

# Inter-cultural mentoring for newcomer immigrants: Mentor perspectives and better practices

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## Abstract

The objective of this study was to draw from mentor feedback and reflections and examine the practices of mentors successful in mentoring immigrant newcomers. The paper reports on how mentors related the competencies they reported as foundational for decoding, absorbing, and transferring tacit/explicit knowledge holdings. Capturing rich insights, the guidelines for best practice are presented for mentoring of immigrant newcomer mentees in smaller/medium cities (SMC) with emerging immigrant populations. Findings identify seven key themes by mentors: mentees' culture, mentors' cultural self-awareness, building relationality and accessibility, sponsorship, deep learning, racism, and small city truths as they influence (a) knowledge transfer and personal learning within the dyad, (b) acculturation/adaptation, and (c) perceived business and network gains on the part of the mentee. This paper also petitions for clarification of the multiple meanings accorded to the use of inter-cultural mentoring (ICM). A purposeful sampling strategy and best practice research (BPR) were employed for this research investigation.

**Keywords:** inter-cultural mentoring (ICM), cross-cultural mentoring (CCM), newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs, best practice research (BPR), applied research, smaller/medium cities (SMC)

## Introduction

According to the United Nations (2013) in 2013 the number of international migrants worldwide (e.g., immigrants, refugees, displaced persons) reached 232 million, an increase of 57 million, or 33%, compared to numbers 13 years ago at the start of this century. As of 2014, roughly 4.3 million people immigrated to OECD countries a 6% rise over 4.1 million (OECD, 2015). In Canada, where this research originates, the country has welcomed almost 1.9 million (1,863,791) new permanent and temporary residents (2005-2010). Since 2001, two-thirds of the country's population growth has been due to immigration, making Canada the fastest growing country in the G8 (OECD, 2010). Historically, newcomers migrated to larger cities; increasingly, however, newcomers are moving to SMCs.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, population changes increasingly shape the demographic landscape and according to *The Migration Observatory* migration, “is now the dominant element in population change in most Western European countries and in parts of the *Anglosphere* (USA, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand)” (Coleman, 2013 pp. 2). Correspondingly, newcomers increasingly influence various aspects of Canadian life, and, pertinent here, is their presence has implications for lifelong learning. Arguably, this is the case for other countries. The United States, for example, the prime destination for new permanent residents, welcomed a little less than one million new permanent residents in 2013 alone, and the United Kingdom accepted 291 000 permanent immigrants, a 2% increase over 286 100 in 2012 (OECD, 2015).

Inter-cultural mentoring and other educational approaches for immigrant populations are increasingly of vital importance. However, there is a particular urgency when newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs are included. A 2010 Conference Board of Canada study (Downie, 2010) reported that Canada may be missing out on economic growth opportunities driven by newcomers. Immigrants could inject life into Canada's failing innovation performance, augment job growth, expand Canada's trade relations, raise the value of exports, increase the number of patents, and boost foreign direct investment. Yet, according to Downie (2010), too many face burdensome and preventable obstacles that limit their chances of fully participating in the economy. The unrealized potential of immigrant entrepreneurship is thus considerable.

For newcomer immigrants, networks and relationships are necessary for accessing knowledge inherent in others and knowledge holdings that exist outside of formal institutional learning (Lo & Teixeira, 2015). Mentoring has liberated learning from the historic or age-old institutional educational bodies and embraces pedagogy that emphasizes formal and informal social learning and educational arrangements (Bard & Moore, 2000). Not only does this assist learners in capitalizing on the perhaps less important and easier to access explicit knowledge holdings, but also the highly valuable, often elusive and inaccessible, tacit knowledge holdings. This holds true for newcomer immigrants intent on starting a business. For newcomer immigrants, the absence of institutionally complete communities or strong ethnic economies in new gateway communities means immigrants are unable to rely extensively on their own community resources, an element considered instrumental for immigrant business development (Lo & Teixeira, 2015).

In other words, due to the lack of ethnic enclaves, recent immigrants are unable to draw on ties to co-ethnics. A tradition of settling immigrants is often minimal to nonexistent in new gateway communities; correspondingly small and medium size cities often face the challenge of attracting and retaining immigrants. For newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs, the limited or lack of social integration and/or existing networks lead to insufficient knowledge of the new business climate (Reeves, 2014b). Mentors can play an important role in the entrepreneurial development of an entrepreneur (Memon et al., 2015; St-Jean, 2009, 2012). However, ‘classic mentoring’ does not capture the robust and, at times, challenging interactions present in inter-cultural mentoring relationships for newcomer

immigrants and it can be especially contemporaneous when the mentee is a newcomer immigrant entrepreneur to an SMC (Reeves, 2014b).

Correspondingly, this research asked how mentors to newcomer immigrant mentees perceive the diverse meanings of inter-cultural mentoring and the skills and/or competencies that are required as they pertain to knowledge transfer and personal learning within the dyad, acculturation, and perceived business and network gains on the part of the mentee. The primary intent of the dissemination of this research is that the key perspectives and practices delineated in this article may serve as a useful planning resource and provide practical utility to both programme participants and to programme administrators in their efforts to facilitate personal learning/knowledge transfer, programme replication, and retention, and create the greatest likelihood of success for mentor dyads. Thus, the findings and recommendations for practice have been blended for ease of use. This research may also serve government and community stakeholders involved in the development or implementation of educational support for newcomer immigrants.

The following sections provide; a literature review examining the term ICM to both clarify and resolve the conceptual confusion or the varied descriptions used for the same construct by different authors, an overview of the mentoring programme of interest and key informants, the methodology and methods adopted by the investigation are then outlined. This is followed by the findings and discussion section which outlines the seven constituent themes reported by mentors: mentees' culture, mentors' cultural self-awareness, building relationality and accessibility, sponsorship, deep learning, racism, and small city truths as they influence (a) knowledge transfer and personal learning within the dyad, (b) acculturation/adaptation, and (c) perceived business and network gains on the part of the mentee. An evaluation of the findings in relation to the extant literature and suggestions for practice are then provided before the research limitations and conclusions are presented.

### **Literature Review: Inter-Cultural Mentoring**

The 21st century model of mentoring has moved beyond the limitations of the traditional mentoring structure —one hierarchical in nature — to one that is more egalitarian and based on equity rather than equality. In other words, both parties are stakeholders and accordingly, both parties have equity in the relationship (Jones & Brown, 2011). According to Jones and Brown (2011), mentoring is a transactional relationship grounded in learning. The mentor is a facilitator of knowledge who assists in bringing clarity regarding the mentee's own aspirations for improvement, helping each mentee diagnose the gap between aspiration and present level of performance. In more recent years, mentoring research has examined a number of important contextual variables such as race and gender (Blake-Beard, 2009; Noe, Greenberger & Wang, 2002; Kram, 1985), however little research exists that examines inter-cultural mentoring where the mentee is a recent immigrant (Reeves 2014a). Within the global society, in which immigration is an expanding world-wide phenomenon it is important that there may be significant research and theory development on the topic of domestic inter-cultural mentoring for new immigrants.

Within the existing literature there is a serious weakness in terminology. First, most studies use the popular or colloquial term, *cross-cultural* mentoring; however, cross-cultural refers to “comparison of cultural differences or situations in which such differences exist” where as, the term inter-cultural refers to the “actual interaction between people of different cultures” (Stewart &

Bennett 1991, p. xii). Generalizability of research, the creation of models and theories, and the ability to communicate about important findings can be hobbled by lexicon confusion. Within this research the term *inter-cultural mentoring* is used. Second, differentiating among the incidents of inter-cultural mentoring is challenging. Is ICM the same for third generation visible minorities (i.e., Asian or Black American [USA] citizens) as it is for newcomer immigrants? Is ICM the same for dyads living both in different countries and from different cultures, in other words, mentoring relationships that cross boundaries of time, geography, and culture and that are increasingly enabled by technological developments? It is difficult to differentiate the precise incidence and type of inter-cultural mentoring when subjects, in this case, the mentor and mentee, are inadequately or insufficiently identified. Currently, the broad literature on inter-cultural mentoring lacks agreement on nomenclature and often, about who, specifically, is being mentored; this lack of consistent terminology is counterproductive (Reeves, 2014b; Reeves, 2015a; Reeves, 2015b).

This review of inter-cultural mentoring literature will demarcate variations located within manuscripts in an effort to minimize confusion, refine terminology, and clarify (a) how inter-cultural mentoring is reported, (b) the range of phenomena to which ICM refers, and (c) where mentoring research of newcomer immigrants is located within inter/cross-cultural mentoring research and literature.

- Domestic. Mentoring literature concerning visible minorities who share an understanding of how a country works because they were born and raised in the same country, but are of different cultural/racial backgrounds to the dominant population (e.g., Black, Hispanic, Asian, Aboriginal). In other words, inquiries into the experiences of primarily US-born individuals who are visible minorities with non-dominant cultural backgrounds, and not newcomer immigrants to the nation in question.
- Foreign Born Newcomer. International or cross-national mentoring literature pertaining to inter-cultural mentoring relationships diverges from the research discussed above (Domestic) and specifically pertains to *newcomer mentees who are foreign born*.
- Global/Pan-cultural. Global or pan-cultural efforts illuminate cross-national variabilities in mentoring. These authors lend global perspectives with insights into the value of creating a shared language for discussing mentoring relationship development, while at the same time acknowledging the specific impact that cultural differences play in helping to shape mentoring processes.

Research studies on mentoring are limited to the last 30 years, beginning with Kram's (1985) work; nevertheless, a substantial body of research is beginning to accumulate regarding mentoring. Mentoring research has examined variables such as race (Blake-Beard, Murrell, & Thomas, 2007; Carroll & Barnes, 2015), ethnicity (Brenner, Menzies, Dionne, & Fillion, 2010; Knight Wilcox, 2002), and gender (Ramaswami et al., 2013). However, it is only recently that researchers have begun examining mentoring through an inter-cultural lens that reflects the current age of immigration and globalization (Carraher, Sullivan, & Crocitto, 2008; Hu, Pellegrini & Scandura, 2011; Lunsford, & Ochoa, 2014; Reeves, 2014b; Reeves, 2015; Reeves (in press); Mezas & Scandura, 2010).

For the ICM field to advance with more certainty, clarity and agreement, there is a need to better understand the term. As inter-cultural mentoring research continues to infiltrate various academic disciplines (e.g., management, human resource development, training, adult education, nursing, and psychology), a comprehensive and analytical review is warranted to link the assorted genres of inter-cultural research, to provide targeted direction for academics and researchers, and to increased accessibility for practitioners. Thus, the literature reviewed for this article focused on distinctions

among the various uses/connotations of the term *inter-cultural mentoring* colloquially referred to as *cross-cultural mentoring* (Reeves, 2015, in press). Thomas (2001) and others (Blake-Beard, 2009; Bearman et al., 2007; Purcell & Scheyvens, 2015) call for research that can further articulate the authentic dynamics of mentoring in diverse relationships.

### **Programme of Study and Key Informants**

The complexity of evaluating business initiatives often requires that research methods capture the rich, nuanced, and varied personal feedback of individual cases or small-scale analyses (St-Jean, 2009; 2012). Given that there were limited numbers of locations from which to draw sufficient numbers of specific mentorship relationships that included an inter-cultural context in a SMC, the Fredericton Business Immigrant Mentorship Program (BIMP) in New Brunswick (NB), Canada was selected as the setting from which to identify mentor-participants for this study (Population of Fredericton: 85,688; NB: 753,914). The BIMP programme is offered and administered by five New Brunswick Canadian Chamber of Commerce/Board of Trade affiliates in their respective cities. This entrepreneurial mentorship programme was established to assist business efforts by newcomer immigrants in SMCs lacking institutionally complete communities or strong ethnic economies in new gateway communities.

The mentor pool was comprised of current/retired business owners from the Chamber of Commerce. Five mentors from the BIMP programme, who were reported as “high-caliber” by the BIMP administrator, were recruited to the study. Study participants were well established locally and provincially, either born in New Brunswick, Canada or had lived in the province for several decades, and been mentors in the programme for several years. One mentor was from a first generation immigrant family who came from a family of entrepreneurs and was an entrepreneur himself. All mentors were from the ethnic majority population and dominant culture in Canada. Some mentor participants had taken breaks but returned after the short sabbaticals. Mentor and mentee programme participants committed a minimum thirty hours over a period of five months; this time commitment is, however, a guide and most dyads readily exceeded it.

### **Methodology**

This research was informed by best practice research (BPR) approach and outlines convergent best practices emerging from the literature and research findings. According to Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, and Wu (2005, p. 308), there is a “discrepancy between the institutional capacity for scientifically based research and practical demands for useful knowledge”. Real-world problems often call for applied research that attempts to identify high impact, low-cost interventions as such BPR is a method of investigation that has emerged in response to such needs. This methodology recognizes evidence-based practices and takes into account the perspectives and experience of service providers and practitioners in the field (Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, & Wu, 2005). Value is placed on key informant feedback and reflection for the development of effective knowledge translation (Vesley, 2011). In other words, best practice research has the distinct capability to link the world of research or academic inquiry and practice (Vesley, 2011). According to Vesley (2011, p. 99), “[o]ne of the ways of improving public organizations is to identify, communicate and facilitate the transfer of practices that seem to work successfully somewhere else”;... in other words, to “study carefully and disseminate ‘what works.’”

## **Methods**

Identifying inter-cultural mentorship relationships which would provide the means for learning about practices of mentors successful in mentoring immigrant newcomers was a significant challenge. Correspondingly, a purposeful sampling strategy was used to select the programme and participants of study (Creswell, 2002). For this investigation active consent processes were implemented. Potential participants were informed of the study by a letter which included the purpose of the research, the data collection activities, and the reporting of data. Recipients were invited to contact the researcher with any questions or concerns about the study. Signed consent forms were obtained from participants. The interviews were carried out in a comfortable area for participants that provided sufficient privacy and that minimized external distractions. Allen et al.'s (2008) comprehensive review of mentoring research emphasizes the importance of context. Correspondingly, this study utilized self-reporting, employing a quantitative instrument in the form of a retrospective survey questionnaire and qualitative, one-on-one interviews (Patton, 2002). Instruments for this and an earlier study of immigrant newcomer mentees from the same programme (Reeves, 2014a) received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick. Research processes adhered to the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2000).

Mentor participants participated in face-to-face interviews at locations of their choice. Both a paper survey and the face-to-face interviews were administered at the same session in June 2015; which lasted between 1 ½ to 2 hours. This approach gave voice to what matters to mentors and why. Hearing the mentor testimonies permitted access to descriptions and personal viewpoints creating context and elaborating on or extending quantitative results. An in-depth understanding was sought in an effort to extract a “thick description” (Denzin, 1989, p. 83), one that went beyond the surface-level and captured nuances beyond the readily observable phenomena. Hearing the actual testimonies of the participants permitted access to descriptions and personal viewpoints that created context and elaborated on or extended the quantitative results. The five mentors who participated in this study were at the following stages in their careers: retired business owner (n = 1); current business owner and national trade association president (n = 1); retired business owner and executive director of a non-governmental organization (n = 1); and current business owner (n = 2).

Quantitative data were collected via a paper survey with Likert questions, as well as yes/no, radial, and free text questions. There were seven sections in the survey relating to:

- Demographics
- Mentor perceptions
- Meeting activities with mentee
- Meeting logistics
- Inter-cultural and learning matters
- Concluding questions related to the programme
- Summary Question: “So, why do you bother? Is it worth the effort? What makes it worth the effort?”

Interviews were digitally recorded and explained and expanded upon the survey data and questions and were embedded in a conversational interview approach (Patton, 2002). Thematic questions asked of mentors were:

1. What challenges do immigrant mentees and local mentors face with concern to mentoring?
2. To what extent does mentoring contribute to the success of newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs?
3. What challenges do mentors face with regard to mentoring?
4. What impedes/supports mentoring relationships?
5. What factors positively/negatively influence inter-cultural mentoring?

### ***Analysis of Data***

Hearing the actual testimonies of participants allows access not only to descriptions and personal viewpoints, but also to insights regarding the meaning attached to participants' experiences (Merriam, 1988). Correspondingly, with respect to the key informant data, qualitative methods were applied to transform data into meaningful findings. Responses from each key informant were recorded and transcribed. Analysis began at the point of data collection while taking time to memo, record, and track analytical insights that emerged as interview data were gathered and analyzed. Interviews were transcribed and organized and translated into findings by a careful review of interview transcripts, by identifying any significant patterns, and by constructing a framework for communicating what the data revealed (Yin, 2003). Content analysis was used for identification of themes and findings (Creswell, 2003). To that end, a process of inductive analysis provided the opportunity to identify themes important to participants, to discover any patterns that connect said themes, and create coded categories for the purpose of organization. Following this initial analysis effort, emergent research themes were organized into major theme categories.

### **Findings and Discussion**

This research was undertaken to provide a deeper understanding of ICM for newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs. Specifically, those living in an SMC or a new gateway community where a tradition of settling immigrants is often minimal to nonexistent. From survey and interview data seven themes of significance emerged relevant to inter-cultural mentoring practices for newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs: learning about mentees' culture, cultivating cultural self-awareness among mentors, building relationality and accessibility between mentor and mentee, seizing opportunities for sponsorship, creating deep learning, developing awareness of racism, and appreciating small city realities. This research was undertaken to provide analyses that could inform the design of mentoring programs. Relevant literature, comments of mentor participants, author reflections, and implications for mentoring programme coordinators/managers are discussed within the seven themes employing an approach that is responsive to this goal. According to both mentees (Reeves, 2014a) and mentors, *classic mentoring* does not capture the robust and, at times, challenging interactions present in inter-cultural mentoring relationships for newcomer immigrants, especially when the mentee is simultaneously a newcomer immigrant and an entrepreneur in a SMC. In order to succeed, mentor/mentee participants reported that recent immigrant mentees must learn how to interact effectively in a completely new environment where people think, feel, and act differently, and often speak a different language. Thus, these entrepreneurs often have to deal with significant barriers in starting and maintaining their businesses (Price & Chacko, 2009). Mentoring is replete with suggestions about best practices in education but is lacking with regard to BPR of newcomer immigrants to SMCs.

The following section provides an overview of promising approaches. Emphasis has been placed on mentor participant feedback and reflections, author reflections, and on the development

of effective means of knowledge translation and transfer. The seven themes are presented in a manner blending literature, findings, and suggestions for best practice. In sum, mentors reported that mentor competencies as they pertain to cultural awareness, relationality and accessibility, sponsorship, knowledge exchange and deep learning, racism, and small town realities were fundamental to successful mentoring.

### **1. Learning about Mentees' Culture**

Mentors recognized the importance and significance of culture and possessed an understanding that knowing about their mentees' culture and/or worldviews were important, commenting "We need something that deals with their culture, religion, worldviews, etiquette. I'd really like to know 'where they're coming from'. .... and humour – that's a hard one." Participants highlighted a range of perspectives and practices linked to enhancing relationship connectedness relating to mentee culture. To foster effective communication, mentors described the importance of endeavouring to see the world from the mentee's perspective(s), particularly when there are power differentials (i.e., race, age, and gender). Mentors reported that the cultural background(s) of mentees influence perception of and expectations for the mentoring relationship. One mentor reflected, "I like to know a bit about them and about their culture before I sit with them... you get off on a better foot". Accordingly, the need for mentor competence in navigating differences due to differing national and/or cultural value systems should not be underestimated within inter-cultural mentoring relationships — for both members of the dyad.

Targeted strategies may enable mentors to prepare for the unique needs, expectations, or background of a given mentee, including his or her racial/ethnic/cultural identity. Although there is little empirical evidence regarding the role of culture in mentoring (Chi-Ying, Bemark, & Talleyrand, 2007; Kent, Kochan, & Green, 2013; Reeves 2014b) there are models that may highlight the dynamics present during inter-cultural mentoring and a plethora of public resources. However, given that the Internet is susceptible to vandalism and can host unreliable information, it is recommended that a curated database managed by the mentoring programme be created to ensure participants are accessing appropriate and credible resources. First, a theoretical framework to understand cultural dimensions may be useful. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's seven dimensions of culture theory (1993), Project GLOBE, (Global Leadership and Organization Behavior Effectiveness) ( House et al., 2004), and Hofstede's (2010) national cultural dimensions theory provide benchmarks for discussion of national cultures or values. Hofstede, for example, calculated the Power Distance Index, which provides insights about dependence relationships in a country. In low power distance countries, there is limited dependence of subordinates on bosses, and there is preference for consultation. In high power distance countries, there is considerable dependence of subordinates on bosses, and subordinates are unlikely to approach and contradict their bosses directly (Hofstede, 2010, p. 61). Second, compiling a catalogue of credible resources to support participants was also undertaken. Suggestions for this resource include (a) country specific breakdowns such as All Refer.com (<http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/>), Centre for Inter-cultural Learning (<http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/ci-ic-eng.asp?iso=ca#cn-1>), and NationMaster (<http://www.nationmaster.com>), and (b) inter-cultural communication research. *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Inter-cultural Communicators*, for instance, is very accessible and is an open access resource located at [sherwoodfleming.com](http://sherwoodfleming.com).

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's and Hofstede's research, for example, represents group level assessment and should not be viewed as a rigidly prescribed set of behaviours or characteristics, but rather as frameworks through which actions are filtered. In other words, these



recommendations are just that — recommendations. The goal and intent is to provide opportunities to share ideas, experiences, and different perspectives and perceptions between mentor and mentee. Not every individual from even the most circumscribed or strict culture will display any or all of the features commonly associated with group level assessments. Other factors derived from socioeconomic and demographic status will also greatly affect behaviours, beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes, including gender, age, level of education, and urban/rural orientation. Mentors either explicitly worked to “find similarities and common denominators” or eluded to it. For mentoring program coordinators findings suggest that mentors and mentees should be encouraged to have intentional conversations to check their own assumptions against each other if they are to share mutual accountability for the mentoring partnership. Everyone is, after all, an individual, and individual differences do persist. This was echoed by newcomer immigrant mentees in an earlier study (Reeves, 2014b). Ultimately, the take-away for programme developers is to foster sensitivity to the myriad of differences that exist among cultures and/or worldviews; to pique the mentor’s interest in deeper exploration of the mentee’s home country and culture; and to provide encouragement and support of more effective inter-cultural problem solving, relationship building, and understanding.

## **2. Cultivating Cultural Self-Awareness among Mentors**

Mentor participants reported that they “get” how difficult it is for mentees to adjust in a general sense, but were to various degrees unaware how much their own culture, i.e., Canadian culture affected the relationship. “Is it a Canadian phenomenon not to see your culture as culture,” one participant pondered recounting that as a newly minted mentor in the programme they were initially oblivious to the impact of their own culture. Another seasoned mentor intimated that immigrant newcomers, like everyone else, were just going to have “take him or leave him... I’m a ‘toucher.’ If I feel a connection well I’m going to touch your arm [demonstrating] or whatever. It’s just who I am. I can’t take that out of the equation...even when I first meet you. Ultimately, most people get used to it [laughing benevolently].” Later that same mentor underscored the complexity of both being your authentic self and knowing your mentee by stating, “You have to be self-aware, and know which of your *traits* will benefit mentees and when.” So then, how can mentors be assisted in recognizing their culture as a ‘culture’ and understanding that they are imbued with values and norms, the effects of which can be far reaching with the potential to have both reassuring and devastating consequences?

In the current study, mentors revealed that they were frequently the purveyors of information couched in terms of a collective mindset. For example, to a large degree mentors disregarded any kind of minority sociocultural perspective. While entirely and completely unintended, such behaviour could unwittingly inhibit relationship building. Conversely, at other times mentors appreciated the challenges faced by newcomers. One mentor in particular reported that he often explicitly tells his mentees to “[a]sk whatever you want; I’m here to help. The more one-to-one engagement the quicker trust is formed.”

Mentor participants emphasized the significance of the mentees’ culture in relationship building. In other words, when mentor participants have the capacity to build relationships that touched, even rudimentarily, on worldviews and cultural understanding, the outcomes were more constructive. Affecting both business goals and the entrepreneur personally – and for of course, the mentor as well. To support such outcomes key actions, from the perspective of the researcher and in part adapted from the literature (see also Alvarez & Piper, 2005; Zachary, 2000), include encouraging mentors to reflect on her or his own cultural orientation. The implicit attachment to one’s own culture makes it virtually impossible to form opinions and impressions that are free from

one's own cultural orientation. Correspondingly, mentors should be encouraged to self-interpret their own cultural patterns including the economic, political, ecological, social, religious, educational, and historical conditions that played a role in shaping their unique worldviews. In other words, mentors should endeavour to develop a keen command of how their own values, experiences, beliefs, outlook, language, and customs have been shaped by location and culture by

- learning about one's own culture and/or worldviews,
- working to understanding and explore their personal worldview,
- appreciating their own multiple identities,
- acknowledging assumptions and biases,
- accepting responsibility and tolerating ambiguity, and
- recognizing the limits of their competence.

Programme coordinators can squeeze more out of such exercises by asking self-reflective questions of mentors individually or in small group settings. Discussion starters include:

- How does your sense of self influence your work and your mentee?
- What are your reactions to your mentee's worldview?
- What are your feelings about whom you perceive this mentee to be culturally/racially?

In addition to cultural orientation, an examination of non-verbal communication conventions, norms, and patterns can be highly beneficial. Personal dynamics and communication between mentor and mentee can make or break relationships, especially across cultures. By becoming more aware mentors are more in control of mentoring outcomes and will be better positioned to not only determine how the characteristics or customs they adhere to most strongly are reflected in who they are, but will also be better able to appreciate the effect these norms may be having on mentees. Furthermore, recognizing the culture and/or worldviews present within the dyad can prevent mentors from making assumptions and judgments about behaviors and can limit the possibility of mentors judging the behaviors of mentees according to their own cultural values, norms, and worldviews.

### **3. Building Relationality and Accessibility between Mentor and Mentee**

Both mentees in an earlier study (Reeves, 2014a, b) and mentor participants in this study highlighted the importance of creating relationality and accessibility that were perceived by both parties as familiar and respectful. From the perspective of the researcher, recommended discussion questions regarding accessibility, limits, and boundaries of the mentoring relationship include:

- Are we conscientious about safeguarding boundaries?
- What kind of access does the mentee have to you?
- What are the limits to access?
- Is an appointment necessary? What kind of email/telephone access does the mentee have to you?
- Will your mentee need to go through a "gatekeeper" to get to you?

In addition to building trust and relationality, mentors suggested it would be useful to have access to scripts or examples of guidelines for structuring a frank discussion about the limits and boundaries of the mentoring relationship. One mentor reported that he is "almost always asked [from his newcomer mentees] to get into business with them or consult for them, but that's not the purpose of the programme or what I'm here for, so I thanked them and declined". Such conversations made mentors uncomfortable when they were novices. Nevertheless, such conversations help ensure

that the focus of the relationship remains firmly within everyone's comfort zone. According to one mentor and echoed to varying degrees by others, it is important for both members of the dyad to have the opportunity to explicitly communicate what each member of the dyad is willing and unwilling to do, in other words, *relationship ground rules*.

The potential significance of a discussion about boundaries is highlighted in this mentor statement, "We have a 'pop-in culture' here – some things you do outside of the programme, you pop-in to see them at their new business, for example. You kind'a check in. It's just a short visit, only a few minutes, but it's a chance to listen to their issues, to take a pulse.... When I've popped in on them [to visit] or ask them out for an impromptu coffee... well, that seems to mean a lot." This impromptu behaviour, while caring and admirable, may need to be discussed, explained, and negotiated for all involved to be comfortable. Equally important is that discussions of local culture may be very insightful for newcomers.

#### **4. Seizing Opportunities for Sponsorship: Connection and Protection**

Mentors in this study and mentees from an earlier study of the same programme (Reeves, 2015) spoke of powerful developmental relationships and expanding networks mentors built with mentees. According to Price and Chacko (2009), both developmental relationships and expanding networks serve the unique acculturation needs and business goals of mentees. This is echoed by one mentor, "[m]entees seemed to like benchmarking progress that seemed important to them and to demonstrate that they were becoming grounded in the community. Their actions said, 'look, I'm making progress!'" Mentorship is a process where the benefits are transmitted through personal experiences rather than learned in a conventional manner (Zachary, 2000). This was echoed in mentor reports.

In addition to first hand personal experiences, mentors used story telling as a mechanism to build trust, express altruism, and convey cautionary tales. As one participant shared, "I've been successful as a business owner for a couple of decades – but that's not that interesting. The more important stories are pulled from the pitfalls and the problems that I've run into. I always try to tell [my mentees] these stories and to give them tools or create the foundation that I wish I had had starting out". Another mentor spoke to the importance of listening when endeavouring to foster meaningful connections: "It's important to really listen to what [mentees] are asking - don't come out with a 'canned' answer.... share of yourself; offer up your own experiences."

Participants recognized mentoring as a robust tool that offers a holistic approach to learning new skills, gaining new self-knowledge, building performance and career capacities, and establishing avenues for safely connecting newcomer immigrants to the community. However, mentors should be counseled that networking is a learned skill and the nuances of networking vary greatly from country to country, place to place, and of course, person to person. According to one mentor and echoed by others, "[t]he best networkers around here focus not necessarily on selling themselves but on helping other people. [As a mentor,] I try to impart that wisdom to my mentees."

To take advantage of the mentor's network and other introductions facilitated by the programme, mentees must be able not only to make a good first impression, but then to parlay introductions into meaningful connections. Similar to earlier findings (Reeves, 2014b) mentors reported that while mentees may say and sincerely believe that networking is essential to business development, findings from this research indicates that mentors may have to validate and *assumption hunt* to ensure that mentees grasp the social norms and skills that are required. One mentor does just that, "I ask my mentees to answer these four questions before I take them to

networking events: Who are you? What do you do? Why are you here? Why should the person you are speaking to care? Toughest four questions ever.”

From the perspective of the researcher, mentors would benefit from support aimed at efforts to expand similar lines of inquiry, start conversations targeted at assumption hunting, and to incorporate role playing. Mentors should be given agency and encouraged by the programme co-coordinator to find out how effective mentees are at networking by asking mentees to

- frame and/or pitch their business;
- role play and simulate networking introductions, conversations, and regional body language;
- formulate open-ended conversational questions; and
- describe how they would follow up on introductions.

Mentors should also check whether mentees are ready to field questions by asking mentees to

- speak to sales objectives and target demographics,
- consider whether they are easy to find or have a social media presence, and
- describe the key benefits of their business.

One mentor summed it up: “Small town people want to put a face to a business- especially here - people want to know you and who you are. Networks are crucial; we’re so small it’s about who you know - you need a circle to both get things done and to build up a customer base.” To that end, mentors can track mentee progress by asking questions related to networking.

- By how many people has your network expanded since you began the programme?
- By how many people has your network expanded since the last time we spoke?
- Who is your larger network, i.e., the network outside your family and close friends?

### **5. Create Deep Learning - The Art of Asking Questions and the Importance of Listening**

Central to moving beyond initial, and to a degree more superficial, conversations is an emphasis on *deep learning* and not just surface learning (Hezlett, 2005; Trautman, 2007). The importance of this was echoed by several mentors: “It’s their plan, their life, your role is to tease the plan out.” In other words, conversations of consequence take time and effort. Mentors acknowledged the importance of frequently asking questions such as, “What knowledge is critical for success here? What am I missing here? What is it my mentee needs to know? What do I need to know?” One mentor, echoed by others, reported that over time, “I have become an expert in knowing what buttons to push and what questions to ask.”

Yet, the same mentor humorously reported, “I’m a slow learner, but a good learner - so it took me a while to really learn how to listen and ask good questions.” Mentors indicated that they tried different communication approaches with mentees. Another mentor summarized his thoughts on this topic, “[i]n most regards, these mentees are my peers. I learn from them and they learn from me. We’re all just people at the end of the day.”

In that vein and in an effort to enhance mentors’ efforts to further support mentee’s understanding of the significance and meaning of new material/ideas/concepts, it is recommended that mentors understand that their role is to engage in a process of mutual inquiry with the mentee, rather than a relationship that merely transmits knowledge and measures conformity to it. For mentoring programme coordinators, these findings suggest that mentors facilitate intentional conversations, employ crosschecking, and inform the mentee that this type of discourse is part of

the mentoring process. Mentor responses support the idea that conversation starters would be useful. The conversation prompts outlined in this section, draw from mentor reflections and are adapted and informed by the literature (see Reeves, 2014a, b; Trautman, 2007; Zachary, 2000). Drawing from frustrations mentors shared, mentees would benefit from opportunities to answer questions such as

- Why don't you read your notes back to me so I can make sure I've been clear?
- To make sure I've covered the last topic clearly, I'm going to give you a minute to talk me through those last few items/steps.
- Why don't you explain to me the main points you've heard me cover?

In contrast, commonly-used but ineffective closed questions that should be avoided by mentors include

- Did you get it?
- Are you with me?
- Do you understand?
- Is this working for you?
- Any questions?

When asked what the biggest ICM challenge was all mentors chimed, "Did NOT listen!" One mentor summed it up, "[y]ou make suggestions and the mentee nods and then they just go and do it their own way anyway. Almost every mentor will tell you that." A longtime BIMP mentor and wise entrepreneur summed this up more specifically, "I'll provide [them] with the direction and advice, but the decision is [theirs]. But when I say be cautious, what I'm saying is, you'd better do a business analysis!" Having mentors check frequently with mentees during meetings protects the mentor from having to revisit the same information and, potentially, from having to resolve problems due to suboptimal knowledge transfer processes (i.e., 'not listening').

Mentors can summarize meetings or recapitulate the most important points to help the mentee digest what transpired in a session and has the added benefit of allowing mentors to check assumptions in process (see Reeves, 2014a; Trautman, 2007). This approach may mitigate mentors' expressed frustration at claims that mentees "did not listen." In sum, mentors expressed frustration that mentees did not heed explicit warnings expressing that in many instances their expertise and experience were insufficient in that they needed specific approaches that could facilitate better communication with newcomers from different cultures.

Mentors also reported that listening, on the part of both members of the dyad, is as important as asking the right questions. In one mentor's words, "[s]ometimes we just need to be a sounding board." This claim is echoed in the literature (Jandt, 2015; Kochan, 2013; Karam 1985). Reflecting challenges voiced from participant mentors, mentees from previous studies (Reeves, 2014a, b), the literature (Tramtam, 2007, Zachary, 2000) and the perspective of the researcher, mentoring programme coordinators may want to encourage mentors to employ some or all of the following lines of inquiry to help mentees to reflect on and articulate their own thinking.

- Could you tell me a bit more about what you mean by...?
- It sounds as if this is the "tip of the iceberg." Let's both think about this some more and discuss it in our next conversation.
- How might someone else see that behaviour?
- Help me understand what you are saying.
- Help me understand what you think I'm saying... And why I'm saying it.

- I have a few ideas that might help... I bet you may have a different take...
- Tell me what you heard me say.
- What do you mean by...?
- Could you tell me more about what you meant when you said...
- What, if anything, is holding you back now?
- Tell me about your recent experience with...
- Tell me what you know about...
- Talk me through the steps.

Similarly, mentors may also struggle clarifying their own understanding of mentoring conversations. The following reformulating statements may encourage and assist mentors in efforts at cross-checking conversations or in rushing to respond with, as one mentor put it, a “canned answer”.

- I think what I heard you saying was ...
- My understanding is...
- To be honest with you, I need a little time to think about that.

While intentional dialogue is important, it is also crucial to be sensitive to culturally different language patterns (i.e., extended pauses). Mentoring programme coordinators may want to encourage mentors to listen for silence. Silence can indicate boredom, confusion, discomfort, or embarrassment. On the other hand, some individuals just need time to think quietly. From the perspective of the researcher, this is especially salient for mentoring programmes designed for newcomer immigrants many of whom would be in the process of learning an additional language.

Mentors should be encouraged to reflect and potentially raise the issue of not only meeting efficacy for review and discussion but also the quality of mentoring interactions by asking

- Is our communication clear and misunderstanding infrequent?
- Is the process we’re using working to facilitate learning and knowledge transfer?
- In what ways are learning needs being met or not met?
- What is the greatest success thus far?
- What is the greatest frustration thus far?
- What gives you the most satisfaction about what you are learning/doing?

Mentoring programme coordinators should also encourage mentors to periodically assess personally, in other words self-reflect about, the mentoring relationship from various perspectives. Questions may include ...

- What is the learning process?
- What might I/we do to make the process work better?
- What might I/we do to make the progress toward learning work better?
- What is my greatest success thus far?
- Will I know what success looks like when I see it?

At the conclusion of each meeting, mentors should be encouraged to check “next-steps.” This can be accomplished by asking any of the following questions

- Before you leave, could you talk me through your next steps?
- What are your action items from this meeting?
- What are you going to do when you leave my office?
- Do you have any comments for me?

As challenges and miscommunications are to be expected, it is recommended that programme co-ordinator prepare for discussions regarding relationship breakdown and the role of the coordinator. In an effort to mitigate potential problems, offering the dyad example conversation openers may be useful

- Because of our differences there will be times when I do not understand your perspectives or experiences. I'll try to let you know when this is happening so you can tell me more – I invite you to do the same.
- Because your progress is important to me, I need to raise what might be a difficult issue.... How do you see this?
- I've become uncomfortable with... I'll bet you have a different opinion.
- Do you feel comfortable with this? Do you have any other suggestions to help us bridge our differences?
- I notice that...The impact of that is...

## **6. Developing Awareness of Racism**

The question of how to support, for the most part, white middle-aged men, the most privileged population on the planet, in their effort to mentor visible minorities who may not, sadly, be welcomed by the whole community is complex. How does one prepare this specific population of mentors for conversations of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination? While mentors reported that this is unknown territory, for them they were nevertheless quick to stand in defense of mentees and criticize “unwelcoming” behavior. According to one mentor, “You are experiencing your country through their eyes.” The same mentor reported telling his mentee “Know if they're ignorant to you they're ignorant to everyone. They're just nasty. [If they act like that then] they're no friend of mine and you don't need them as one either!” Such visceral responses are laudable; mentors weren't going to take any “bullshit” from anyone and their mentees weren't either. Mentors wanted to “get-in-on-this,” in other words, ensure that their mentees weren't going to face racism, xenophobia, and discrimination alone.

Correspondingly, tools to ease the potential apprehension that can occur from attempting to balance multiple concerns embedded in the inter-cultural mentoring process would be useful. Inter-cultural mentoring dyads need to spend time acknowledging not just the blessings of cultural diversity, but also the accompanying challenges present in relatively homogenous SMCs. This may be achieved by discussing how mentees may be perceived and the biases and prejudices that they may run up against. Such conversations require a softer and more intuitive approach of mentors, a flexible approach that includes relational and improvisational types of discussions. According to Stanley (2012), “[t]he first thing to focus on is this hurt, and its attendant feelings of isolation... Think for a moment about what must be involved and how someone must feel to even think of making such a complaint...It is an on-going engagement of listening and learning” (p. 54). One mentee tells his mentees of racism or unfair discrimination to, “[a]sk me the questions you're scared to ask. If odd things are going on you need to tell me. You live here now and we look out for each other here”.

Research by Johnson-Bailey (2012) offers insight into micro-cosmic power relations within Western society. Several promising practices have merit and could assist majority culture mentors with inter-cultural mentoring efforts with newcomer mentees (1) a willingness to extend beyond normal mentoring expectations, (2) an understanding of the psychological and social effects of racism, (3) cultural competence, (4) an understanding of the mentors' social identity and (5) an acceptance of the risk and possible discomfort implicit in mentoring across racial lines (Johnson-Bailey, 2012).

It is interesting to note that the word racism was not specifically used by mentor participants in this study. Instead mentors used euphemisms and spoke of, for example, “unusual” challenges mentees sometimes came up against or to “ignorant people”. For mentoring programme coordinators these findings suggest the benefit of preparing mentors to both shoulder and interpret negative racist experiences their mentees may possibly encounter. LeBaron and Pillay (2006) in *Conflict Across Cultures* suggest that acknowledging cultural differences is beneficial in creating deeper understanding. Using the image of an iceberg as metaphor, LeBaron and Pillay (2006) posit that acknowledging the impediments to “smooth sailing” is helpful to all parties. By pretending the iceberg does not exist, dyads put each other in danger of greater damage and suboptimal outcomes.

## **7. Appreciating Small City Realities**

Mentors reported that mentees were frequently from very large metropolitan cities and expressed frustration with efforts to communicate the structural and/or contextual and geo-social differences between SMCs and larger metropolitan areas. They are in a sense *modern pioneers*. One mentor summed it up succinctly, “[t]here's not a lot of population within the borders of our province. There is a struggle for [newcomer immigrants] to reconcile where they are now with where they come from; it's important to talk about that and explore what it means.” The importance of this point was top of mind with other mentors, “selling in a larger market often makes the seller fairly anonymous; in an SMC it's exactly the opposite of anonymous, “[s]mall town people want to put a face to a name and a face to the business — especially here — people want to know you and who you are — get ready for that.” Mentors were concerned that “[m]ost mentees don't understand the reality of having a business in a small or medium sized city. It often takes time for mentees to come to understand the full implications of living and starting a business here — for example, many are used to thousands of people passing by their door daily, and sometimes I just don't know how to get this across — it can take quite a bit of time.’

Mentors spoke to the importance of conversations that impart the experiences of running in a small business a rural city. Several mentors spoke to *pace*, “Most [mentees] are unaccustomed to the pace of business we have here, and part of what we do is sensitize them to the rhythm of life here. They feel they need to leap at opportunities because things are often so competitive and fast where they're from.” Mentor volunteers, leading by example, encouraged newcomers to actively seek out and act on opportunities for participation, to contribute to community life, to help others in the community, and in some way “get involved in local life. I tell them to get involved in something, to volunteer, and some of them are smart and get on to that early.”

## **Research limitations**

Due to the limited number of survey respondents, it would not be appropriate to attempt to generalize responses to a larger population. Rather, these results provide a snap-shot of the perspectives of individual participants at one point in time. Nevertheless, factors supporting and hindering ICM may be of interest and relevance to other mentoring programmes and as such, may provide insights into programme components or processes. However, this research should be treated as a limited early step into this type of analysis. A longitudinal study that includes mentors is necessary to examine relationship dynamics through different stages. Additional areas of future research are also suggested by lessons learned. Like most research on inter-cultural mentoring, this study was cross-sectional, and thus could not examine the mentoring process as it unfolded over time.



## **Conclusion**

The findings in this paper embody a delicate dance that juxtaposes social norms, societal pressures, and expectations with individual character attributes. The need for mentor competence in navigating differences due to differing cultural and world-views should not be underestimated – for both members of the dyad seeking fruitful mentoring relationships. Drawn from mentor feedback and reflections, the findings in this paper add substantially to what is known about practices mentors successful in mentoring immigrant entrepreneur newcomers employ. Seven themes emerged: mentees' culture, mentors' cultural self-awareness, building relationality and accessibility, sponsorship, deep learning, racism, and small city truths as they influence (a) knowledge transfer and personal learning within the dyad, (b) acculturation/adaptation, and (c) perceived business and network gains on the part of the mentee.

Best practice research was employed to link the world of research or academic inquiry and practice (Vesley, 2011). To that end, findings have been presented in such a way as to respond to the demand for practical “useful knowledge” that addresses real-world problems and offers high impact, low-cost interventions with recommendations for practice (Bretschneider, Marc-Aurele, & Wu 2005). The specific aims were to: (a) understand how mentors guide their mentees through manifold and varied demands to enhance the inter-cultural mentoring efforts and strategies of mentors and mentees; (b) inform practitioners (mentors/mentees) on the utility of the efforts of inter-cultural mentoring; and (c) further inform mentoring programme developers and managers who oversee ICM programmes.

## ***Social Implications***

Given the small size of most Canadian communities, some question the potential of immigrants to adapt, find a sense of belonging, and ultimately stay (Lo & Teixeira, 2015; Ramos & Yoshida, 2011). If small town Canada faces this demographic challenge in isolation, many other jurisdictions face similar challenges, despite variations in circumstances. Inherent in this problem is the need to not only acculturate and retain this population, but also, accelerate the likelihood of newcomer immigrants enjoying a purposeful life in their new home.

For newcomer immigrants, mentoring relationships can be particularly critical in terms of not only knowledge acquisition but facilitating integration as well as encouraging persistence. Business mentorship programmes are considered a key component of the solution to these obstacles. Business networks can develop trust among members and redefine self-interest to consider the group as a whole (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). Members may then choose to expand their identity to gain access to benefits (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The development of trust within and among networks further encourages access to benefits through the promotion of resource exchanges (Besser & Miller, 2011).

## ***Originality and Value***

In light of the ongoing move toward economic globalization, immigration trends, and workforce diversity, this research has the potential to provide valuable information for not only inter-cultural mentoring for newcomer immigrant entrepreneurs, but also inter-cultural youth and faculty-student mentoring, and expatriate mentoring programmes. For example, multicultural curriculum developers can also capitalize on this research to support business immigrants in efforts to mobilize resources and social networks to improve their outcomes. Further to this, understanding the

implications of inter-cultural mentoring in the context of adult education is crucial to the development of human resource potential.

Opportunities that can facilitate new learning, reinforce recent learning, and accelerate learning are invaluable. Correspondingly, increasing understanding of the inter-cultural aspects of mentoring is immediately useful to administrators recruiting mentors, and to administrators developing training programmes for mentors. According to D'Abate and Eddy (2008), what programme administrators require are the keys to unlock the success of mentoring programmes and their inner workings to capture, understand, standardize, and ultimately duplicate mission critical behaviours (Bearman et al., 2007; Hezlett, 2005; Kram & Ragins, 2007; Noe et al., 2002).

### ***Practical Implications***

In sum, the goal of this research is to contribute to a broader understanding of inter-cultural mentoring and to provide practical utility to mentors of immigrant newcomers and programme administrators in their efforts to facilitate personal learning/knowledge transfer, programme replication, business success, and retention, and create the greatest likelihood of success for mentoring dyads. It is anticipated that the mentor input captured within this study can be used to guide the prioritized implementation of mentoring interventions. Additionally, policy makers wishing to use mentoring as a mechanism for economic development will also be guided by these findings.

### ***Implications for Future Research***

This study was cross-sectional and thus could not examine the mentoring process as it unfolded over time. A longitudinal study is necessary to examine relationship dynamics through different stages. Additional areas of future research are also suggested by implications for best practice. While acknowledging the difficulties in conducting longitudinal research, it would be advisable to study inter-cultural mentoring processes as they develop over the course of the programme to enhance the understanding of how mentoring influences the effectiveness of individuals mentoring across cultures. Such longitudinal research would enable scholars to examine not only the effects of the mentoring programme, but also how these mentoring relationships may change over time — from initial acceptance of the relationship to its formal conclusion.

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