, 1997). In line with these findings Storey (1993) argues that support agencies should focus on supporting firms with a record of growth, with two
or perhaps three years of business behind them. Given this he furthermore argues that
start-up support should be abandoned and that focus should be moved towards picking
winners and support them in their growth processes. Deakins et al. (1997) acknowledge
these findings, however they still consider mentoring being an efficient method in business
support, and theoretically it should work even during this early phase. Conclusions from
their empirical study were first and foremost that the impact of the mentor was more valu-
able than other types of business support during the early phases. In detail, they found that
when it came to more specific types of questions, such as financial or accounting questions,
less respondents found mentoring effective and instead turned to other sources for sup-
port, such as the banks and accounting firms. In more general advice they found that the
role of the mentor was much more appreciated and useful. The long term advice, often
managerial related, was much appreciated and enabled the adept to progress as an entre-
preneur (Deakins et al. 1997).

2.7.1 Beyond Start-up-The Following Phases

Going forward from the start-up support discussion, we approach a subject that has not
been as discussed and researched as the former. In his article “Entrepreneurial learning and
mentoring”, Sullivan (2000) conducts research with newly started entrepreneurs, and inves-
tigates what type of support they believe they will need from the start and later in their en-
trepreneurial career. Sullivan (2000) further presses for more research on the effect of men-
tors in the later stages of running a firm, and this brings us to the core of our research.

Since we have not been able to find any research on the specific needs when it comes to
mentoring in the phases beyond start-up and growth, we have to incorporate other findings
in our research. A way to do this is by looking at what types of support the entrepreneur’s
value highest, and then comparing that to the phases. We have however found theory con-
cerning mentoring mature entrepreneurs, but not in the context of phases in a life-cycle.

A common finding among researchers on mentoring in the framework of entrepreneurship
is that the most important support that the mentor supplies is the “general business” type
of support (Deakins, 1997). This as opposed to “specific business” (Bisk, 2002). Specific
business in this case refers to questions were the entrepreneur rather consult an expert in a
field, such as an accountant, banker or marketer. Deakins et al (1997) argue in line with
Bisk (2002) and have found that the advice perceived as most important is the more gen-
eral advice, and not advice on specific subjects such as financing. This is evident when
looking at Sullivan’s (2000) conclusion, that the mentor should help the entrepreneur to
learn, rather than provide prescribed solutions. It is the ability to learn from occurrences in
a firm that is the most important source of learning for entrepreneurs, and his research
concludes that support in the learning and reflecting process is beneficial (Sullivan, 2000).

The support delivered does not necessarily have to be in the form of a mentor, but the per-
son or method should facilitate reflection. The most interesting part of this research is that
the entrepreneurs have realized the need for this type of intervention as their firms have
grown and evolved. During the early phases of running the firm they have mostly needed
the crucial “tools” necessary to cope with change, and develop their ability to learn from
mistakes in the early phases of entrepreneurship (Sullivan, 2000).

2.7.2 Start-up Entrepreneur Needs vs. Mature Entrepreneur Needs

Since we are interested in the impact that a mentor can have on an entrepreneur during dif-
ferent phases of development, we have searched for literature concerning this issue. How-
ever, as mentioned in the introduction we have not found any specific empirical findings
concerning the needs during these different phases. What we have found is more general research, where the differentiation is not between phases, rather between start-ups and more mature entrepreneurs. Megginson et al. (2006) found that start-up entrepreneurs considered mentoring as the most useful source of help. Further they found that the topics that were most important fell exclusively into the career functions (financial planning, marketing, regulation etc). Psychological benefits, such as reassurance and improved confidence and self esteem was considered less important. Notably however, they found that a shift occurred after the entrepreneurs had been in business for some time, towards more need for reassurance and confidence. According to Megginson et al. (2006) this makes sense, since newly started entrepreneurs are in need of a broad spectrum of factual and specific information. Similar to the needs of the start-up entrepreneurs, were the needs of the entrepreneurs who had been in business several years, as they often requested support from the mentor when specific questions arose, when they considered employing someone, when they needed to grow, basically to find out if they were on the right track or not. To conclude there seems to be a contrast between the needs depending on phase of the entrepreneurial development, and as factual questions are answered, the support requested becomes more along the lines of finding out if their experiences were normal or not (Megginson et al. 2006).

2.7.3 Managing Growth

Almost synonymous with entrepreneurial development is firm growth, and as some of the phases of the life-cycle specifically includes growth, we need a thorough understanding of the concept. According to Covin and Slevin (1998), when growth occurs, management complexity increases both within a firm and in its external environment. In order to keep growing, these complex problems need to be dealt with. In other words, growth needs to be managed (Covin & Slevin, 1998). Both the organization and the entrepreneur are subject to change as the firm develops. The organization needs to adapt to this change, consequently the entrepreneur needs to develop stronger management skills and change management style, in order to cope with the change that occurs during different phases of entrepreneurial development (Stanworth & Curran, 1976). Growth comes with many problems and inconveniences, and the main areas that need to be dealt with in order to enable growth are reputation of the firm, attracting qualified people, attracting financial resources as well as handling the relationship with customers and their stakeholders (Barringer & Greening, 1998).

2.7.4 Mentor/Client Matching

The nature and timing of support to entrepreneurs and the adaption to the life-cycle model is closely related to the matching of entrepreneurs and mentors. As an entrepreneur and his or her firm develops, their need for support changes, and thus could also the adept’s relationship with his mentor (Clutterbuck, 2004). This argument has been developed in line with the life-cycle approach, where the needs change over time and where the mentor might have to be replaced with a more suitable mentor as time passes (Clutterbuck, 2004). Sullivan (2000) argues that this is clearly the case; however he stresses that the relationship between the mentor and the adept, and the chemistry between them, is so important that pre-selecting mentors for different phases could be very problematic. This argument is not only supported with the chemistry argument, but also from a learning perspective.

Researcher Mumford (1995) suggests there are four different learning styles; the activist, reflector, theorist and pragmatist. These learning styles are connected to the learning life-cycle (having an experience, reflecting on the experience, concluding from the experience...
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and finally planning the next steps). He further argues that since mentors and adepts often have different learning styles this could be an issue, or they could beneficially complement each other. Many researchers consider entrepreneurs learning style to be activist, and that this clashes with the idea of a mentor program, where the mentor should facilitate reflection and guide the learner through processes. Mumford (1995) found that activist mentors often leap in with strong statements about their own experiences and offer solutions. Naturally, this clash with the idea of having experienced entrepreneurs mentoring new entrepreneurs, since the focus most likely would be on “directing” the entrepreneur rather than guiding. This would result in that the new firm becomes a replica of the old firm, developed by the mentor (Mumford, 1995). Given this, the question whether or not to match is difficult, and in our research it will be interesting to see if having a mentor who has gone through the different phases in a similar business is perceived as positive or negative.

### 2.7.5 Social Learning through Relationships

In a study made by Rae and Carswell (2000) an alternative view of mentoring is presented. They suggest that mentoring does not only have to take the form of a formal or informal mentorship program, it could also be through family members, other business owners, other entrepreneurs, consultants, non executive directors and academic teachers. All of these were referred to as having a large impact in how the entrepreneurial process can turn out. These influencers had the same characteristics as the traditional mentor, however always in a more informal setting. The essence of this phenomenon is that entrepreneurs learn from experience and in turn transfer this experience into their own theory. They then are able to transfer this theory to other entrepreneurs and consequently the knowledge base of that entrepreneur expands. Important to note is that many of these “indirect” mentors are available for a longer time than a regular mentor, and normally easier to reach for an intervention (Rae & Carswell, 2000).

### 2.8 Implications Drawn from the Frame of Reference

Having revised the literature available we have come to draw some general conclusions. Mentoring as a concept is clearly perceived as a positive business support method, and the nature of the concept, the fact that someone devotes exclusive time to help develop another person, is built upon voluntarism and is generally not criticised from the perspective of the adepts. Nonetheless it is still important to find ways to make the most possible out of the mentor/adept relationship, and conclude where improvements need to be made. As presented in the frame of reference there are many dimensions to consider within mentoring, and especially so when mentoring entrepreneurs. As we perceive the situation, there are no “best practises” available for mentoring entrepreneurs, however there are broad implications drawn concerning what constitutes a successful mentorship and what type of mentorship that is most efficient.

Following this, the next dimension is the timing of support. Entrepreneurs experiencing different phases are in need of different types of support. In order to come to conclusions on how a mentor can help an entrepreneur develop, it is of importance to merge these two dimensions, in essence, how the support should be formatted and when is this support most beneficial. Naturally this awakens the question; what type of support is most beneficial at a given point of development and this also needs to be addressed. In order to explore these circumstances we have created two research questions that address these matters.
2.8.1 Research Questions

Design of all research demands a conceptual organization, ideas to express needed understanding, conceptual bridges from what is already known, structures to guide data gathering and outlines for presenting interpretations to others (Stake, 1999). Research questions can guide a researcher in this and therefore we have created two questions which in turn enable us to draw implications regarding our purpose.

- What type of mentor support/other business support is most efficient?
- When in the business life-cycle is the support of a mentor most efficient?
3 Method

When conducting any type of research it is important that the researchers declare how they look at the problem at hand and research in general, since this will influence their choice of method. In this section we will present our view of the problem and the environment in which we are researching, as well as the approach we consider most appropriate to apply in order to reach our goals.

3.1 Scientific Approach

The main objective with our research in this thesis was to explore how entrepreneur’s development throughout and during different phases was affected by active participation in a mentor program. We also wished to contribute to future research within the fields of entrepreneurship and mentoring by presenting additional findings which needs further elaborate, in-depth research. Our primary data in this thesis was constituted by qualitative interviews. This was motivated by the fact that an exploratory case study approach is well suited in order to reach final conclusions when examining a mentoring relationship, since this relationship is constituted by events beyond the authors’ control (Yin, 2003). Within the topic we have chosen to base our thesis on there was existing data in relatively similar areas of research; however our primary purpose had not been examined earlier. Thus, since there was little relevant research attainable, we had to conduct qualitative empirical research in order to attain the necessary data. When conducting an exploratory study it is important to always include a thorough explanation of the purpose and the content of the exploration, as well as the measurement criteria as to whether or not the research can be seen as a success (Yin, 2003).

There are generally three ways to connect theory to empirical findings; induction, deduction and finally abduction which is a combination of the two previous. Abduction implies that the researcher uses existing theories to create new theories that explain the findings from the current research (Patel and Davidson, 2003). According to Alvesson & Sköldberg (1994) this approach is a combination of induction and deduction since it considers both empirical findings and theoretical perspectives. We considered abduction as the most appropriate research approach for our study since our interviews are based on previous empirical findings as well as existing theories, hence enabling us to build on existing theory while simultaneously perhaps explore new theories. To conclude, we decided on abduction and the choice of this approach will be further explained and motivated in the following sections of this chapter.

3.2 Data Collection

The aim with the purpose of this thesis was to examine real life relationships between entrepreneurs and mentors. Since we focused on the mentored entrepreneurs’ perspective of the relationship, we needed to conduct personal interviews with relevant subjects within this sample base. This leads to the benefit of attaining rich data, possible for in-depth analysis (Hancock, 1998). We wanted a sample base large enough to constitute a valid ground for drawing general conclusions, but at the same time we did not want too many cases since working with more than ten can easily become overwhelming and hard to cope with (Eisenhardt, 1989). More importantly, it is less the number of cases that is important, rather the quality of the sampling decisions on which the generalization depends (Flick, 2006). We will address the issue of generalizability further in a later section. After consulting our tutor, Ethel Brundin about this issue we concluded that around ten interviews would be an appropriate number. During the progress of writing our thesis and conducting the first inter-
views we noticed that even though it was possible to obtain more than ten interview subjects, due to saturation this was never an option.

Since we chose to base our research on a sample base of ten entrepreneurs involved in mentor programs, there were a rather limited number of possible subjects available. In order to establish contact with these entrepreneurs we chose to go via a mentor program in order to reach them. The mentor program we chose to cooperate with was Almi, which operates one of Sweden’s largest mentor programs for entrepreneurs. Thanks to their help we were able to come in contact with our respondents without having to perform extensive screening processes in order to find suitable interview subjects. Due to Almi’s compliance, the process of finding suitable interview subjects was undertaken by them, saving us a lot of valuable time and resources. The benefit of being able to avoid an extensive screening process at this stage of the thesis is valuable, since such a process can often become overwhelming (Yin, 2003). In order to receive entrepreneurs with different backgrounds and experiencing different development processes, we requested that Almi supplied us with a variety of entrepreneurs, within different businesses, as well as differing between years in business and development. We had no specific demands regarding turnover figures or number of employees since this was not of specific interest for the study. Furthermore, in order for the adepts to be relevant to our study; the mentorship relationship had to have been active within the last 12 months, in order for the memories from this experience to be relatively fresh in mind. We based this time frame on the assumption that interviewing adepts who have ended their mentoring relationships more than a year ago, will simply not be able to remember the experience as detailed. We also requested that the entrepreneurs operated in the area of Småland, due to accessibility purposes.

3.2.1 Designing the Interview

Developing the interview as a research method includes the challenge to renew, broaden and enrich knowledge and theory in the social sciences. Many problems when conducting research do not stem from poorly developed interview techniques; rather they are consequences of unclarified theoretical assumptions (Kvale, 1996). In order to avoid this problem we developed our questions with our theoretical framework in mind. Each question was connected to a theory or a previous empirical finding in order to make sure to be able to build on and develop these theories and findings. Qualitative research is oftne practical in nature and in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice, assumptions regarding theory must be clarified (Flick, 2006 ).

According to Hancock (1998) a good method for qualitative information gathering is to conduct focused, personal interviews, since this method allows the interviewer to discuss the current topic investigated with the interviewees, and enhance his or her understanding of it. This type of interview can be referred to as a type of unstructured interview, in which there are no clearly specified plans or expectations of the outcome of it (Hancock, 1998). Other alternative methods applicable in qualitative information gathering are, according to Hancock (1998) to use focus groups or observations. Focus groups were however not relevant to our research since a focus group consists of several subjects interviewed together at once. This would be inefficient since we aimed at investigating each entrepreneur as a single case, and interviewing several people at a time would make it difficult to focus on each one in-depth. Since the entrepreneurs are in different phases of development, have different types of mentorship relationships and so on, it would be harder to tap into differences, since the discussion would have to be more general in such a setting. It would also make it more difficult to establish a personal relationship with each entrepreneur, something we aimed to do. As of observation as a method, this was not relevant to our data collection ei-
ther, since these are primarily used when the researcher wants to examine and study how a subject actually behaves in practice (Yin, 2003), something that will not help answer the research questions and purpose of this thesis.

We had previous experience from similar type of interviews with entrepreneurs within the field of entrepreneurship, and were therefore familiar with methods applicable when designing qualitative interviews. First of all we used Yin’s (2003) methods of effectively conducting and constructing qualitative interviews, which states that the interviews should be handled as guided conversations, rather than a structured query. This means that the interviewers have to focus on conducting the interviews in accordance with the self-constructed interview model created, as well as making sure to ask questions that leads to the opportunity of open conversation (Yin, 2003). In accordance to this we used open-ended questions in our interview, which provides the interviewer with the opportunity to define specific questions while also opening up the possibility for a detailed topic discussion (Hancock, 1998). We also made sure to post questions both about the facts of the matter as well as addressing the interviewees’ responses. The reason for this was to try and get the entrepreneurs’ own personal insights and reflections about the topic at large, something often occurring when using these types of interview questions (Yin, 2003). The interview templates with the questions derived from theory are displayed in appendix 1. According to Stake (1999) the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry is that it emphasises interpretation. Case researchers are interpreters in the field, observing cases objectively while simultaneously examining its meaning and redirecting observations to refine and substantiate those meanings. Initial research questions may be modified mid study in this type of research (Stake, 1999). We decided to conduct our interviews during face-to-face personal meetings. Such a relationship enhances the possibilities of getting the interviewee to open up, and not hold any information back, something which is crucial in qualitative interviews (Hancock, 1998). We considered a phone interview to be less personal, and therefore less effective when trying to create a personal relationship to the interview subject. Having done similar types of interviews previously, our ability to interpret was improved. Since some of the answers we seeked were to be compared with definitions, and especially the life-cycle model, it was important for us to interpret where on the life-cycle the entrepreneurs were, according to themselves and to us interpreting with the underlying theory in mind.

3.2.2 The Interview

We were given samples via e-mail from Almi, who provided us with all necessary contact details for each of the entrepreneurs. Since Almi had to perform quite an extensive screening process in order to find relevant subjects for our research, we did not attain all samples at once, but were instead presented with a total of 14 samples spread out on four different e-mails over the time period of two months. In the first round we were provided five samples, secondly we received contact details for an additional four entrepreneurs, and in the last two e-mails we were given one, respectively four samples. After choosing ten appropriate samples based on our criteria’s we contacted these via telephone, and made a brief presentation about ourselves and our research. All of the entrepreneurs agreed to meet up for a qualitative interview, and we chose to decide on the details through e-mail conversations, in order for the entrepreneurs to be able to take time to check their schedules and make necessary arrangements for a meeting, as well as understanding the research subject, based on relevant information about our research included in the e-mails. We always left the choice of time and location for the meetings up to the entrepreneurs, and informed them about the time frame for the interviews, with an hour being the maximum length.
3.2.3 Reliability and Quality of the Interview

Since this thesis is to such a large extent based on interviews we will cover the reliability of the interview in this separate section. The general reliability of the thesis is addressed later in this chapter.

The quality of the original interview is decisive for the quality of the later analysis, verification, and reporting of the interviews. According to Kvale (1996), there are six quality criteria for an interview:

- The extent of spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee.
- The shorter questions and the longer answers the better.
- Degree of following up and clarifying the meaning of the relevant aspects of the answers.
- The ideal interview is to a large extent interpreted throughout the interview.
- The interviewer attempts to verify his or her interpretation of the subject’s answers during the interview.
- The interview is “self communicating”, a story contained in itself with no need for descriptions and explanations.

Throughout the interviews we followed these six steps. Since the interviewees in our case were active participants in a mentor program, and through the nature of their communication with their mentor, where reflection and ventilation was often used, the answers we received were indeed rich and relevant. By having one of the interviewers handling the questions and conversation, while the other one merely observed and interpreted, we were able to conduct on site interpretations. Following discussions on a subject, the conservator asked the interpreter if there was any need for clarification or verification, enabling both interviewers to get confirmation. Finally, our interviews were stories in itself, illustrating a complex relationship in an understandable way.

The most frequently asked question about studies based on interviews is concerned with the effect of leading questions. It is important to be aware of this. However, leading questions can also be used deliberately to obtain information the researchers suspect is being withheld (Kvale, 1996). Since we had been supplied the respondents by a person from Almi, we wanted to make sure that they did not only send us entrepreneurs with a spoken positivism of mentoring as a concept. Having revised literature on our subject, we concluded that the general opinion about mentoring entrepreneurs is very positive. Since we wanted to explore whether or not there were any negative aspects, we posed leading questions such as; could you tell me about the negative aspects of the mentor and the mentorship? This way, even though the respondent might not have said anything negative about his or her mentor, we were able to initiate the discussion and receive more trustworthy answers. This type of reasoning was undertaken in every interview, discussing different aspects of the relationship.

3.2.4 Using Theory in Qualitative Research

Some researchers have the opinion that qualitative research does not need to start from reviewing the existing literature. The reason for this is because qualitative research is concerned with the idea of unveiling new fields of study and exploring areas that are new to the world of science and research. However, it is quite naive to think that there are still new fields to explore, where no research has been conducted before. Almost everything that
one wishes to research has probably been researched in at least a connecting field (Flick, 2006). In order to get the most complete overview of the state of the theoretical literature in our specific field, we have followed Flick's (2006) four types of literature that need to be revised; literature about the topic of our study, empirical literature about earlier research in the field of our study as well as related fields, methodological literature about how to best do our research as well as theoretical literature to contextualize, compare, and generalize our findings.

In this thesis we are exploring a field which has not been specifically studied, however, there has been lots of related studies conducted. As can be found in the theoretical framework, we have revised both previous theories on the topics of interest, mentoring, entrepreneurial development, business support functions and so on, as well as previous empirical literature, mostly the similar type of case study reports as this thesis. As we became familiarized with the previous research, we also came to the conclusion that the methodology to use when exploring the field of interest was to conduct qualitative research, often case based, with interviews as the main method. All of these findings and conclusions were then used to compare, contextualize and generalize our findings to.

Our position towards the theory revised is similar to what Silverman (2000) refers to as simplistic inductivism. This method involves three main strategies; Using sensitivities, using earlier findings or theories and introducing a third variable. Using sensitivities means treating the knowledge one already possesses as a resource, thinking about how it can sensitize one to various researchable issues (Silverman, 2000). This basically means looking at topics from different perspectives. In our case we acknowledged from previous research that mentors could have a positive effect on entrepreneur's development, hence we looked at the two concepts mentoring and entrepreneurship in a new perspective, as business support at different points of time and development. Using earlier findings or theories can be used to find their limits by postulating new conditions (Silverman, 2000). In our case, we found theories on business support, and one of these being mentoring, and involved how mentors can help entrepreneurs to reflect and learn. From this we wanted to find out if this was affected depending on certain variables, different development phases being the most important. Finally, introducing a third variable involves adding a focus to your area of interest (Silverman, 2000). In our case the focus was on finding differences in the mentorship depending on which of the six phases of development the entrepreneur in question is currently in as well as what type of mentor support that was most appreciated.

3.2.5 Transcribing the Interviews

Before deciding on a suitable method for analysis, the raw data collected needs to be managed in an appropriate manner. We therefore chose to transcribe all of our interviews, since this method is a guarantee that all relevant data is included when analyzing, as well as a good insurance that biased notes and interpretations are not occurring in the research. Even though the method is resource consuming, it has proven to be very helpful to the research (Hancock, 1998). We made sure to record all of our interviews with permission from the interview subjects, since this method provides an accurate rendition of the interview according to Yin (2003).

3.3 Method for Analysis

In our previous research involving qualitative interviews as the basis for analysis, we revised several different methods for analyzing our data, and were able to assert two specifically successful analytical methods for this type of empirical findings; Eisenhardt's (1989) with-
in-case analysis/ cross case comparison, and Hancock's (1998) content analysis. These two constituted the fundamental base for our method for analysis.

The first method we applied was content analysis by Hancock (1998) in which we divided the analytical part in two different levels. The first one, the basic level, consists of data constituted by the actual verbal statements during the interviews, with no interpretation applied onto the information. The second, higher-level, deals with the interpretation of the responses received, from the author's own analytical perspective. The content analysis is a quite advanced, ten step process, with the primary aim to enable identification of not yet observed data from the transcript. The entire process is divided into three parts; categorization, classification, and codification of data (Hancock, 1998). The first step in this method was to determine the different categories and dimensions of our collected data. In order to do so we applied all ten steps of Hancock’s content analysis (See appendix 2). This large data base was quite difficult to interpret and we had to put an extensive effort into doing so, but as Hancock (1998) argues, a thorough content analysis assures the researcher that the groups, themes, and categories represent and reflect the empirical data in an honest manner.

Hancock’s (1998) content analysis was also combined with Eisenhardt’s (1989) within-case/ “cross-case comparison”. This was due to the fact that we in our previous research experiences from dealing with qualitative interviews, had been able to establish that these methods complement each other well when analyzing these types of empirical findngs, with the aim to observe and take advantage of different types of data collection opportunities. Eisenhardt’s (1989) “within-case analysis” and “cross-case comparison” methods constitutes two parts of a large extensive analytical method by Eisenhardt (1989) called the “process of building theory from case study research”, and is considered suitable when exploring a field that is currently in its early research stages (Eisenhardt, 1989). Since our specific approach within the fields of entrepreneurship and mentoring is relatively unexplored, this method was appropriate. The “within-case analysis” is a technique in which the researcher studies each case as a single unit of data, enabling him or her to find general patterns between these cases. In the “cross-case comparison” the researcher selects categories/groups of data and actively searches for similarities and differences within these categories or groups. This method actively puts effort towards evasion of reaching premature, and often false, conclusions. This is due to the fact that this model eliminates biased information which can sometimes lead to these types of invalid results. According to Eisenhardt (1989) these positive effects are due to the fact that when the researcher uses a “within-case analysis”, he or she is forced to look beyond the first impressions, and uncover hidden patterns and themes.

Eisenhardt (1989) further stresses the significant importance of having detailed explanations of the research questions when building theory from case study research, as in this case. She also states that it is essential for these questions to be tentative, and have the ability to be altered during the research. We were aware of these facts before establishing our research questions, based on knowledge from our previous thesis, and had therefore beforehand decided to develop them according to this method in order to let the questions provide us with guidance in our effort to apply the theoretical framework onto the qualitative data collected.

In Hancock’s (1998) model, the methods we chose to implement by Eisenhardt (1989) were already undertaken to some extent within the ten step process, however these steps are more deeply elaborated by Eisenhardt, and therefore usage of the “within-case analysis”
and “cross-case comparison” provides a basis for more extensive analysis. Therefore after successfully implementing the content analysis, the next step in our analysis was to apply a “within-case analysis”, in which we investigated each specific case in-depth as a single unit of data. After doing so we were able to establish certain relevant attributes and facts for each case, which then enabled us to make “cross comparisons” between these cases and the findings from each one, with the aim to find certain patterns consisting of similarities and dissimilarities between them.

3.3.1 Generalizability

When conducting quantitative research, generalizability is a standard aim achieved by statistical sampling procedures. This type of reasoning is very unusual in qualitative research where the selected cases are often selected on a random basis, often because of the ease of access. This raises a question for qualitative researchers; how representative are our case studies? There are ways to be able to draw broad generalizations (Silverman, 2000). A way of doing this is by using purposive sampling and theoretical sampling. Purposive sampling occurs when choosing samples based on more than convenience or accessibility. Purposive sampling allows the researchers to choose cases because they illustrate some feature or process in which they are interested. This infers that the researchers think critically about the parameters of the population of interest, and base their choices on this. Theoretical sampling is similar to purposive sampling, and is meaningful theoretically, because it builds on certain characteristics or criteria that help develop and test theory and explanation. Theoretical sampling refers to selecting groups to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions, the theoretical position, and the explanation or account which the researchers are developing (Silverman, 2000). We incorporated a mixture of the two sampling methods. Our purpose and research questions concerned what impact a mentor can have during different points in time on the life-cycle of entrepreneurs and their firms. We purposely chose to interview entrepreneurs who were in different phases of development because they illustrated a specific feature that we were interested in. As Silverman (2000) states, the only difference between purposive and theoretical sampling is that theoretical sampling is when the “purpose” of purposive sampling is theoretically defined. In accordance with Silverman (2000), our sample is meaningful theoretically because it builds in certain criteria’s which help us develop and test our theoretical framework on. In our case, we are empirically building on existing theory on entrepreneurial mentoring, more specifically how a mentor can help an entrepreneur throughout and during different life-cycle phases. Our respondents, being in different phases, will illustrate the differences between the phases, and thus contribute to developing the existing theory.

3.4 Challenges of the Chosen Method and Research

One of the biggest challenges with this research was establishing an efficient means of getting in contact with ten entrepreneurs involved in mentor programs, willing to share their experiences and reflections on this matter. We decided this was the most highly prioritized issue to address in our research, since we feared it might be a task impossible for us to accomplish, and therefore made sure to solve this problem in the initial stage of our thesis. Since we knew of a highly respected mentor program with an office located close to our location, in Jönköping, we chose to contact them via phone and e-mail in order to present our research and try to receive their assistance in providing us with relevant samples. Jenny Olsson, an employee and mentor coordinator at Almi promised us to contact as many of their entrepreneur adepts as possible, and ask them if they would agree to be contacted by
us. She was positive she would be able to provide us with at least ten possible candidates for our research, and we therefore decided to move on with our thesis.

After receiving the candidates from Jenny, the next challenge was to persuade these entrepreneurs to take time out of their own schedule to meet with us. This showed to be an easy task, since they had already been presented with a short introduction to our research by Jenny, and agreed to be part of the research before being contacted by us.

When conducting a qualitative interview there are always some challenges that might occur, beyond the control of the interviewers:

- The interview subjects might give us a lot of “irrelevant” information when answering our questions, which might lead to difficulties when interpreting the answers due to over-flow of data.
- The interview subjects might feel offended and un-willing to answer questions.
- The interview subjects might not be able to answer all our questions.
- The interview subjects might not want to be recorded.
- The interview subjects might not want to give us honest or fulfilling answers.

Since the interview samples had already been presented with a brief introduction, as well as a more extensive description by us personally, they knew about the topic before the interview, and hence the possible challenge of the subjects being unwilling or unable to answer our questions was significantly minimized. Also, the fact that we put effort into creating a personal relationship and gaining the entrepreneurs trust further diminished the risk of the entrepreneurs not wanting to give honest answers to our questions. The issue of interview subjects not being able to answer posted questions, is an occurrence sometimes apparent due to lack of knowledge and understanding of the topic (Bruno et. al, 1989). We did however address this issue by presenting material beforehand, personally explaining our research, and also let the entrepreneurs’ ask questions about the research before starting the interviews. This way we made sure that the interview subjects were all well prepared and informed on the subject before conducting the interviews, and thus less prone to lack understanding of the topic.

3.4.1 Reliability

In conversation analytic research, recordings and transcripts checking reliability are crucial, and guarantees public access to the raw empirical material (Silverman, 2000). According to Saunders et al. (2007) reliability refers to the extent ones data collection methods will yield consisting findings, and he suggests posing the following three questions in order to address this issue; will the measures yield the same results on other occasions? Will similar observations be yielded by other researchers? Is there transparency in how sense was made from the raw data? We believe that the measures would yield the same result on other occasions than now. Since we used such an personal approach when dealing with the respondents, we were able to inform them of the importance of always being objective in their answers, as well as saying everything that was on their mind. We do not know whether or not the crisis in which we are currently experiencing has an effect on business life in general and this might affect the results. Other researchers with the same agenda would probably observe what we observed. However, since our background is within learning, our focus might have been more on these types of variables, and to us learning is a very beneficial
thing for an entrepreneur. We find support for this in the literature revised, however, a researcher with a different philosophy might observe certain things differently. By transcribing and recording all of our data, anyone interested can receive those documents and files. By explicitly describing how we have gone about analyzing each case and later compared each case with theory and between cases, we believe there is transparency in how we made sense of the raw data.

3.4.2 Validity

Validity is another word for truth and concerns the interpretation of the observations (Silverman, 2006), or the question whether the researchers see what they think they see (Flick). Basically there are three types of errors that can occur; type one error is when the researcher sees a relation, or a principle and so on where they are not correct, type two error is when the researcher rejects information that is correct, and type three error, when the interviewer asks the wrong questions (Flick, 2006). Type one and two errors were avoided by having clearly defined research questions, closely related to theory and what we were researching. By analyzing each case independently, then comparing them with each other and then finally with existing theory, we confirmed that the relationships found were correct. Moreover, the two authors initially conducted separate analyses before comparing each others findings. Type three errors have already been covered in the reliability of the interview section.
4 Empirical Findings

In this chapter the empirical findings from the interviews will be presented. Ten interviews have been conducted. The interviews in this section are presented in the form of summaries, covering the entrepreneurs’ professional background, company information, mentoring involvement, mentoring relationship, negative aspects of the mentorship and finally the entrepreneurs’ personal reflections of mentoring as a concept. A table and a figure will be used in order to summarize and illustrate the findings at large.

One of the objectives during the interviews was to find out where on the business life-cycle the entrepreneur/adept was positioned when initiating the mentorship, and where they are currently situated. This was important since we were exploring when, on the firm life cycle, support is most efficient and whether or not the entrepreneurs had been able to transfer from one phase to the next.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Interviewee</th>
<th>Initial Phase of Mentor involvement</th>
<th>Current Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pernilla – Reklamfirman</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl-Johan – CI Ledskap &amp; Personlig Utveckling</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agneta – Välterspa</td>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard – Richards hemservice</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl-Anders – GainIT</td>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claes – GTG Group</td>
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<td>Pla – Resegruppen AB</td>
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<td>Anne – Huskvarna Stadshotell</td>
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<td>Raul – ECO2WIN</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mattias – Bluewall</td>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Phase 5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 Phases of Entrepreneurial development.
4.1 Pernilla-Reklamfirman Andersson Garcia

Professional Background

Pernilla has lived in both Sweden and Spain, and her higher education took place in the latter. She has an education within tourism, in which she learned design and lay-out, something which would later come to constitute her profession.

About the Company

Reklamfirman is an advertising firm, founded in Jönköping in 2008 by Pernilla herself. The vision for the company is to be the best supplier of advertising and web-design in the region. Pernilla runs the company herself, and has no other employees. She does however outsource certain services to people in her personal professional network, when certain expertise is needed. Based on the information attained from Pernilla, we believe Reklamfirman to be a definite case of a stabilization firm on the life-cycle phase's model, since she has a stable customer base, and is currently mostly focused on improving the quality of her total service offering, more so than expanding her business further.

Mentor involvement

After searching the internet for information about company start-up, Pernilla came across ALMI’s webpage and decided to get in contact with them. After attending some seminars about entrepreneurship and start-ups, Pernilla became aware of ALMI’s mentor program, and decided to apply for it. She was granted a spot in the program and when interviewed for the matching process, regarding what mentor would fit her needs best, she stated to ALMI that she wanted someone with experience from a small service company, since her primary need at the time was to receive help with pricing. She did not know how to properly value her services. She also wanted the mentor to assist her in increasing the over-all quality of her services and offerings. The mentor came into play during the survival phase (phase 2) of Reklamfirman, based on the life-cycle model, and Pernilla’s primary aim was to become more stable on the market. Pernilla consider the mentor's input to have been very valuable to her progress, both personally and professionally, and states that the mentor accounts for a strong contribution to the development of the company, which is currently experiencing the third stage, stabilization, on the life-cycle model.

Mentoring relationship

This mentoring relationship has been very informal right from the start, and Pernilla and her mentor discusses both professional questions, as well as personal. They also do not follow any clear structure or guidelines for the meetings. The guidance from the mentor has been strictly focused on awakening Pernilla’s own reflections on different matters, in order for her to be able to attain a deep learning from these situations; something she thinks has worked very well for every issue they have discussed. The mentor has not helped Pernilla with small, factual, detail type questions but has instead focused on more comprehensive matters of concern, in alignment with Pernilla’s own wishes. The two meet approximately every third month and the meetings can cover any area of interest, depending on what Pernilla wants to discuss at the moment. She states that she has been able to make use of the mentor's network in the sense that he has invited her to professional network meetings outside of ALMI.

Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship

Pernilla has never felt that the mentoring program contained any negative sides.
Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept

Mentorship is something Pernilla considers very useful for both professional and personal development, if used correctly. She thinks that the mentor should be attained after the first phase on the life-cycle model has been surpassed, since she feels it is important that the entrepreneur has clear developed ideas about what he or she wants to do with the company, before receiving input from the mentor. Otherwise the mentor might affect the company too extensively overall and possibly mold it after his or her own ideas instead of the entrepreneur’s.

After being active in the mentor program, Pernilla considers herself to be much more secure in her decision making abilities, and she has learned to reflect on issues more effectively and extensively. She considers a theoretical course to be more inefficient than a mentor relationship from a learning perspective, since taking a course results in the attainment of a lot of unnecessary information, whereas the mentorship allows the adept to receive information completely based on his or her own specific needs. She also feels that a course is harder to learn from since it is too impersonal compared to the mentorship and consequently she feels like the learning experience comes more naturally in a mentor program. In the future, Pernilla is open to the possibility of becoming a mentor herself, but feels that she needs more experience before taking on such a responsibility.

4.2 Carl-Johan-CJ Ledarskap & Personlig Utveckling

Professional Background

Carl-Johan has an educational background within the field of behavioral science, both from Jönköping School of Learning and Communications and through distance courses from other universities. He had already decided to start his own consultant firm within the field of management and personal development when he began his academic career six years ago.

About the Company

CJ Ledarskap & Personlig Utveckling was founded in January 2008 and is only consisting of Carl-Johan himself, and is active within the field of life coaching and management consulting. Carl-Johan has a wide variety of services offered through this firm, and has for example written books within leadership, and often holds seminars in life coaching and management. The firm’s service offering is aimed both towards private customers as well as businesses. Carl-Johan is currently focused on growing and developing, and we regard CJ Ledarskap & Personlig Utveckling to be located within the second phase, the growth orientation phase on the life-cycle model.

Mentor involvement

After being active a few months Carl-Johan decided it would be useful to receive input from a more experienced entrepreneur in order to move forward more efficiently with his business. He received his mentor relatively early on in his business life, after being active less than six months. The company was during this time not very stable, and was experiencing the second phase on the life cycle model, survival. Carl-Johan was during this time aiming to become more stable in the market place, and therefore asked for a mentor with extensive leadership experience from the consultant industry. He was very happy with ALMI’s matching process since he was assigned a female entrepreneur with a lot of relevant experience and knowledge. Since the mentor’s involvement, CJ Ledarskap & Utveck-
ling has moved forward on the firm life-cycle, and is now a stable firm with a solid customer base and service offering. Therefore we assume the firm to currently be positioned in the third phase, the stabilization phase.

**Mentoring relationship**

The relationship between Carl-Johan and his mentor started out formal, and they followed specific guidelines provided by ALMI for a short while. However, the relationship soon became more informal and the structured guidelines were replaced by their own preferences of relation etiquette. The meetings were held on a fairly regular basis, and they tried to meet at least once a month.

The main issues discussed were comprehensive matters such as business strategy for firm growth, and different types of business objectives and visions. Small detail questions were not of concern in this mentoring relationship. In order to try and provide Carl-Johan with the most efficient and deep type of learning, his mentor never gave him clear concrete advice on how to go about solving problems, but instead questioned his actions and thoughts, in order to awaken his own reflections on the matters. She often tried to get him to see things from many different perspectives, in order to come up with the best possible solution himself. Carl-Johan states that this was crucial to the learning experience from the mentor relationship; that he always got to come up with the final answer himself. Carl-Johan has not been able to make use of his mentor’s network, but states that this was never really topical because of the fact that ALMI informed the adepts never to exploit his or her mentor’s network.

**Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship**

Carl-Johan cannot identify any negative aspects concerning his mentor relationship.

**Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept**

In order for the adept to gain a learning experience on a deep level, Carl-Johan considers the mentor’s advisory methods to be of crucial importance. He believes that a mentor should not be used in order to receive specific advice on how to go about things, but his or her primary role should instead be to awaken the adept’s own reflection, in order for this person to attain a deeper understanding of the situations encountered during the mentor’s involvement. He also believes that in order to avoid the problem of the mentor affecting the overall business idea and vision of the company to a too large extent, the mentor should not come in to play until the entrepreneur himself or herself has developed a clear business idea and understanding of the vision of the company. Carl-Johan considers a mix between theory and practice to be the absolute best alternative for learning. Therefore he does not want to choose one best alternative between attending a theoretical course and being involved in a mentor program. After the involvement of the mentor, Carl-Johan has become better at putting focus on the “right” type of issues to take into consideration before making a decision. In other words he has become more aware of what factors play a crucial role for a successful outcome, when dealing with a problem. Today, Carl-Johan is an active mentor in the ALMI mentor program, and considers it a great experience from both a teaching and learning perspective.
4.3 Agneta-Wätterspa

Professional Background

Agneta has worked as a nurse for most of her professional life, and has over the years been involved a lot with drug addicts, mentally ill people, and criminals. After a long career of dealing with very intense situations and harsh working environments, Agneta decided it was time to settle down career wise and start enjoying life to a fuller extent. She wanted to do something less stressful and intense, and got the idea to start-up her own spa from her daughter, and along with a former colleague she acquired a therapeutic education in Linköping.

About the Company

After finishing up their education, Agneta and her former co-worker decided to become business partners and founded Wätterspa in May 2008. The Company has since the start been located in Jönköping, and has no intention of extending their business to other locations. The business idea is to provide people with several different health -and relaxation related services, such as massage and skin treatment. The company is currently in the third phase on the life-cycle model, and is very satisfied with staying stable in that phase, without any plans on expanding and/or growing.

Mentor involvement

Agneta gained her mentor when the company was very new, and based on her statements we consider the company to have been in the second phase, in which the company was just trying to establish themselves on the market in order to survive. She found out about the ALMI mentor program through a course she was taking through ALMI. While attending this course she was asked by an employee at ALMI if she would consider joining their mentor program, and was immediately interested. After being interviewed by ALMI she was assigned a male mentor from a completely different professional field, car production. This mentor had leadership experience from a company that produced parts for big trucks. The main area of assistance relevant for Agneta during the initial phase of the mentor involvement was input concerning her thoughts and questions about starting up the company. She mainly used the mentor as mental support, so to speak, in the sense that he encouraged her to dare to try her ideas and move forward with her vision. With the support from the mentor Agneta received the courage needed to take the necessary steps to fully put her business ideas into practice.

Mentoring relationship

This mentoring relationship was very informal, and the meetings were held on a very personal level. According to Agneta the mentor’s main function was to always be there and provide an extra sense of security, since Agneta always knew that she could talk to the mentor about any type of business problem, and that he, thanks to his extensive experience and knowledge as a business leader, would have thoughtful input to provide her with. The mentor never helped her with detail questions, and never gave her specific advice on things to implement in her business, since he always wanted her to reflect upon the problems herself in order gain in-depth learning by reaching a solution on her own. He therefore mainly assisted her by questioning her ideas, and trying to encourage her to think in a variety of ways. Agneta and the mentor met two times a month, and the meetings could be held both via the phone and in person and last longer or shorter depending on the issues
discussed. Agneta has not been able to use the mentor’s network since he is in a completely
different industry than her.

**Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship**

During this program Agneta has not identified any negative sides to the mentoring rela-
tionship.

**Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept**

Agneta states that she thinks every entrepreneur should be provided with the opportunity
of having a mentor, in order to be able to effectively avoid pitfalls that come along naturally
when starting up a new company. Therefore she thinks a mentor is particularly useful in
the earlier phases of entrepreneurship, but also considers the mentor relationship to be val-
uable all throughout the firm life-cycle. She considers a mentor to be much more effective
for an entrepreneur than learning from a theoretical course, since she believes it is much
more effective learning that comes from close personal interaction, than learning in a large
group of people. She is not able to determine whether or not her decision making abilities
have been changed by the mentor or not.

**4.4 Richard-Richards Hemservice**

**Professional Background**

Richard has no higher education, but has a quite extensive relevant working experience
from the same type of field as he is currently involved in. He used to work for
Hemtjänsten, which is a service company dealing with housework for private customers.

**About the Company**

During his employment at Hemtjänsten, Richard was able to identify needs that were not
met by his employer, and decided to act on this business opportunity by starting his own
firm, also involved in household related services. This company got the name Richards
Hemservice (Richard’s home service) and was founded in 2006. Currently, Richards Hem-
service is in the growth orientation phase on the life-cycle model. We base this on the fact
that the company has already been stable on the market for two years, and is constantly
gaining a larger customer base and more revenue, with ambitions to expand its business.

**Mentor involvement**

Richard became aware of the ALMI mentor program through the organization’s newsletter
which he has been signed up for since the start of his company two years ago. He had
some requests for criteria he wished for the mentor to fulfill; he wanted someone with a lot
of experience from the service industry, and most preferably someone from the household
service business. However, ALMI was not able to match him with a mentor fulfilling the
later criteria, mainly because of the fact that these more experienced entrepreneurs reg-
garded Richard as competition, according to Richard himself. But he was at least able to get
a mentor who had extensive experience from the service sector, since this mentor had been
involved in the restaurant business for several years. The mentor came in during Richards
third year of business, while his company was still experiencing the third phase, stabiliza-
tion. He had at this point in time made attempts to develop his business, but failed. Now
he was in need of guidance from someone who knew how to successfully develop a small
company. With the help from his mentor, Richard has been able to successfully develop his
company and expand his services.
Mentoring relationship

The formality is very high in this relationship and Richard and his mentor has kept it on a strictly professional level, without developing a deeper personal relationship. The assistance from the mentor is mainly consisting of concrete advice, both concerning comprehensive matters, such as how to adopt the expanding business most effectively to the market, as well as on more detailed questions concerning such issues as book keeping. Richard states that the mentor's input has great value, but also that he does not implement any advice from the mentor before reflecting on this information himself, as well as receiving input from other people in his surroundings as well. Richard and his mentor aim to meet two times a month, but this vary. They always discuss issues which Richard has prepared beforehand, in order to make effective use of their time. Richard has not been able to exploit the mentor’s network, mainly because they are in different industries. He does however state that they might be able to partner up for some projects in the future.

Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship

Richard and his mentor are as mentioned active in two different industries, and also from two completely different backgrounds. His mentor comes from a family of corporate traditions, and started his company with a lot of capital to back him up. Richard on the other hands started his company from scratch, and has never before been in contact with the corporate life. Therefore they are two individuals with completely different perspectives on almost everything, which is mostly to an advantage, but can sometimes be frustrating according to Richard.

Entrepreneur's personal reflections on mentoring as a concept

Richard thinks the mentor program has resulted in very positive experiences for him and his business. The main advantage with having an experienced entrepreneur as a mentor is the opportunity to have someone to discuss anything with, and be able to receive truthful answers due to the fact that the mentor has no self-interest in the adept’s business. He believes the most appropriate time to be assigned a mentor is after being in business for at least a year, since then the entrepreneur has been active long enough to have identified important questions and problems concerning his business. He also stresses the importance of being able to build your company from your own ideas, and not anyone else’s, which might become problematic if the mentor comes in to the picture too soon. Richard believes a theoretical course is less yielding than a mentorship, since a mentor relationship offers the opportunity to actively affect the learning outcome, based on what questions the adept wants answered. Listening to a lecturer does not involve active participation to the same extent, but you rather just learn by listening and following the lecturer’s agenda, something Richard sees as a less effective method of learning. After participating in ALMI’s mentor program Richard feels his decision making abilities have been improved in the sense that he is now more concerned about the bigger picture whenever he is facing a problem. He has become inspired and become more courageous to expand his firm. He is more aware of the different variables which have to be taken into consideration in order to make a wise decision, something he often neglected in the past. In the future, Richard states that he is definitely open to the opportunity of becoming a mentor himself, as soon as he feels confident he has attained enough experience in order to be able to guide another entrepreneur effectively.
4.5 Karl-Anders-GainIT

Professional Background

Karl-Anders’ educational background consists of an electric engineering degree, as well as an IT architect certification, from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. His first employment was at Nässjö Tryckeri, a printing company in Nässjö, where he first came in contact with IT and lay-out in practice.

About the Company

GainIT started in 2006, and consists of Karl-Anders and his partner, as well as two part-time employees and two international interns. The company works with structured data collection and communication, and re-usage of this type of important information. Since the company is currently re-structuring its organization to adjust for growth, we definitely consider GainIT to be in the fourth phase of the life-cycle model.

Mentor involvement

Karl-Anders had talked to ALMI early on the business life-cycle, not about mentorship but about matters of structure, capital, financing and other important areas of business. Since he had so many questions, ALMI suggested that he should look into the possibility of attaining a mentor from them. After signing up as an applicant for the program, he was assigned a mentor in May 2008. Karl-Anders did have some criteria he wished for his mentor to fulfill; he wanted someone who had a similar professional background, and someone who would be able to understand the IT-business, at least to some extent. The matching process went excellent, according to Karl-Anders, and he is very satisfied with his mentor. When getting the mentor, the company had already started growing and developing, and according to Karl-Anders the company was currently in phase 3, stabilization. Due to the mentor’s involvement, the company has developed very positively and is now somewhere in the fourth phase of the life-cycle model.

Mentoring relationship

The relationship between Karl-Anders and his mentor has always been held on a very personal and informal level, and the two discuss anything on their minds. They do however always prepare an agenda before every meeting, in order to make the most efficient use of their time together. The mentoring assistance mostly concerns larger more comprehensive matters, but also smaller detail questions. An important fact according to Karl-Anders is however that the mentor never tells him what specific actions to take in different situation, but instead is solely focused on enhancing Karl-Anders own thoughts and reflections. The mentor questions Karl-Anders’ actions and thoughts, and also gives him input from his own experiences in similar situations. Karl-Anders states that he has not been able to use the mentor’s network in any sense.

Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship

Claes has never felt that the mentoring program contained any negative sides.

Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept

Karl-Anders considers his personal mentoring relationship to be a great success, he does however stress the fact that he believes the mentor should not impose his or her own ideas onto the adept, but instead let the entrepreneur find the answers himself or herself, in or-
der to learn on a deeper level. Karl-Anders himself has experienced a lot of improvement in his own ability to reflect on things before making decisions. In alignment with these opinions, he also states that the mentor should not come into the picture until the entrepreneur has a clear vision and understanding of his company and its potential. Therefore he does not consider a mentor program to be relevant until the third phase of the model, stabilization. According to Karl-Anders, mentorship and theoretical education does not compete with each other on any level, since the mentor should have a primary focus on giving the adept input which should in turn be used based on the adept’s own theoretical knowledge.

4.6 Claes-GTG Group

Professional Background

Academically, Claes has a four year technical gymnasiial education from Eric Dahlbergs Gymnasium in Jönköping. During his professional career he has mostly been involved in sales, and has also worked with product quality. He spent 13 years as a buying manager for a company that dealt with companies from all over the world. He later came to take over the position as key account manager for that same company and dealt mainly with firms in the industrial sector.

About the Company

The idea with the GTG Group is an old idea, which originates from a network which Claes himself was a member of. It is an industrial firm, and is located in Gnosjö. The business idea is to be able to provide the customer with the opportunity to deal only with one contact person, for an affair that involves several suppliers. The company was started in 2005, and the board of directors involves Claes plus one representative from the different companies involved in this partnership. We regard GTG Group to be positioned somewhere in the fourth phase, based on the fact that the company is aiming to expand, and has already passed the stabilization phase, since it is constantly investing in development processes.

Mentor involvement

When starting GTG-group in 2005, Claes already knew about ALMI and their new start-up programs. It was not until about a year later however that he took contact with ALMI to see what they could offer him, and then became aware of their mentor program. Claes gained his mentor in 2007, while the company was already in the growth orientation phase, and was focused on putting resources on development. Claes had some specific criteria for his mentor, which he wished for ALMI to consider when matching him with one. He wanted someone with extensive industrial experience, in order for that person to be able to view the business from a helicopter perspective. This was his main pre-requisite for the mentor program, since he believed himself to have gone a bit too home-blind during this time period. Therefore he wanted someone experienced to come in with a new perspective on things, which could then make him see things from another angle. He also wanted someone who had been in a similar position as himself, since he was relatively inexperienced in this type of executive position. He needed someone who was able to give good feedback since he needed to be pushed forward a little bit, in his own mind. The mentor helped Claes to gain a more comprehensive understanding over different situations, and also the company as whole, which has helped him in making decisions leading to company development.
Mentoring relationship

Claes and his mentor’s relationship is on a very informal level. After the end of the ALMI mentor program in 2008 they have chosen to stay in touch, and Claes considers them close friends. The mentor’s feedback on Claes’s ideas and questions was focused on trying to awaken Claes’s own reflection on the matters, in order for himself to ultimately come up with the right answers. Therefore the mentor never gave Claes any clear directions or advice on how exactly to do things, but instead acted a lot to actively question Claes’s ideas and try to make him see things from different perspectives. This was according to Claes very effective. The type of questions and problems in focus in this particular mentorship was solely of the large, comprehensive art, and Claes never asked for help with small detail questions, since he believes the mentor should primarily work as more of a reflection awakener.

The two had planned to meet face-to-face on a monthly basis, but ended up meeting much less in person. All in all they met five to seven times, according to Claes. Instead they often talked on the phone. Claes states that he has indeed been able to exploit his mentor’s network, and explains this by the fact that they both were able to profit from each other’s networks. They are both active within similar type of industries, and both live in small towns with important networks. Therefore this was a clear win-win situation in that sense, according to Claes.

Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship

Claes has never felt that the mentoring program contained any negative sides.

Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept

Claes believes the ALMI mentor program to be very important for business life in Sweden, and hope that business mentoring will grow in the future. He is also open to the idea of one day becoming a mentor himself, but stresses the fact that in order to take on the role of a mentor, he has to be sure he will have gathered extensive experience within the field of his adept. He thinks a mentor should not come into play until the entrepreneur himself/ herself has a clear picture of what his/ her company should look like, and is completely aware of the vision with the firm. Otherwise, if a mentor enters to early in the firm lifecycle, he/ she might affect the business to a too large extent, since the inexperienced entrepreneur might not be able to question the more experienced entrepreneur’s (the mentor) input, because of lack of own experience. Between taking a theoretical course within a relevant topic and receiving input from a mentor, Claes states that one alternative does not exclude the other. But he does however think that a course is less personal, and therefore it might not fit you as a person to 100%, based on your problems and questions, while a mentor relationship is purely personal, and therefore will be able to address your specific need to a full extent. After being part of the mentor program, Claes states that the mentor input has not changed his decision making abilities to a very large extent, but he does admit that he is probably a bit keener on listening to others thanks to the mentoring relationship.

4.7 Pia-Resegruppen AB

Professional Background

Pia has a long history of working in the travel industry. During her career she has attained a lot of experience and skills needed in order to successfully run a travel agency, and has also realized opportunities within the industry which she has been able to exploit. For a while
she left the travel business in order to work in a completely different field, but found herself missing her old field of profession too much. Therefore, in 2005, after being asked by a former co-worker to jointly start-up a new travel agency, she finally decided that was her calling.

About the Company

Resegruppen AB was founded in 2006, by Pia and a former colleague. The company has since the start been located in Jönköping, and is a pure business-to-business based firm. The business idea is to organize travel arrangements for big groups of people and for business conferences, something Pia new first hand was a very profitable niche. In the summer of 2006 Pia decided to buy her partners share in the company, since that person only worked part-time with Resegruppen, and wanted to focus on her other job full time. This resulted in Pia running the firm by herself for a short while, before deciding it was an overwhelming duty in the fall of 2006. Therefore she started looking for a new partner, and quickly found a suitable candidate, Liselotte, willing to work with the firm full time. After a short training and test period, Pia decided that her new partner was up for the task, and the two has been running the firm ever since. Based on the life cycle model, Resegruppen is currently experiencing the 4th stage “Growth Orientation”, since the company develops its resources and its sales in order to adjust for expansion.

Mentor involvement

Pia gained her mentor in 2008, while the company was already positioned at the 4th stage of the life cycle model, according to Pia. She became aware of ALMI’s mentor program by a coincidence, while just screening through her e-mails. She noticed an e-mail from ALMI announcing the start of a new mentor program, and thought it sounded interesting. After getting in contact with ALMI, and interviewed about her certain needs and expectations on this program, she was assigned a mentor who had been the market director for Huskvarna AB, a company in a completely different field than Pia’s company. This was the mentor she had actually requested, based on the fact that she knew about his skills in marketing, and this was her primary area of concern at the time. She also wanted a mentor who had been active in a different field than the travel industry, in order to gain input from someone with a new and different perspective on business. Due to the mentor’s extensive experience and skill set, he was able to give Pia a lot of advices on how to more effectively reach her customers and market the company. Therefore the mentor’s help was very valuable to Resegruppen and the business has been more successful since his involvement.

Mentoring relationship

The relationship was based on much formality, and Pia and her mentor followed clear guidelines all throughout the program. At every meeting they decided upon six new changes that the mentor wanted Pia to implement in her business, and Pia followed most of his advice to full extent. The mentor was, according to Pia, quite demanding and had very clear demands on what he required from her from one meeting to the next. He did however not only implement his own ideas on Pia’s business, but also encouraged her to reflect on her own during their meetings, since he wanted to achieve a mix between giving clear advice and also awakening Pia’s own reflection on problems in order for her to learn more in-depth. They met with each other approximately once a month and the meetings lasted for several hours each time. As for all other adepts in ALMI’s mentor program Pia and her mentor had to attend group meetings with ALMI and other adepts on a regular basis, in order for ALMI to be able to conduct follow-ups on the relationship.
Pia has not been able to use the mentor’s network, and it was made clear by ALMI that the adept should not ask to do so.

**Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship**

Pia sometimes felt that the mentor pushed his own ideas a bit too hard on Pia’s business, and did not always like his advice. Even though she did not want to make some changes that the mentor felt necessary, he continuously lobbied for these ideas, and most of the time Pia ended up following his instructions. At this point in time Pia feels that these changes were for the most part very useful and helped her company move forward, but at the same time feel that the mentor was a bit too demanding and non flexible at times.

**Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept**

Pia considers mentoring to be a very helpful and effective way of getting useful guidance in big problems that the entrepreneur does not have enough knowledge to solve herself/himself. She thinks it is important that the entrepreneur has a clear vision with the company and that he/she is confident in what he/she is doing, in order for the mentoring to become an effective type of assistance, rather than a force of crucial change. In other words Pia thinks it is more effective to receive a mentor in a later stage than the start-up phase of a company, in order for the mentor not to influence the business too much which could lead to the company vision being that of the mentor, instead of the entrepreneur. When asked about whether theoretical education or mentoring was to prefer when attaining useful knowledge about business, Pia stated that taking a course in a certain topic is very valuable and she thinks it can be a very effective way of getting useful knowledge. However, she feels that every entrepreneur sooner or later needs to gain input from a mentor in order to develop the business effectively, since she believes that you always become too blind when working in one industry for a long time, in order to be able to realize new opportunities, if you do not receive input from someone with a different perspective.

### 4.8 Anne-Huskvarna Stadshotell

**Professional Background**

Anne’s educational background consists of a three year gymnasial program at Per Brahe Gymnasium, in Jönköping. In her professional life she has worked mainly within sales, but also in the restaurant business, in which she is currently involved.

**About the Company**

Huskvarna Stadshotell is a hotel and restaurant, located in central Huskvarna. Anne took over the firm in February 2007. It used to be only a restaurant, even though it had access to hotel rooms as well. Anne saw the potential in this and decided to exploit the opportunity of combining a hotel and restaurant, since this type of business did not exist in Huskvarna at that point in time. Currently Anne has added 11 rooms to the original 10, and see the capacity to increase the business further with 10 more rooms. The company is currently experiencing the 4th phase on the life cycle model, and is currently undergoing extensive renovations and business development.

**Mentor involvement**

Anne’s first involvement with ALMI was when she was granted a loan from them in 2007. Due to the quick success of the firm, Anne was able to pay off the loan within less than a year, and asked ALMI if there was any additional assistance available from them, more than
just monetary. She was then informed about the mentor program and decided to join it immediately. This was early in 2008. Anne already had a female business leader in mind when joining the program, and was able to be appointed this specific person as her mentor. She wanted someone with business experience from the industry Anne is currently in, and also someone with good documented leadership skills. According to Anne, the company was currently in the growth orientation phase (4th phase on the life cycle model) when the mentor came into the picture. She bases this assumption on the fact that the company was doing well financially and was already in the midst of hefty development. Since the mentor has been introduced to the business Anne states that she has definitely benefited from the guidance from her experienced mentor. It is however hard to say to what extent the mentor has helped the company develop, since Anne considers the mentor more as an extra security than a powerful force of change.

**Mentoring relationship**

Anne considers her relationship with the mentor to be very informal and personal and her and her mentor have developed a close friendship during the mentor program. The meetings are held once a month, and during each meeting the two discuss several different issues that Anne needs help with. The advice received from the mentor is always concrete, and based on personal experience and knowledge about the industry in general. The mentor often tells Anne about her own actions in similar situations as Anne are currently experiencing, and informs her about the factors that needs to be taken into consideration for different types of decisions. In other words the mentor gives Anne concrete advice, which Anne can then choose to follow or not. The questions handled are always of the more comprehensive kind, the two never discusses smaller, more detail type questions. Anne has not used her mentor’s network to any extent, since she feels it is not appropriate for an adept to do so.

**Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship**

Anne does not have any complaints about her mentoring relationship, but does however aim some criticism towards ALMI in general and the way they have administered this program. According to Anne, ALMI should have focused more on letting the compulsory follow up meetings, in which all adepts within the program meet with each other and their mentors, include networking to a higher extent. She feels like she has not been given the opportunity to get to know the other adepts and their mentors in the program well enough to be able to create professional relationships, which could be of value to all of the entrepreneurs in the mentor program.

**Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept**

According to Anne, mentoring is very useful as an extra source of security, and the adept is through the mentor able to receive valuable input in important decisions. The mentor is particularly valuable in this sense since his/her input is completely truthful and open minded, much due to the fact that all information shared between the mentor and the adept in the mentor program is confidential, and neither one of these two parts has to worry about holding anything back. Anne thinks a mentor could be of value from day one, but should primarily be used for assistance in larger, more comprehensive questions, while smaller detail questions should be addressed by other sources of expertise. When comparing the benefits of attending a theoretical course, and having a mentor, Anne personally feels that a course is too impersonal compared to the mentorship, and therefore it is harder to grasp the information and turn it into valuable knowledge. She also considers the aca-
demic learning from a course to be too short-term concentrated, while a mentor relationship is a long-term solution, which can be useful throughout a whole lifetime. Anne feels she is more comfortable and secure in her decision making now that she is actively involved in a mentor relationship, due to the fact that she can always turn to the mentor for support whenever needed.

4.9 Raul-Eco2Win

Professional Background

Raul has a professional background as a researcher at Chalmers University, in Gothenburg, where he conducted research within the field of environmental issues. He led a team of researchers with the aim to make environmental issues handling more efficient for large corporations. He did however get tired of the business, and decided to leave the University to move back to his former hometown of Jönköping, to work as a consultant in environmental questions towards companies in that region.

About the Company

Eco2Win, Raul’s initiated consultant business, is a successful consultant firm with focus on environmental issues. It was founded in 2006 by Raul himself, with the support from VINNOVA, a large research organization.

Mentor involvement

After two years of business, Raul decided he wanted to develop the company further, and decided to contact ALMI in order to join their mentor program. He specifically wanted the mentor to enter during this time period since the company was currently in a developing stage (the growth orientation phase, based on the life cycle model) and he wished to use the mentor primarily as a type of benchmark. He did however not have any real criteria on the mentor itself, something he regrets today, since that would probably have been very valuable in order to make the most out of the mentor relationship, according to Raul. After the end of his mentor program participation, Raul states that he feels a bit unclear whether he thinks the mentor helped him in a real significant manner to develop, but he appreciated the fact that he was able to discuss issues with someone with a different perspective.

Mentoring relationship

The relationship between Raul and his mentor was on a quite informal level, even though they both tried to hold it very formal from the beginning. During their meetings they discussed ideas that Raul wanted feed-back on, and the mentor gave his input based on his own experiences. Raul was then able to decide whether he considered this input to be of value or not, from case to case. The most important help he got from the mentor, according to Raul himself, was the ability to use the mentor’s professional network. Through his mentor Raul was able to meet a lot of potential business contacts, something he emphasizes as one of the most important aspects of the mentor relationship; to be able to exploit the mentor’s network. He also valued the sense of heightened comfort and security in knowing that he always had someone to turn to if a problem occurred. It made him feel more confident and secure when facing difficult situations. Raul and his mentor met sporadically, but not on a regular basis, and not often.
Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship

Because of the fact that Raul neglected to mention any specific criteria he wished for his mentor to fulfill, this might have led to a slight mismatch between Raul and his mentor, since Raul would primarily have wanted someone with seniority and great stability, within his/her professional role, but received a mentor who was quite unstable in the latter sense. This resulted in the guidance being a bit less in-depth than Raul had hoped, because of lacking knowledge and experience from similar situations by the mentor.

Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept

Raul considers mentorship to be very effective as a way of reaching own decisions with the help from a mentor as a sort of sounding board, just commenting on the adept’s own ideas on a very general level, and questioning these ideas, in order to support personal reflection for the adept. He believes a mentor is most useful if attained in the beginning of the start-up process. In that period, however, the mentor should not try to affect the business too much, but rather act as mental support, and try to normalize the process of start-up for the entrepreneur by telling him/her about the mentor’s own experience from this time period. He also states that a mentor should throughout the mentorship process always focus on not giving straight advice to the adept about how to do things, but rather providing different perspectives on difficult situations that the adept finds himself/herself in, based on self-experience. The adept should then by himself/herself always make the final decision, in order to learn more deeply from these situations by coming up with a decision by himself/herself. An interesting aspect with Raul’s view on mentorship is that he thinks one of the mentor’s main contributions to the adept should be to enhance the adept’s professional network, even though ALMI does not encourage this type of networking assistance. When asked about the best alternative from taking a theoretical course about a topic, versus attaining support from a mentor about that topic, Raul believes that a combination between the two is the most optimal solution. However, if he had to pick one he would choose mentorship, since attending a course gives you no cognitive training, and does not answer your specific questions, something he values highly. His decisions making skills have not been enhanced by the mentor, since this specific mentoring relationship did not result in much useful input from the mentor at all.

4.10 Mattias-Bluewall Construction AB

Professional Background

Mattias has an educational background as an engineer, and graduated from university with a civil engineering degree in 1997. Right after graduation he was hired by a big construction firm named NCC, and spent the following eight years climbing the career ladder in that company. However, in 2005, after being appointed the market executive for the Jönköping region, he and a colleague decided it was time for a change. Mattias and his partner then made the decision to start their own construction firm, and since Mattias had extensive experience from that industry, as well as a large established network of clients and suppliers, the start-up phase went smooth and fast.

About the Company

Bluewall Construction is a construction company located in Jönköping, and is purely based on business to business. Based on the life cycle model, we conclude that the company is currently experiencing the 5th stage, and has thus come along way on the firm life-cycle, in just four years. We base this conclusion on the fact that Bluewall Construction has a steady
cash flow, is constantly increasing its market shares and customer base, and has fulfilled all criteria for the earlier stages in the model. The company also has one subsidiary named Co-lugo, which runs a parallel business, and a real estate company which is fairly newly established.

**Mentoring involvement**

Mattias attained his mentor in 2007, while his company was currently, according to Mattias himself, experiencing the 4th stage of the life cycle model. He was not actively looking for a mentor himself, but was instead contacted by Almi who offered him to be part of their mentoring program. After Mattias accepted the offer, Almi conducted a research on him and his company, in order to be able to establish a good match between the mentor and the mentored. Mattias was assigned a male mentor who he already was familiar with, since this man had been in a similar industry as Mattias, and his company was almost in the exact same phase as Bluewall Construction. Since Mattias’ company was so far ahead on the firm life-cycle, the guidance needed from the mentor was not so much about detail questions, but more about the softer variables involved in the business. This is because the basic foundation of how to run the business was already in place when the mentor came into play. This resulted in the mentoring initially being focused on intangible assets, such as human resource development strategies, and recruitment methods, since these issues are very fuzzy and always open for improvement. Since the mentor had recently experienced the issues Mattias was struggling with, he was able to effectively give his advice on these different matters. The mentoring program definitely contributed in a positive manner to enable Bluewall Construction to effectively move on to the next phase on the firm life-cycle.

**Mentoring relationship structure**

This particular mentoring relationship has very informal structures. No clear guidelines have been followed and the meetings are on a very personal level, with no specific agenda set beforehand. This type of structure has, according to Mattias, fit both parties very well, since the personal relationship which has developed between them leads to no thoughts or opinions being held back. The discussion is always very open, and analysis and feedback sessions are performed on any aspect of relevance. The fact that all mentor relationships in Almi are based on strictly confidential information between the mentor and the mentored further enhances the openness of the discussions.

**Negative aspects of the mentoring relationship**

Mattias has not experienced any downsides with his mentoring relationship, since no tips and guidance from the mentor are required to lead to any final decisions. Therefore, all input from the mentor is just considered an extra chance for a second opinion in complex matters. However, this has lead to the situation in which Mattias do not turn to the mentor in situations where the company is experiencing a crisis, such as the current low conjuncture on the market, since the mentoring feedback is not prioritized in these types of critical situations. This is mainly because the mentoring relationship is very informal and easy, and both parties stay away from going in too deep in each other’s more complex aspects of business. Mattias is then rather totally focused on his own businesses and market situation.

**Entrepreneur’s personal reflections on mentoring as a concept**

Mattias considers mentoring to be a good means for both mature and newly started com-
panies to get effective guidance and assistance in questions relevant for their specific situation. He believes that newly started firms differ in their needs, compared to more established firms, in the sense of what specific areas of expertise needs to be provided by the mentor. For smaller firms questions about the basic foundation of how to run a business effectively, including expertise about small scale details, is probably vital, while mature firms will probably need help with more softer variables on a larger scale (such as in Mattias case). Concerning the pros and cons off mentorship VS traditional theoretical education, Mattias concludes that a combination between educational, theoretical learning, and learning from the experiences of a mentor is probably to prefer. But if he would have to choose one, he would select to be part of an ongoing mentoring relationship instead of attending educational courses within the subject of relevance, because he feels it is more important with the hands-on experience gained from the former alternative.
5 Analysis

In this chapter the empirical findings from the interviews will be evaluated and analyzed in the light of the literature revised and our own research questions and purpose. The presentation of the analysis will initially take the form of a within case analysis. This is motivated by the fact that each mentor/adept relationship is so unique that in order to reveal all possible characteristics, requires individual analysis of each case. Secondly a cross case comparison will shed light on the patterns discovered when combining the individual analysis and to answer our research questions and finally our purpose.

5.1 Pernilla

Pernilla's initial reason to enter the mentor program was among other things that she wanted to receive input regarding the valuing and pricing of her services. This type of advice could be seen as factual or specific advice as referred to by Bisk (2002), or as Megginson et al. (2006) refer to it as career function support, factual support concerning financial planning, marketing, regulation or in this case pricing. This is in line with previous research findings where it has been established that entrepreneurs' in the early phases of development are in need of factual and specific information (Megginson et al, 2006; Deakins et al. 1997). However, in this case the mentor did not possess the business specific types of support (pricing) that Pernilla requested initially, in essence he did not possess the type of knowledge that Deakins et al (1997) claims that new phase entrepreneurs require. Nonetheless Pernilla possessed more knowledge than she thought she did and her mentor managed to awaken her thoughts and ability to find answers through reflection.

Pernilla concludes that the mentorship has been very valuable and the mentor has contributed to her development in many aspects. The mentorship is of the non directive type, where the mentor acts more like a counselor, supplying passive support, assisting the adept in his or her analysis of situations. By doing so the mentor enhances the adept's ability to take responsibility for his or her own development process (Clutterbuck, 2004). A good example of this regarding the pricing issue was when Pernilla's mentor asked questions such as; how good are your services compared with your clients? What can you do that others can't do? Instead of giving Pernilla recommendations, the mentor in this case made Pernilla think long and hard about her offerings, something that Pernilla saw as very rewarding.

"No, Carl-Johan does not tell me what to do, he makes me reflect, he doesn't instruct me in any way rather he makes me think, and then suddenly I come up with the answer myself" (P. Andersson, personal communication, 2009-05-12).

Given this, we conclude that in Pernilla's case, active learning and reflection have been two very important factors. Active learning is claimed to increase the adept's ability to take responsibility, claim leadership, and most importantly preparing the adept for making his or her own discoveries (Swap et al. 2001). Such is the case with Pernilla. Even though the mentor was not able to contribute with the type of mentoring described by Swap et al. (2001) as "Experts", who have acquired knowledge and then passes it on by sharing their findings with an adept, the mentorship has been successful by utilizing other methods.
After being active in the mentor program Pernilla considers herself to be much more secure in her decision making abilities and she has learned to reflect on issues more effectively and extensively. She has transferred from phase 2 to phase 3 and she contributes a lot of this to her mentor.

5.2 Carl-Johan

Since Carl-Johan himself is a mentor, and that he has an active firm dealing with coaching and consulting, he is very knowledgeable in the subject of mentoring. It is clear that Carl-Johan and his mentor share the same background and also the same perceptions of what constitutes good mentoring. Carl-Johan sees reflection and questioning of thoughts as the most important theme within mentoring, and concludes that this is the only way the adept will really gain a deeper knowledge and consequently learn from his mentorship. Since Carl-Johan and his mentor share this opinion, the mentorship has been very successful. When incorporated in Clutterbuck’s (2004) mentoring map, the relationship is considered as the counselling type of mentorship, where the mentor acts as a sounding board assisting the adept in his or her analysis of situations. Even though Carl-Johan sees coaching as a separate function from mentoring, it is clear that according to Clutterbuck’s (2004) definition, he is being coached as well, since his mentor provides him with real life examples from the same business as the adept.

"Having someone who can give advice from experience is of course very important, but the theory part as a base is at least as important in order to understand what you’re being told. I prefer having theory combined with mentoring" (C J Forseen, personal communication, 2009-04-02)
Even though Carl-Johan received his mentor in a relatively early phase, when he did not possess all the necessary factual knowledge about running a firm, these types of questions were never discussed since Carl-Johan thinks he can find those answers elsewhere. This reasoning goes in line with Storey (1993) who claims that it is not cost beneficial to supply entrepreneurs with mentoring in earlier phases since there are more cost efficient ways to obtain knowledge than through mentoring. In this case, as Carl-Johan puts it, certain knowledge is attainable through many channels, but the tailor made knowledge that comes from mentoring can only come through this specific relationship. Therefore the types of issues addressed in a mentorship should be focused on the type of support that deals with more comprehensive matters. Partly because of his engagement in the mentor program, Carl-Johan has now transitioned from the second to the third phase of business development.

5.3 Agneta

In Agneta's case, the aim with the firm currently is to stay stable in the phase she is in, the third phase, stabilization. Agneta does not have any specific agenda with the mentorship and she describes the relationship as very informal and unstructured. The mentor is there merely as reassurance and provides very general advice. This indicates that the mentorship is of the non directive, counseling type when applying Clutterbuck's (2004) mentorship map. The mentor has kept his position in this corner and does not change in this matter. In this case we see a tendency that the mentorship is to informal and unstructured in order to reach any actual progress. According to Clutterbuck (2004), being to stuck in one type of mentorship can lead to an inefficient mentorship, where progress is replaced by convenience. It is however important to note that Agneta has no ambitions to expand or grow her firm and this clearly affects the mentorship. A more directive mentorship could have lead to more progress we believe. Storey (1993), a criticizer of early mentoring support argues that support agencies should focus on supporting firms with a record of growth, with two or perhaps three years of business behind them. Given this he furthermore argues that start-up support should be abandoned and that focus should be moved towards picking winners and supports them in their growth processes. From this perspective, supporting
entrepreneurs with no ambition to grow could be less positive since the added value from having a mentor would never yield the benefits that a growing firm could achieve. Agneta would be a case for such arguments, since she has no spoken ambitions of growing.

"He has mainly served as an extra sense of security. Just the feeling of comfort in knowing he is always there, has been the most important contribution" (A. Andersson, personal communication, 2009-05-11)

Nonetheless, Agneta is very satisfied with the mentorship and she sees many positive spinoff effects, such as a personal relationship who she can discuss with in other context than within mentoring. This suggests that Agneta’s and her mentor relationship is more of the “learning through social relationships” described by Rae & Carswell (2000), and the advice given is not categorized or planned, rather spontaneous and more leisureed.

5.4 Richard

Richard and his mentor’s relationship is very formal, and the two always have, by Richard predetermined, issues which they discuss. In this sense the mentorship is non directive, however, since the advice that Richard receives is often of the factual and specific type, the relationship could be seen as directive in the sense that the mentor provides this type of input, in accordance with Clutterbuck (2004). This constellation works very well according to Richard and he has progressed by being part of the mentor program. Richard himself comes from a background with no corporate traditions, as apart from his mentor, who has a generation of enterprising behind him.
Richard is also in the midst of development, and in need of advice on this matter. He is not very confident in “doing business” and one of the effects that the mentor has had on Richard is to inspire him and make him think in a bigger picture. Growth comes with many problems and inconveniences, and the main areas that need to be dealt with in order to enable growth are reputation of the firm, attracting qualified people, attracting financial resources as well as handling the relationship with customers and their stakeholders (Barringer & Greening, 1998). According to Deakins et al. (1997), these are natural issues that the adept needs support with during the later stages of running a firm, however, in Richard’s case this does not seem to be the case. According to Sullivan (2000), new start entrepreneurs are in need of the “tools” necessary to overcome the barriers in the initial phases of running a firm. However, Richard’s firm is in no way newly established; nonetheless he is in need of these critical tools. Advice from the mentor is of the factual type, as Richard and his mentor discuss bookkeeping questions, advertizing methods, and other detailed, very specific problems. With regard to these questions, as we see it, an inexperienced entrepreneur such as Richard might benefit more from expert help in different questions, something that is possible via Almi as a separate function from the mentor program. Empirical evidence from Deakins et al. (1997) concluded that entrepreneurs generally preferred to consult experts in these types of questions, and this could be beneficial for Richard as well as his mentor.

“W hen the company is new and fresh everything is fun and exciting. I think it’s in the second year that the questions start coming, when the fun fades out. Then questions such as, how am I going to survive surfaced and the mentor comes in play.” (R. Josefsson, personal communication, 2009-05-15).

Regardless of this, one very important input from the mentor is that he has inspired Richard and encouraged him to think bigger. Given this, when an entrepreneur like Richard is exposed to the behaviour of an experienced mentor, who he is probable to look up to professionally, the potential learning outcome is often high (Swap et al. 2001).

Interesting is also that Richard performs double checks, and reflects, on all the advice that he receives from the mentor, either himself or with someone else. A reason for this could be the fact that Richard’s mentor operates within a completely different business, and
therefore Richard might feel that the advice he receives is not suitable in his own case. As Richard said, he would have preferred a mentor within his own business field. A conclusion from this is that in order for a directive type of mentorship such as Richard's, where lots of focus is on factual matters, to be effective, it is important that the mentor operates within the same business field as the adept. If not, time is wasted on double checking relatively simple matters, at the cost of more comprehensive support.

5.5 Karl-Anders

Karl-Anders has many things to say about mentoring as a business support method, and they are almost exclusively positive. Karl-Anders and his mentor have a very informal relationship, focused on reflection. The relationship is foremost of the counseling type, however it sometimes moves towards the far end of the coaching type when applying Clutterbuck’s (2004) definitions. According to Karl-Anders this is the way that a mentor should act in order to be efficient. Karl-Anders and his mentor have agreed that no advice from the mentor shall be direct and that the mentor’s main function should always be to enable the adept to increase his knowledge base through empowerment. Sullivan (2000) concludes that the mentor should help the entrepreneur to learn, rather than provide prescribed solutions. He further argues that it is the ability to learn from occurrences in a firm that is the most important source of learning for entrepreneurs, and his research concludes that support in the learning and reflecting process is beneficial.

![Figure 8 Karl-Anders](image)

Karl-Anders strongly believes that a mentor should not come into play until the adept has a clear vision of his firm, and the advice received is not useful until later in the life cycle. According to Swap et al. (2001) having no previous experiences, and lacking the experience foundations, an adept might have no developed method for assimilating and taking in what the mentor instructs and teaches. In order for information to become knowledge, the adept must possess some shared contextual references and meaning with his mentor. Karl-Anders does not think he possessed this knowledge initially, and he took courses offered by Almi instead of mentoring, during the earlier phases. This is further confirmed by Karl-Anders, since he explains how his mentorship relationship builds on questioning of thoughts and reflection. The mentor does not necessarily possess the knowledge; he rather
stimulates Anders to discover it himself. In order to be able to attain this knowledge, Karl-Anders claims it has to be received through theoretical knowledge which can then be adopted in different contexts. According to Swap et al. (2001), a problem with mentoring is often that there is a large time gap between the mentor and the adept, and in Karl-Anders case a way of bridging this gap has been through attending courses. Karl-Anders tells us that as part of one of the courses that he attended at Almi, the final step was to receive a mentor, something that would be in line with findings regarding start-up vs. mature entrepreneurial support from many researchers (Deakins et al. (1997); Storey, (1993); Megginson et al. 2006).

“My mentor asks questions, and following this I have to solve my problems independently. He is not there to explain to me how I should act. His opinion doesn’t really count in this aspect. However, if he has had a similar experience then he can draw parallels from a different perspective and this is like an extra bonus.” (K.A. Bringfeldt, personal communication, 2009-03-20)

To conclude, Karl-Anders strongly believes that the mentorship has enabled him to move forward in the life cycle and that the main reason for this is that his ability to reflect has been increased. Karl-Anders can be perceived as a relatively stressful and energetic person, whose firm has grown rapidly, and with little time for reflection. Having the mentor has introduced Karl-Anders to the concept of reflection, and he has come to realize that in order to move forward, “learning by thinking” is important. A final interesting conclusion that Karl-Anders draws is the fact that he believes that his and his mentor’s relationship will turn from officially being a mentorship, into a networking relationship, something that would further move Karl-Anders and his mentor around Clutterbuck’s (2004) mentoring map.

### 5.6 Claes

When Claes decided to join the mentor program he wanted a mentor who could look at his firm from a helicopter perspective, since he felt that working in a small organization, with few colleagues, often only brings up one perspective of different situations. Claes and his mentors relationship is focused on awakening reflection and involves a lot of feedback functions. However, since Claes and his mentor are active in similar businesses, they have been able to capitalize on each other’s network quite extensively as well. Given this, we conclude that Claes mentorship is somewhere between networking and coaching on Clutterbuck’s (2004) map.
Claes mentor has been active as a business leader for over forty years, and because of this he has extensive experience of going through crisis, such as the financial crisis that we are currently experiencing. Claes explains that by drawing on his own experiences, his mentor has been able to see things from perspectives that Claes could not, and this has been a highly valuable asset to the firm. What is so exceptional with the expert’s knowledge is that by calling on their previous experiences, they can discover patterns quicker and more efficient than the inexperienced. This in turn enables the expert to selectively choose between the information retrieved and form a solid response (Swap et al. 2001). The helicopter perspective that Claes initially requested was definitively fulfilled with respect to the different patterns evolving during times of crisis as his mentor could supply new insights and elaborations. So the relatively large gap in experience in this case is beneficial.

"For the most I made the thinking and he made the comments, relating back to what he had done in similar situations. I have been in my type of position for four years, he has been a corporate leader for 40 years. Having experienced crisis such as the one we are in right now he has definitively given me new perspectives on things" (C. Josefsson, personal communication, 2009-05-08)

As the crisis has hit relatively hard on Claes and the community of Gnosjö, the type of crisis that Greiner (2009) refers to as a transition necessity might be applicable. Growth comes with many problems and inconveniences (Barringer & Greening, 1998), and in this case simultaneously with a crisis. The advice received by the mentor concludes that he has learned from the mentor to see things from different perspectives. In this case, being able to think positively during a crisis has enabled Claes to think forward. Claes has not transferred into a new phase; however, he thinks he is more prepared to do so when the crisis fades out.

5.7 Pia-Resegruppen AB

Pia and her mentor’s relationship is very direct, as the mentor often delivers concrete advice and recommendations, and sometimes even demands that Pia completes certain changes before each meeting. This suggests that the relationship is of the guiding type when applying Clutterbuck’s (2004) mentoring map. A characteristic of this type of mentoring is that the mentor constitutes a role model who often possesses specific knowledge
relevant to the adept, and that these advices are often followed to a large extent (Clutterbuck, 2004). Given that Pia’s mentor is a market executive at a large Swedish organization it is natural that he possesses a lot of knowledge, especially within marketing, something which Pia requested. Pia has implemented a lot of her mentor’s suggestions and for the most part they have been successful. However, what Pia really requested was reassurance, to see if she was on the right track in her marketing efforts among other things. What she got was concrete advice, and Pia has mixed feelings about this. According to Mumford (1995), there are four different learning styles and the most common one for entrepreneurs is activist. This clash with the idea of a mentor program, where the mentor should facilitate reflection and guide the learner through processes. Mumford (1995) found that activist mentors often leap in with strong statements about their own experiences and offer solutions. Naturally, this clash with the idea of having experienced entrepreneurs mentoring new entrepreneurs, since the focus most likely would be on “directing” the entrepreneur rather than guiding (Mumford, 1995).

Even though facilitating reflection and awakening the entrepreneur’s own thoughts seems to be the central theme in most mentorship literature and actual relationships, it is not always necessary the most efficient. In Pia’s case, she has implemented several of the mentor’s direct advices, and this has been successful. According to Cope (2003) higher-level learning has long-term effects and is a cognitive process that involves skill development and new insights.

“Sometimes I’ve felt like the mentorship has been negative. Sometimes he gives me direct instruction and tells me that this is the way to do it. Sometimes I follow them and sometimes I don’t. However, two or three months after his advice I have found myself implementing his recommendations and they have always turned out positive”. (P. Kjellerstedt, personal communication, 2009-05-07)

The drawback from having such a strong mentor as in Pia’s case could be that the learning outcome is more short term, and that Pia does not develop the skills necessary herself, something that could become a problem when the mentor is no longer present or available.
To conclude, Pia has not been able to move forward in the life cycle process, however she is satisfied with the mentorship. The mentorship is as mentioned very direct and in order to compensate for this Pia explains that she has other unofficial mentors, addressing other matters. An implication from this could be that a very direct mentor can be useful, but if the mentor is not able to move across Clutterbuck’s (2004) dimensions, with respect to the needs of the adept at different times, certain aspects intended to come from mentoring are overlooked.

5.8 Anne

Anne first and foremost sees her mentor as an extra security, which can be used to receive input from, when making decisions and facing strategic changes. Her mentor has extensive experience in the same business as Anne, and often draws on her own experiences and gained knowledge in order to contextualize Anne’s questions. Given this, the mentoring that Anne receives is foremost of the guiding type, who according to Clutterbuck (2004) gives direct and straightforward answers and advice. This type of mentor is often very experienced and possesses a lot of knowledge in the specific subject, and often constitutes a role model (Clutterbuck, 2004). Anne’s mentor fits very well with this description. However, their relationship sometimes move more towards the coaching type of mentoring, since Anne’s mentor sometimes stops and challenges Anne, asking her to reflect before giving her own thoughts about certain issues, described by Clutterbuck (2004) as the coaching type.

Anne explains how her aim is to constantly expand her firm and she is a very ambitious young woman. According to Covin and Slevin (1998), when growth occurs, management complexity increases both within a firm and in its external environment. In order to keep growing, these complex problems need to be dealt with. In other words, growth needs to be managed (Covin & Slevin, 1998). Given this, Anne’s main issue is constituted by dealing with such expansion hurdles. The way Anne and her mentor tackle these hurdles is two folded, one being the type of mentoring involving concrete passing of knowledge, and the other being of the “learning by thinking” type, where the mentor teaches by asking ques-
tions which then lead to reflection, encouraging the adept to deeper explore certain issues (Swap et al. 2001). Interesting in this case is that even though the mentor possesses very exclusive knowledge, in a field directly related to the adept, the relationships utilizes on other methods as well. This indicates that both Anne and her mentor has realized that it is more important to tailor Anne’s own understanding in the context of her specific business environment, than to simply use what could be seen as a model of “success” derived from the mentors experiences.

“My mentor told me that she would never accept an adept from another business than the hotel business, since she wants to be able to share with me as many experiences as possible”. (A. Robertsson, personal communication, 2009-05-15)

To conclude, Anne has not by definition entered any new phase in the life cycle development, and at this point it seems like her support need is more of the reassuring type, preparing Anne to enter a new phase in the life cycle.

5.9 Raul

Raul’s mentorship seems to suffer from not being clearly defined in Clutterbuck’s (2004) map. The type of support that Raul receives is guiding and direct, however Raul sets the agenda and always initiates each discussion, something that is significant for a non direct mentorship. The problem that occurs here is the fact that Raul actually does not always want the type of support that his mentor offers, since he wants general advice from someone experienced, who has been in similar situations. Raul’s mentor has not been in those situations, and is not very experienced in the relevant fields either, hence the clash. Raul claims that the two most important aspects of his mentorship has been that he feels more secure since he can always talk to his mentor before making decisions, even though he might not use the input, and also that he could make use of his mentors network.

One reason for the clash is the fact that Raul and his mentor do not see the world in the same way. Raul is more entrepreneurial and risk willing while his mentor is more cautious and comes from large corporations. As Raul puts it, his mentor starts off by looking at things from a skeptic perspective, while Raul does the opposite. Values have been proven very important when matching adepts with mentors and the importance of sharing values
has been claimed one of the most crucial parts when initiating and nurturing mentorships (Swap et al. 2001). Since they start off from so different perspectives, for example when discussing entering the Chinese market, it has been difficult for them to reach any concrete conclusions. Raul thinks that this type of support does not have a considerably large effect later on in the business life cycle, and believes that start up support is very important. Raul believes that mentor support is more important during strategic change, and in the more comprehensive questions. He further states that he believes employing firms for such matters, such as Accenture, could be at least as beneficial, however not as price worthy.

What Raul concludes has been the best thing with his mentorship is that he has been able to make use of his mentor's network. However, the mentor's only function in this aspect was to introduce Raul to his network, not to teach him how to network and how to expand ones network. Raul has received advice; however, it is apparent that when an adept does not consider his or her mentor to be more experienced, or to possess more relevant knowledge, the relationship output is limited.

“When we discussed my possible expansion to China he was very reluctant and this was not even possible in his mind. Completely the opposite to me, so I decided not to waste any time discussing this further. I also wanted to work with small and medium sized firms and when he introduced me to his Rotary network, a lot of insights and opportunities came”. (R. Carlsson, personal communication, 2009-05-11).

5.10 Mattias

When we met Mattias he was in the midst of preparing for the next phase of development and in need of a new perspective, as well as a second opinion about the “softer” variables (more comprehensive matters) involved in developing a business. Mattias’ mentoring relationship is mostly of the coaching type, since his mentor possesses valuable knowledge related to the issues that Mattias deals with. Mattias has also been able to make use of his mentor’s network, and has received a lot of feedback as his mentor often acts as a sounding board. Using Clutterbuck’s (2004) mentoring map, the relationship is touching upon three of the four variables.

Figure 13 Mattias

An interesting aspect of Mattias and his mentor is that they are relatively close to each other in development, and this definitively has an impact on the output from the relation-
ship. In line with Deakins et al. (1997) Mattias claims that as a mature entrepreneur he is not in need of detailed advice regarding issues such as bookkeeping or marketing. This is true to a certain extent, however, it is interesting that he does get a lot of advice that are of the more detailed type, especially within human resources. We believe that this could be a product of Mattias and his mentor being so close to each other on the business life cycle, and it comes naturally to ask about certain detail questions, since they have both developed a strong business strategy and are successful. Mattias primary concern is not therefore to evaluate his strategies, rather to receive a new perspective on different issues from a businessman who is almost in the same development phase as himself.

Similar to the needs of the start up entrepreneurs, are the needs of the entrepreneurs who have been in business several years, as they often request support from the mentor when specific questions arise; such as a situation where they consider employing someone, or when they need to grow. Basically to find out if they were on the right track or not (Megginson et al. 2006). It is very interesting that Mattias uses the word benchmarking when discussing his mentors firm and this has proven to be a valuable tool for Mattias, and the ideas gained from this benchmarking generally falls under the factual support category, normally received and requested during the early phases of business development. Another spinoff effect from the mentoring has been that Mattias has been able to use his mentor’s network. This he claims was a product of the relationship being very informal.

"As the company has developed and reached almost the same development as my mentors firm, we can discuss and compare our thoughts and strategies, in this sense we both benefit and this has probably contributed to the relationship being so informal" (M. Carlsson, personal communication, 2009-03-17).

5.11 Cross case comparison

The cross case comparison will shed light on the patterns discovered when combining the individual case analysis, and will further answer our research questions. The research questions will be addressed one by one starting with the first.

- What type of support is most efficient?

There are many perspectives one can approach this question from, using different measurements when evaluating the different types of support. First of all we can conclude that none of the respondents found any other support than mentoring to be more plausible, which confirms previous empirical findings on the subject (Deakins et al. 1997; Megginson et al. 2006). However, many of the respondents concluded that a combination of mentoring and other support, such as seminars, is the best, since this enables the adept to form a general understanding of critical issues in entrepreneurship and business.

When it comes to the question of how the mentor should behave during the mentorship, we see a clear correlation between the degree to which extent the mentor actively involves the adept in processes of reflection and questioning, and strong results, at least in the long run. We find evidence for this in the interviews, and this is further confirmed in the theory. According to Huber (1991), fundamental learning is accomplished only when the entrepreneur is able to question his or her established way of doing things, and by doing so creating a new cognitive “theories for action”. This type of higher-level learning is the learning that is attained through experiences, and entrepreneurial decisions, through self-reflection and critical reflection (Cope, 2003). In order to be able to reach this type of long-term learning, the mentor must be of the counselling or the coaching type, since these two approaches involve active questioning of the entrepreneurs thoughts as well as assisting the entrepre-
neurs in his or her analysis of situations. Pernilla, Carl-Johan, Karl-Anders, Claes, Anne and Mattias all have mentors who have applied both a coaching, counselling or combined approach and state that they have increased their abilities to address comprehensive matters independently. This in contrast with Pia, who’s mentor has been of the direct guiding type, and who has presented prescribed solutions solving the addressed problems temporarily, but who has not provided solutions in a long-term perspective, since Pia has not been challenged or forced to find out the underlying reasons for the advice, rather she has just adopted it. Richard has had a similar experience and has felt obliged to seek reassurance within himself and other people in his network in order to verify what he has been told is actually correct.

Many researchers consider entrepreneurs learning style to be activist, and that this clash with the idea of a mentor program, where the mentor should facilitate reflection and guide the learner through processes (Mumford, 1995). Activist learning refers to having an experience, and following this experience the entrepreneur should reflect on the experience, conclude from the experience and finally plan their next step. Mumford (1995) found that activist mentors often leap in with strong statements about their own experiences and offer solutions. Naturally, this clash with the idea of having experienced entrepreneurs mentoring new entrepreneurs, since the focus most likely would be on “directing” the entrepreneur rather than guiding. Both Richard and Pia had their experiences, however none of the following steps were addressed by themselves and thus no deeper understanding from the experience was gained. What happened in their case was that the mentor went in and completed the final steps independently using his own framework when concluding. Thereby excluding the adept from the process, and consequently not really giving the adepts any new “theory for action” as Huber (1991) describes it to refer to in the future when perhaps the mentor relationship is over. Even in cases where the mentor obviously has very deep knowledge within the same field as the adept, solely direct support is not preferable. Almost all of our respondents have stated that it is important for them that they are able to form their own vision and shape of their company. In Pia’s case, it became evident that even though many of the recommendations that the mentor presented was good, the impression Pia gave us was that she was often reluctant to making these decisions since she could never be sure if they were just “best practice” and if so, if they would fit her firm as well. According to Swap et al. (2001) knowledge takes years to develop, and this is probably true, making the mentor more experienced. However, getting to know a company also takes time and the entrepreneur has more experience from the firm than anyone else, thus, strong advice will naturally be challenged and might perhaps lead to negativities in the mentorship.

To conclude, what type of mentoring is most efficient, we find the counselling and the coaching type to work best. Having said this, there are of course many other variables that determine the outcome of a mentorship. In order to be a guiding mentor for example, the mentor needs to have explicit knowledge within the field that the entrepreneur needs support within. In our case, Pia’s and Anne’s mentors where the only ones possessing this type of deep knowledge, and hence the only ones able to successfully transfer this type of knowledge. The difference between the two is that Anne’s mentor combined guiding and coaching, in essence she worked from her own experience as a base, providing different perspectives, and then questioned Anne. Pia’s mentor on the other hand focused very much on giving strong, concrete advice. When defining the concept of a mentor in the beginning of this thesis, we concluded that there were two strands of definitions; One being as Deakin’s et al. (1997) definition describes; to help the entrepreneur learn revolves around giving meaning to experiences. The other function is illustrated in the definition of
Clutterbuck (1991), where the mentor simply transfers his or her own knowledge to the adept. We can conclude that the definition by Deakins et al. (1997) describes the soundest relationship and that a combination is probably the best.

- When in the business life cycle is the support of a mentor most efficient?

Having concluded that the indirect mentorship type is the most beneficial, we can also conclude that mentor support should not be delivered until the first phase has been surpassed. Based on our empirical findings we motivate this by the fact that in order to understand the type of support that the mentor provides, the adept needs to be able to create his or her own perception of what he or she is being advised or taught, and during the conceptualization and start-up phase, the adept lacks the ability to form this type of perception concerning his or her own firm, since the firm has not yet been developed and tested in different situations (yielding vital knowledge about the firm and its capabilities). Therefore, the advice needed would have to be of the factual direct type, what Sullivan (2000) refers to as the necessary “tools” for survival. Having no previous experiences, and lacking the experience foundations, a adept might have no method in assimilating and taking in what the mentor instructs and teaches. In order for information to become knowledge, the learning person must possess some shared contextual references and meaning with his mentor (Swap et al. 2001). Mentorship in the earlier phases is of course not negative, however, it can often be found through other more suitable and cost beneficial channels.

The time or experience gap between a mentor and an adept could result in both the mentor becoming inpatient in guiding the adept, or the adept might feel that someone with more similar level of knowledge could do more for him or her than that of the more experienced mentor (Swap et al. 2001). In the earliest phases of development, perhaps an incubator organization, which normally has people employed who work as “specialized” start up mentors, would be better suited. Swap et al. (2001) illustrate this relationship well; In order for information to become knowledge, the learning person must possess some shared contextual references and meaning with his mentor. If the new information lies outside the adepts “zone” of coping with the new information, the mentorship will be of little use. However, as experiences accrue, an effect of the mentorship could be, even though the initial learning experience is not as powerful, an increase in the adept’s ability to take on instructions and advice, and in doing so widen his or her “zone” (Swap et al. 2001). Thus, by going through the crucial phases, collecting knowledge and experience, the adept becomes more mature for a mentor relationship and can fully utilize on the opportunity of being part in a mentor program. Many of our respondents state that theory and mentorship should not compete with each other, but rather work as compliments. According to our interview subjects, in order to be able to create one’s own perception on the input from the mentor, the basic knowledge must be attained through either courses organized by organizations like Almi, or by experience going through the hectic but fruitful early phases of development.

Another conclusion we can draw is that entrepreneurs with a spoken ambition to grow is in more need of mentoring. We base this assumption on two facts. Firstly, it is important to realize that a mentorship is a valuable resource which should be used to develop firms. If the mentorship is too relaxed, the mentoring could easily be replaced by informal social relationships, such as family members, other friends who run firms and so on. Agneta is an example of when the mentorship has no predefined goals or ambitions, and where we get the impression that the relationship is more of a friendship relationship discussing anything, than having an actual predetermined goal. Agneta is in the stabilization phase, phase three, and has no ambitions to move forward. Mattias on the other hand knows what he
wants to accomplish and understands how this can be done. He wanted to move from phase four into phase five, and has done so, much with the help of the mentor.

Secondly, complexity increases and thus also the need for assistance. According Covin and Slevin (1998), when growth occurs, management complexity increases both within a firm and in its external environment. In order to keep growing, these complex problems need to be dealt with. In other words, growth needs to be managed (Covin & Slevin, 1998). Based on this, it is not possible to say in which phase the support is most needed. However, we can conclude that during the start-up phase the adept is generally in need of other types of support than mentoring. Firms without growth ambitions do not need mentors, and the further a firm has developed on the life cycle, the more sophisticated the relationship becomes. Storey (1993), one of the most famous critics in this matter bases his arguments on his belief that entrepreneurs in an early stage of development do not need the type of support that experienced mentors (also entrepreneurs) can deliver, and that other types of support, such as theoretical, is more efficient for them.

6 Conclusion

Having answered our two research questions, we can now return to address our purpose. To grasp all the possible pros and cons that are related to a mentor/adept relationship would be a very extensive process, and since every relationship is unique, also a very complex research procedure.

We have looked at two parameters; what type of mentor support is most efficient, and when in the business life cycle should this type of support be implemented? This has led us to draw general conclusions about our purpose; how an experienced entrepreneur, a mentor, can best help a less experienced entrepreneur, an adept, achieve entrepreneurial development during and throughout different phases of the entrepreneurial life-cycle.

Entrepreneurs at different points on the entrepreneurial life cycle model have different needs, and therefore it is important that a mentor is able to switch between different mentoring styles during different points in time. In the early phases of the life cycle we believe that the more direct mentorship style works better than it does later on the life cycle, however it does not work very well at this point either. This type of support, guiding support according to Clutterbuck (2004) is often concrete and direct and gives relatively straightforward answers and advice. As many of the respondents have stated, this is negative for the firm as it will be shaped by the mentor rather than by the entrepreneur.

Having evaluated the direct type of support and excluded this as a feasible method, we look at the more non direct support for start-up firms. In order for information to become knowledge, the adept must possess some shared contextual references and meaning with his or her mentor. If the new information lies outside the adept’s “zone” of coping with the new information, the mentorship will be of little use (Swap et al. 2001). Many of the respondents express that they did not possess this type of contextual understanding during the early phase of running their firm, and therefore often looked for answers through other channels.

As the firm has entered the second and the following phases, a shift in needs occur; and the adept’s knowledgebase has reached a crucial point since he or she now has developed his or her concept, and has a clear vision of the firm. An increase in the adept’s ability to take on instructions and advice has occurred, and accordingly widened his or her “zone” (Swap et al. 2001), preparing the adept for mentorship. During the following growth phases
on the life cycle, and also in the stabilization phase while preparing for future growth, the entrepreneur is now in need of support, and this support is more likely to be beneficial and long term if the support is of the non directive type, awakening reflection and preparing the adept to be able to draw his or her own conclusions and take responsibility for his or her development experiences and progress.

So to conclude our purpose, a mentor can best help an entrepreneur develop during and throughout the different phases on the life cycle model, by supplying non direct support after the start-up and conception phase has been surpassed.

6.1 Discussion

After writing this thesis and conducting research around mentoring in the context of entrepreneurship, we can conclude that this field is complex and fragmented, since it has so many dimensions to it. Apart from the two dimensions we have examined, the timing of support and the nature of support, important dimensions are also the fit of the mentor/adept, the goal of the mentorship, and the use of a new support function. The latter refers to having entrepreneurs involved in a mentor program with the aim to help each other in an organized surrounding.

We believe that in order for a mentorship to be even more efficient, it needs to be more formal in the sense that both the mentor and the adept determine what the adept’s goal is with the mentorship, and where the adept sees himself in the future. Even though many of the mentorships were very successful, a general characteristic was that much time was devoted to discussing things that were unrelated to the business. Even though a mentorship that is informal can be beneficial, we believe that many personal type questions could be better addressed by using other forums, such as social relationships described by Mumford (1995). Since the mentorship should be seen as a valuable resource, it should also be focused on the core of the mentorship, that is the developing of a firm and an entrepreneur’s ability to lead this firm.

Another finding from our research was that many entrepreneurs believed that they had a lot to learn from their adept colleagues, who were also participants of the mentor program. Networking has only been present in two of the mentor/adept relationships, mainly because Almi does not really approve of the adepts capitalizing on their mentors networks. However, as they are all part of a mentor program, and they do meet as a group occasionally, this could be better organized. Both we and the adepts in this research believe there is huge potential in those meetings, since the participants are all in relatively similar situations and can therefore help each other, and benefit further, by supporting each other, sharing experiences, and perhaps even do business with each other.

6.2 Future Studies

During our research we have discovered certain features which would be interesting for future research. One such field is to examine whether or not it would be beneficial to switch mentor when entering new phases of development. In essence, the questioning would be if tailor made support from experts in certain types of development is more beneficial than having a long term consistent mentorship.

Another interesting topic for future research would be to investigate the mentor’s perspective on the mentorship, versus the adept’s. Do mentors and adepts perceive the mentoring relationship the same way, or do they have different perspectives on how the assistance is provided (direct, non-direct, coaching, guiding etc.), and the relationship structure (formal,
in-formal), as well as other important aspects of the mentorship? This would be very useful for mentorship research since it would provide a more extensive picture of how the mentoring relationship actually looks like, and point out the interpretive differences between the two parts involved. This could then serve as a ground for research aiming to decrease the gaps between these two interpretive sides.
References


Gibb, A.A (1994), “Do we teach (approach) small business the way we should?”, Internationalizing entrepreneurship and training, band 6, p.487.


Appendices

6.3 Appendix 1

Intervjumall

1. Vad hade du för affärsidé och vision när du startade företaget? / What was your business idea, and vision, when starting the firm?

2. Vad är din professionella samt akademiska bakgrund? What is your professional, as well as academic, background?

3. Hur gick det till när du fick din mentor, och varför fick du denne? När fick du mentorn; innan du startade företaget, under startperioden, eller senare? Vilken roll spelade mentorn i denna fas av företagandet? / Under what circumstances did you attain your mentor, and why? Before starting the firm, during the start-up process, or later on? What role did the mentor play in this particular phase of the business?

5. Förekom det någon form av matching innan du blev tilldelad en mentor? / Was there any matching process involved when you were allotted your mentor?

6. Presenterar några av de stegen som känns aktuella för entreprenören i fråga. / Presents some of the phases which feels relevant for this specific entrepreneur.

6a. Under vilken fas enligt dig själv blev du tilldelad din mentor? Vilken fas låg din mentor i vid denna tidpunkt? / During what phase do you consider your mentor to have been attained? Which phase was your mentor currently in during this time period?


8. Ser du några tydliga skillnader i ditt sätt att ta större beslut nu när du har en mentor jämfört innan du hade en mentor? Hade du agerat annorlunda utan mentorn och hade detta i så fall varit till det bättre eller sämre? / Do you consider your decision making abilities to have changed since the involvement in the mentor program? Would your decision making processes look differently without the interaction with the mentor, and if so, is this positive or negative?

9. Hur ofta träffas ni? Om det är något du vill diskutera omgående, är detta möjligt eller är väntetiden ibland lång? / How often do you meet with the mentor? If you want to discuss something urgent, is this possible, or do you sometimes need to wait for a long time before receiving input from the mentor?

10. Jämför mentorskapet med att ha enstaka kurser, där du teoretiskt får lära dig av professionella och sedermera ta med dig detta ut i näringslivet? Vilket tror du är bäst, fördelar/ nackdelar? När i företagarenprocessen är det att föredra mentorskap och tvårtom? / If you compare the mentorship with attending theoretical courses and lectures in specific topics in business, which would you consider most effective for learning and development, and why? When in the entrepreneurial business process do you consider the two alternatives to be most effective, respectively?

10. Skulle du klassificera mentorskapet som formellt eller informellt? Har detta förhållande förändrats under tiden? Har ni ett slutdatum på mentorprogrammet? / Would you classify...
your mentorship as formal or informal? Has this relationship changed over time? Do you have a final date for the mentor program?

11. Vilken fas var det viktigast för dig att ha en mentor? Tycker du att mentorer ska specialisera sig på olika faser? En Start-up mentor respektive en growth mentor? During which phase do you consider the mentor to have been of most importance? Do you believe a mentor should specialize in certain phases? In other words a start-up specializing mentor and a growth orientated mentor, and so on?

12. Har du någonsin känt att mentorn kanske inte alltid varit till nytta i sin assistans, eller till och med har varit en belastning i något hänseende? / Have you ever felt like the mentor might have been somewhat problematic, or even a hinder to your development, on some level during your mentorship?

13. I detaljerade frågor, såsom finansiella, bokföringsrelaterade eller produktrelaterade, skulle du då vända dig till din mentor eller en expert inom området, eller kanske läsa dig till informationen själv? In questions concerning detailed aspects of business, such as accounting or product development, would you rather turn to your mentor or an expert within that specific area?

14. Har du haft någon nytta av din mentors kontaktnät? / Have you been able to use your mentor's network on any level?

15. Vilken uppföljning av mentorprogrammet har skett från Almis sida? / What type of follow-up has been made by Almi, concerning the mentorship?

16. Spontana kommentarer eller något vi glömt? / Do you have any spontaneous comments that you would like to share with us about the mentor program in general, or do you want to bring up something you feel was missing in this interview?

17. skulle du rekommendera en vän som ska starta/har företag - att skaffa mentor? Varför/varför inte? / Would you recommend a friend who is about to start a firm / already has a firm – to get a mentor? Why or why not?
6.4 Appendix 2

Ten steps developed by Hancock (1998)

1. Take a copy of the transcript and read through it. When you see something that contains apparently interesting or relevant information, make a brief note in the margin about the nature of the information you have noticed.

2. Look through your margin notes and make a list of the different types of information you have found. If the transcript was typed using a word processor, a quicker way of doing this will be to highlight each item of data, copy it and paste it onto a list (make sure you keep an original copy of the whole transcript in your file!)

3. You now have a list of items excerpted from the text. Read through the list of data items and categorise each item in a way that describes what it is about. You will find yourself using some of the categories several times because several items of data refer to the same topic. However, at this stage go for as many categories as you need and don't put something into the same category as a previous item of data if you even suspect that you may have identified a new category. The number of categories can be reduced later.

4. Now look at the list of categories you have identified from the transcript and consider whether some of the categories may be linked in some way. If so, you could list them as major categories and the original, smaller categories as minor categories. Some textbooks refer to these major categories as themes.

5. Look through the list of minor and major categories of data. As you do so, compare and contrast the various categories. You may find that you change your mind about some of the minor categories. As you start to develop “the big picture” you may perceive some items of data differently and see them as “fitting” better into an alternative category. Sometimes, an item seems to belong in two categories. If so, list it under both.

6. Move on to the next transcript and repeat the process from stages 1 - 5. As you work through the second and subsequent transcripts you will continue to identify new categories of information but you will increasingly find that you recognise an item of data as belonging to a previously identified category. Eventually you will run out of new categories and find that all the items of relevant and interesting information can be accommodated in the existing categories. At this stage some researchers like to colour code their categories and use a different coloured highlighter pen for each category to highlight items of data in the transcripts. This is a good idea as it makes recognition of data easier when reviewing the transcripts at a later stage. However, be aware that you could change your mind later about an item of data and want to move it to a different category. Always keep clean copies of transcripts so that you can go over it with a different coloured pen.

7. Collect together all the extracts from the transcribed interviews that you have put into one category because they appeared to bear some relationship to each other. Examine each of the extracts in turn. Do they belong together or are there any extracts that now look as though they don't fit and really belong in a different category?
8 When all the relevant transcript data has been sorted into minor and major categories, look again at the data contained in each category. As you review the data within the system of categorisation you have developed you may decide to move some items of data from one category to another. Or you may decide that information is in the right category, the “right place”, in that it fits together, but the terms used to name or describe the category is inaccurate.

9 Once you have sorted out all the categories and are sure that all the items of data are in the right category, look at the range of categories to see whether two or more categories seem to fit together. If so they may form a major theme in your research.

10 Go back to the original copies of the transcripts, the ones where you made your initial notes in the margins. Look at any text that you did not highlight at all because it did not appear relevant at the time. Now you have the themes, major categories and minor categories clearly sorted, consider whether any of the previously excluded data is relevant and should be included in your results.