The conditions for a successful mentoring relationship: The followup on young graduates

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The mentoring program described herein follows up on young graduates of higher education who are looking for work. Its aim is to fight against discrimination and open access to the world of work for youth who are underprivileged (owing to their place of residency or social background). Conducted at the request of a nonprofit organization that brings young graduates into contact with white-collars working in firms, an "action research" program has identified four major psychosocial effects of the mentoring relationship: *1)* the "Wow!" effect; *2)* the Pygmalion (expectations) effect; *3)* the improvement of relational skills; and *4)* the network effect. Taken together, they form the "magic square" of successful mentoring

Mentoring programs for entering, or returning to, the world of work, especially for *"accompanying, in their search for employment, young people without a personal network of relations to occupational environments"* are part of the toolkit proposed by public authorities in France to curb youth unemployment.[1] Under these "accompaniment programs", the mentors often have a relatively high social status and are capable of identifying job opportunities for their wards (HOUDÉ 1996) and putting them in contact with corporate decision-makers (CHAUVAC 2011). Furthermore, they are examples and, thus, a positive source of motivation that ultimately affects the access, or return, to employment of those whom they are accompanying.

Our action research program, conducted at the request of a nonprofit organization, the association NQT (*Nos Quartiers ont des Talents*), has inquired into the conditions for successful mentoring both in terms of the psychosocial interactions between mentors and wards and at the organization's operational level. Founded in 2006, the NQT's core activity is to bring young graduates from underprivileged neighborhoods (classified as "priority neighborhoods") or disadvantaged social backgrounds into contact with experienced white-collars, the goal being to facilitate their integration in the world of work. Owing to its success, this mentoring program has been expanded on a large scale, and the NQT has grown fast.

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[1] Circular of 8 November 1996 in application of an act of December 1993. For Maela Paul (2002:50), mentoring is based on an intergenerational bond with the mentor's action at the *"articulation of the occupational and social fields"*.

The NQT establishes multiparty partnerships with private and public organizations, NGOs, etc. Such a partnership organizes mentoring, circulates job offers among young graduates looking for work, serves as a relay and facilitator at the local level or participates in the events organized by the association. By deploying an energy often described by its partners as "contagious", the NQT tries to create and maintain mentoring relationships. Its special talent, in its work with partners, has been to successfully match mentors with wards and then to manage these mentorships over time, by supervising the frequency of meetings.[2]

We have chosen herein to explore the psychosocial aspects of interactions in the mentoring relationship, since the association's mentorship model seemed to us to be evidence of its success. Our research has brought to light four psychosocial secrets for successful mentoring: a) the "Wow!" effect, b) the Pygmalion (expectations) effect, c) the accrual of interactional skills and d) the network effect. Taken together, they form the "magic square" of mentorship. In the case studied herein, they were the principal psychosocial factors that account for effective mentoring.

We shall start with a brief account of the studies that, made on mentoring programs for helping people gain access to the world of work, analyze the objectives and limits of mentoring. We shall then describe our fieldwork in the NQT, the latter's request for research and the methodology adopted in response. Our findings will then be presented by using labeling theory (BECKER 1963) as a gird of interpretation. In conclusion, we shall discuss the advances made through our research and, too, its limits.[3]

Mentoring for opening access to the world of work

Integration in employment as an objective

Mentoring programs in France have mainly targeted youth with few or no qualifications. Programs have been set up locally for young people who are the farthest removed from the labor market (WAHBI 2002; CORVISART DE FLEJEURY & LANLO 2001). Other programs have been designed for young people under judicial control (by the services of *Protection judiciaire de la jeunesse*), the aim being to help them enter the world of work (CLÉMENT 2006). According to Dufour and Frimousse (2006), the young people targeted by mentoring programs need — given their low "educational capital" — to be sponsored by experienced adults, who will play a role in their socialization. Other mentoring programs have focused on underprivileged

secondary school students, the purpose being to help them finish high school and find a job.[4]

A few programs, run by nonprofit organizations, have targeted categories of young people with diplomas. Besides the NQT, the AFIP (Association pour Favoriser l'Intégration Professionelle) runs a program for bringing into contact graduates from "visible minorities or lower-class neighborhoods" with mentors who work in firms that have pledged to "open their address books" (KROHMER *et al.* 2010).

All these programs rely on volunteers to provide counseling. These mentors use their address books to find job opportunities for their wards. This illustrates the "strength of weak ties" dear to Mark Granovetter (1973, 1974). By recommending his/her ward, the mentor makes the job application creditable to potential employers. This has been shown in studies on local networks for integration (BARON *et al.* 1995), which have proven effective *"partly because of a 'contagion of value', whereby the value attributed to the recommender is partly conferred on the person recommended"* (BUREAU & MARCHAL 2009:183). Philippe This phenomenon has been said to be a "transfer of fame" in the case of French jazz musicians: *"insofar as it has to do with beliefs, the transfer of fame achieved through sponsorship thus has, in a way, the sui generis effectiveness of ritual gestures, conveyed by belief in the magic virtues of the mentor's renown"* (COULANGEON 1999:696). The ward is thus endowed with an otherwise unattainable "symbolic capital".

The fight against discrimination as a purpose

One purpose of mentoring programs that help people enter, or return to, the world of work is to counter the effects of discrimination (BERENI 2009).

According to Rebzani (2000), mentoring, by obtaining a commitment from both the young wards and employers, is effective for three reasons. The first has to do with the "technique of taking the first step" (JOULE & BEAUVOIS 1987): to obtain a big favor from someone, start by requesting a smaller one. The employer's first step is to sign the national charter on mentoring; he then has to prove his open-mindedness toward disadvantaged young people and open the company's doors to them. According to Rebzani, the confidence placed in these young people motivates them to reconsider their perceptions of firms and double up on their efforts. Secondly, the "low-ball technique" of priming (CIALDINI *et al.* 1978) makes mentoring more effective when mentors see to it that employers keep their commitments. Rebzani's third reason has to do with the "hypothesis of contact" (ALLPORT 1954), whereby increasing contacts between two social groups

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[2] Readers who want more information about the NQT, its social work or business model, are referred to the minutes of its meeting of 3 February 2016 at École de Paris du Management (FOURNIER & RAULET-CROSET 2016) and to the research report in the NQT's white book (RAULET-CROSET et al. 2015).

[3] This article has been translated from French by Noal Mellott (Omaha Beach, France).

[4] Examples are the programs of the foundation Un Avenir Ensemble (BANCEL-CHARENSOL 2015) and the association Actenses (BEHAGHEL et al. 2013). According to Behaghel et al., the short- and medium-term effects of the latter program on the orientation of students were barely cogent. However the long-term effects on orientation after high school and integration in the world of work were not assessed.

will, under certain conditions, attenuate their prejudices about each other. Let us bear in mind that these three reasons are working hypotheses drawn from the literature in social psychology on obtaining compliance.

Other scholars have had reservations about mentoring or even criticized it. Mentoring lets employers off lightly, and this hardly motivates them to alter their recruitment practices (MASSON & VAN DE WALLE 2001, GARNER-MOYER 2003). Besides, it tends to push responsibility for fighting against discrimination onto young people, who are expected to modify their attitudes toward firms. The fight against discrimination is thus often pushed into the background in order to grant priority to jobs for youth. Furthermore, the public targeted by mentoring programs is often too broad; the objectives are sometimes poorly understood; and the mentor's role as a go-between is not clearly defined (MASSON & VAN DE WALLE 2001). According to Milena Doytcheva (2011:67), whose criticism goes even farther, mentoring heavily relies on *"an 'adaptive' approach to 'publics' that is specific to social programs for fighting against discrimination but that, in actual practice, deviates this struggle's objectives"*. The controversy on the cogency of mentoring programs is, as we see, keen.

Though opening paths for analyzing mentoring programs, the aforementioned studies have drawbacks. For one thing, some of the critical studies have adopted a macrosocial approach and mainly concentrated on discrimination in the labor market. For another, those studies that do take a look at the mentoring relationship itself are usually limited to theoretical remarks or a discussion about how to design experiments. This leads them to see the processes active in mentoring separately, one by one. Our inquiry, via an interactionist and pragmatic approach, has sought to discover the many factors accounting for successful mentoring in real-life situations.

Fieldwork and methodology

The art of mentoring on a large scale: The NQT
We have studied the mentoring actions conducted by *Nos Quartiers Ont des Talents*, a nonprofit organization created in 2006 on the initiative of Yazid Chir and Raynald Rimbault, two entrepreneurs with strong social commitments who, at the time, were, respectively, president and general delegate of MEDEF 93 Ouest, a local branch of the main employers' association in France. The NQT came out of a successful experiment carried out in 2005 in Seine-Saint-Denis, north of Paris, with 200 young graduates.

The NQT, which had approximately forty wage-earners in 2015, conducts throughout France a mentoring program for promoting the occupational integration of young graduates. Mentors, who are unpaid, are white-collars with at least eight years of on-the-job experience. This large-scale program relies on partnerships with public institutions (local authorities, universities, local unemployment offices, etc.) and firms. These partners support the association by providing funding and, too, "human resources", since mentors come from their personnel.

Since the start of this program, 7,800 mentors have accompanied young graduates in their search for jobs. Referring to its program as a pursuit of "equal opportunities", the NQT has followed up on approximately 30,000 young people over a 10-year period: 69% of them have found, on the average within six months, steady jobs (contracts of a duration of six months or more) on par with their qualifications.

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Young people in the NQT's mentoring program

TARGET
Young people, less than thirty years old, with postsecondary diplomas (at least three years of higher education) are recruited as a function of their place of residence (in "priority" neighborhoods or zones of "rural revitalization") or social backgrounds (underprivileged groups).

PROFILE OF RECRUITS
In 2014, 64,4% of recruits were women. According to the NQT, the most frequent profile was: a 26-year-old woman with five years of postsecondary education in communications. In fact, 50% of the young people had an education in communications, business/marketing, human resources, the law, accountancy, management, finances or insurance. These young people, the majority with university degrees, have trouble finding a job on par with their qualifications. They are often demoralized when they contact the association.

THEIR DIFFICULTIES
According to Yazid Chir and Raynald Rimbault, the NQT's founders, three main reasons account for the difficulties encountered by these young people as they look for a job. First of all, they lack confidence in themselves and have no methodology for conducting the job search. Secondly, they lack knowledge of the labor market and of the world of business and its codes. Thirdly, they have no occupational network as a backing. The NQT's mentoring program tries to act on these three points.

The NQT's request and our methodology

In a ten-year period, the NQT evolved from an experimental setup to a "thriving start-up", in its president's words, with operations all over France. For its tenth anniversary, this association set as the goal of accompanying 100,000 young people toward employment. To make political office-holders aware of the importance of integrating young graduates from modest social backgrounds in the world of work, the association's founders had the idea, in 2015, of writing a white book and delivering it personally to President François Hollande at the Élysée Palace. After the President's Office responded positively to the request for a meeting, it was time to start thinking about the contents of this white book on the "activation of social mobility". This was the NQT's outlook when it contacted us in February 2015.

Following a first meeting with staff members, a lead emerged for our research: describe and analyze the association's foundations and business model while verging on the issue of the mentoring relationship. An *ad hoc* research team formulated an 8-month long action research program that combined several methods: participation in meetings with the NQT's staff, observations in the association (mainly during the events it organized) and interviews (a dozen with NQT members, more than twenty with young graduates and seven with mentors). We also used the findings of a survey by questionnaire of mentors, which the NQT had asked Adrien Constant, one of its members, to conduct.

Underlying this research is "grounded theory" (GLASER & STRAUSS 1967), an empirical, inductive method whereby: *"A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind […] Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data"* (STRAUSS & CORBIN 1998:12). Accordingly, the purpose is not to prove or disprove an existing theory but to propose a theory or concept that is grounded on examining the collected data, that emerges from the analysis of the phenomenon — in our case, a study of the conditions for successful mentoring in the NQT's program for accompanying young people toward the world of work.

Findings

By shifting back and forth between data and theory, we have been able to identify several effects that, usually present in the mentoring situations observed, facilitate the access of young people to employment. The "magic square" of mentorship combines these four main psychosocial effects.

A theoretical framework was necessary to avoid being lost in the data: *"It is a matter not of theoretical hypotheses but of frameworks for orienting one's self in the data, frameworks loose enough not to shape the material and, as a consequence, the findings"* (AYACHE & DUMEZ 2011:30). For this orientation, we relied on labeling theory (BECKER 1963). This current of symbolic interactionism (BLUMER 1969) focuses on social phenomena from the angles of social interactions and cognitive representations. It clearly corresponds to what happens in the mentoring relationship. We shall present the four psychosocial effects identified in our research from the viewpoint of labeling theory and then show how they are interdependent.

The "Wow!" effect

In marketing, "Wow!" *"refers to the fact that a product, service or advertizing campaign arouses among consumers an effect of surprise, admiration or appreciation translated by the interjection 'Wow!'"*.[5] Though theorized by Peters (1994), it is a practical concept rather than an academic construct.

In our research, this effect was triggered when the young graduate looking for a job met for the first time his/her mentor in the firm where the mentor works (a rule set by the NQT). The status and image of mentors (experienced white-collars, thus often a role model for the youth in question), the company where they work (often a big firm with an exceptional force of attraction), the layout of the workplace, or the experience of the mentor listening… these elements helped unleash the Wow! effect. As a consequence, these young people fastened a positive label on their mentors. One young graduate recalled:

> *"I called. He was director of logistics at Coca-Cola. It was really a stroke of luck to have someone in such a position! He's not paid for it [for mentoring]. His job is to help run Coca-Cola. I remember: it was on the fourth floor, a table football was next to the elevator. It was very modern, a little like Google, offices of an American sort. People were cool at work, relaxed; they felt good."*

The Wow! effect had a positive psychological spin-off: a motivation, hope, feeling of recognition or even the belief that mentorship was enhancing the chances of landing a job. All this had a positive impact on the young graduate's self-image — through a process of positive self-labeling.

The Pygmalion effect

In the educational sphere, this effect refers to what psychosociologists have usually called the "expectations effect" (TROUILLAUD & SARRAZIN 2003). As Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) showed, the mere fact of a teacher believing in the success of a pupil improves the latter's scholastic performance. A harbinger of this idea was Howard Becker (1952), who pointed to teachers' low expectations as a reason why pupils are less successful.

This effect came into full play in mentorships. Mentors were deeply convinced that the young people whom they were accompanying had potential, had aptitudes, and were deserving — a process whereby they attached a positive label to their wards. In one mentor's words:

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[5] From the website: http://www.definitions-marketing.com/definition/ [consulted on 2 June 2017].

"It supports my idea that there are gems everywhere, not only in privileged neighborhoods or in schools with a good reputation."

And as another had this to say while talking about the young people:

"They are amazed by our attention to them and our tenacity, and are sometimes surprised that we are more convinced of their aptitudes than they themselves!"

This evinces NQT's outstandingly performative slogan (and name) about the "talents in our neighborhoods" (*Nos quartiers ont des talents*).

This belief positively affected the young graduates' attitudes and helped modify their perception of their own experiences — a process of positive self-labeling. As a young graduate declared,

"A small personal example: I did theater for ten years, and so I put that under 'miscellany' at the end of my résumé. He [his mentor] told me, 'That's amazing. It's fantastic! It means a lot: the aptitude for improvising, working on a team', etc. And me, I was telling myself, 'Oh yea, but even so…'."

Improved relational skills

According to Emmanuelle Marchal (1999:45-46), *"an applicant's flawed relational skills might overwhelm the recruiter's ability to make a judgment [insofar as this judgment] varies depending not on abstractly defined qualities but on the applicant's ability to show them and, as a consequence, on the relations that form between the persons in interaction."* This is a reason why mentoring is important: it helps prepare young people for job interviews.

Improving relational skills meant learning the "codes" inherent in the interview setting: the ward's ability to adjust his remarks to what the employer was saying and to draw attention to his/her strong points on a job application. Beyond that, it meant making a lasting impression on the recruiter. According to a mentor:

"It was necessary to make Melanie progress, because she was too shy. So, I organized a simulation with two other colleagues, and I was there just as an observer. There were twenty minutes of interactions, and it was really terrific. She did not lose her concentration […] We picked everything in her presentation apart, we went over everything! Then, after the debriefing, we redid the interview right away; and that changed everything! So I told her it was outstanding. But I admit it was rough. I think it triggered something for Melanie. She suddenly got it; and now, two weeks today, she's head of a project in marketing-communication."

This example clearly shows how feedback on the young graduate's comportment (the mentor's positive labeling of the ward) affected the latter's attitude and led her (through a process of positive self-labeling) to adopt an attitude conducive to the job search.

The network effect

The mentors who volunteer for the NQT program have an extended network of relations they can share with the young graduates whom they accompany. Jean Khiat, an icon in the association, has been so successful mentoring because he opened his network of relations to his wards. With thirty years of professional experience and more than nine hundred contacts via Linkedin, he proposes to each of his wards to choose five persons in his Linkedin network whom they would like to meet. He then serves as go-between, a practice that ultimately pays off. In his words, the persons who accept to receive a young graduate

"soon realize they're dealing with someone who's really worth it. They see a young person who has worked, is striving, who wants so hard. And so, they tell themselves, 'It would be stupid not to do something! I got to find a way…' And they tell the young person, 'I think such-and-such is looking for someone. So, I'm going to see if you can put in your application.' Being able to apply is already enormous! And then, if the young person manages to have an interview, because these are talented youth, they can make the difference during the interview, even more so since they've been prepared, they're supple… When they have a real job interview, they're usually hired."

As this example shows, the road to a job was opened through the processes whereby the mentor and, too, the contact label the young person.

However this road was not always so simple or straight, as we saw in the case of Aude. After graduating in architecture, Aude went from job to job just to pay the rent before she went to the unemployment office and then to APEC (an association specialized in employment opportunities for white-collars: Association pour l'Emploi des Cadres). When this association's six-month program did not lead to success, APEC oriented Aude toward the NQT, which quickly found her a mentor: a jurist working at Allianz. The mentor decided to take her along to a conference organized by Palladio Foundation. Set up in 2008, this Foundation works on a major 21st-century issue: urbanization and urban spaces. During the cocktail after the conference, Aude's mentor brought her into contact with persons in his network. One contact turned out to be decisive, as Aude put it:

"I had an interview with, in particular, an important person in the architecture network [at Allianz] who told me at the end of the interview, 'Go see such-and-such, you never know.' He sent me to a consultancy office and an agency, and gave me other names. My mentor had advised me to never leave an interview without having obtained references for other contacts, for fortifying my network. Some day, potentially, that would lead to a real job interview. That's more or less what happened. One thing leads to another. I had, I think, five network interviews with people who recommended other people. After an interview, I wrote e-mails [to contacts] with the words 'recommended by'. One

thing leading to another, I managed to land a real job interview. Following an interview I had a year and a half ago, I have a position in a firm: I'm an architect in an agency in the southwest of Paris."

This clearly illustrates the mentor's key role in opening the way toward employment by tapping his/her network, a key resource, and drawing on "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter 1973, 1974).

The magic square

The four psychosocial effects, which we have analyzed through the prism of labeling theory, form the magic square of mentorship. Owing to the positive labeling of mentors by their wards (the Wow! effect) in combination with the mentor's high expectations and positive beliefs in the graduates they are accompanying, these young people regained confidence in themselves. They came to perceive their past in a positive light — the process of self-labeling through the Pygmalion effect. Relational skills then improved thanks to mentoring; the mentor's positive feedback to wards is an act of positive labeling. Combined with the opening of the mentor's network of contacts, this improvement of relational skills often proved decisive for integration in the world of work, even more so when the young graduates met (thanks to their mentors) people who fastened a positive label on them and recommended them to potential recruiters (the network effect).

It is not each of the four effects taken separately that accounts for the effectiveness of mentoring. Instead, the magic square refers to the chaining of the four. This metaphor emphasizes that successful mentoring involves a combination of all four effects. We can imagine, given the reputation of certain mentors, a virtuous circle, whereby the fourth effect chains back onto the first. Accordingly, the improved image of the young person who has found a job would reflect back onto the mentor, whose own image would be enhanced within his/her network, thus making the aforementioned labeling processes more effective in future mentorships. However our findings do not enable us to prove this hypothesis.

Discussion

This article helps us better understand what the mentoring relationship implies in psychosocial terms. Not many studies have been made of this, apart from Rebzani's (2000) purely theoretical approach to commitments and the more empirical studies on the "strength of weak ties" and a "contagion of value" in local networks for social integration (BARON *et al.* 1995, BUREAU & MARCHAL 2009). Our empirical findings are in line with these results since mentorship, in the NQT program, created both a commitment and a "contagion of value" (through the network effect). However they go farther by identifying other effects (the Wow! and Pygmalion effects as well as the improvement of relational skills) that give rise to positive interactions and are decisive for explaining the success of this mentoring program. The four psychosocial effects observed in our research

set off a group dynamics that facilitated integration in the world of work.

This article also contributes to the literature on mentoring by approaching this topic through labeling theory. Although this theory has concentrated on the the processes producing social deviance, it can, in our opinion, be put to wider use. It can serve to explain how the processes of labeling and self-labeling come into play in most social interactions and affect behavior. Alongside negative labeling (studied by Becker in *Outsiders*), there are positive labeling processes that lead, not to stigmatization and discrimination, but to social integration and inclusion. In the repeated interactions between mentors and young graduates, a process of positive labeling leads, as we have shown, to modifying the young person's position in the labor market.

We cannot generalize our findings however. The magic square of mentorship mainly applies to the accompaniment of certain young people (graduates) by mentors of certain sorts (experienced white-collars). Let us point out what might be a finding in and of itself: the wide differential (which we observed) in the "value" on the labor market of the parties to a mentorship could be taken to be a reason why positive labeling is effective: it works in proportion to the distance between the young person and mentor.

Our research has another limitation. Although the magic square has been useful for the NQT's staff, it fails to shed light on other phenomena that might come into play in specific mentorships. For example, what turns out to be crucial for integrating a given young person in the world of work might be something else: his/her career plans or résumé instead of improved relational skills or restored self-confidence. In this case, the mentor's art is to adapt to the occupational situation of each young graduate whom they accompany.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to propose two leads for further studies on mentoring.

The first lead brings us to a critique of the aim of mentoring and, more broadly, of the entrepreneurial philosophy underlying programs such as the NQT's. These programs are not intended to modify corporate recruitment practices and thus attack discrimination at its source and ultimately change the rules of the game. Instead, they prepare young graduates for the current situation and adapt them to it. Working on one's self, acquiring self-confidence, learning corporate codes, knowing how to seize recruitment opportunities and draw attention to one's assets and "sell" them during a job interview… these are both the prerequisites and finalities of mentoring. Such programs have the normalizing goal of adaptation, even more so when most of the program's "clients" are firms that volunteer, and provide financial and human resources.

Despite these reservations, mentoring for helping people enter, or return to, the world of work seems to be an appropriate solution for underprivileged young

people who have diplomas but lack a network and, very often, self-confidence as well. Mentoring enables them to acquire what they lack in order to find a job on par with their qualifications. To their credit, the firms providing volunteer mentors for the NQT's program are also committed to programs of corporate social responsibility. This has meaning for their personnel, and brings concrete, measurable benefits in house. Finally, the mentoring we observed was a "mending" action for creating the actual conditions for equal opportunities. It targeted young people who, objectively, were underprivileged — due to their very low endowment in economic and social capital (BOURDIEU 1980) — but who were "deserving" thanks to the educational capital they had built up through schooling.

The second lead for further study has to do with the way mentoring is organized. Our research deliberately focused on interactions within the mentoring relationship, a focus that has brought into view issues extending beyond mentorship itself. It would be worthwhile inquiring into these issues in order to understand how the association's managerial practices capitalize on successful cases of mentoring. How are the "right" practices shared, discussed and incorporated in the organization's regular practices? How does the organization take advantage of the four psychosocial effects? Is the association fully aware of the virtuous circle that can add to its reputation and to the value of its "stock" of mentors?

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