The Support to an Entrepreneur: From Autonomy to Dependence

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Abstract
Entrepreneurs are often associated with autonomy, but one of the coauthors, the sole owner of a microbusiness, had a different experience. Based on this, we used an autobiographical narrative method in a constructivist paradigm to explore this phenomenon that is autonomy. The coauthor’s different experience developed the idea that difficulties lived by an entrepreneur can transform autonomy into dependence. This negative complex process is grounded on a request for help by the entrepreneur and the dissymmetric relation between the person who needs help and the support. This kind of relationship promotes a loss of the entrepreneur’s capacities. A non-co-construction of solution (by the entrepreneur and the support) is not only less productive, but could also develop a very negative process. This finding is important to better understand support to entrepreneurs.

Keywords
entrepreneur, project, autonomy, support, autobiography, reflexive work

Introduction
We are researchers in managing people in the workplace. With this article, we wish to study a concept that is dear to the field of entrepreneurship—autonomy—and present it from a management perspective with a personalist approach.

Most entrepreneurs share a wish to be autonomous and to control their environment. A number of research projects suggest that autonomy is an important entrepreneurial motivation (Van Gelderen, 2010). Alstete (2008) has shown that business people value independence and freedom. This confirms the need for autonomy and independence described by Kets de Vries (1977). Several years later, this same author explored the need for control experienced by entrepreneurs. This need can be linked to the fears of being at the mercy of others (Kets de Vries, 1985). Nelson (2004) supported this idea when he says that entrepreneurs do not like to be controlled. The need for control is reflected in the concept of locus of control. According to Rotter (1966), an individual’s locus of control can be either internal or external. While the internal locus of control refers to an individual who believes that events in his or her life are caused by factors that can be controlled, the external locus of control refers to an individual who attributes the cause of events to others, the environment, destiny, or chance. Even if empirical data have not been able to strongly authenticate the links between the internal locus of control and the entrepreneur, these links exist regardless (Janssen & Surlemont, 2009). Lumpkin and Dess (1996) clarified what they mean by autonomy: “Autonomy refers to the independent action of an individual or a team in bringing forth an idea or a vision and carrying it through to completion” (p. 140). For Lumpkin, Cogliser, and Schneider (2009), autonomy is an important component of an entrepreneurial orientation (EO). A high level of autonomy within EO has “show[n]a significantly higher level of performance than those with a lower level of EO” (Lee & Lim, 2009, p. 12). Autonomy is one of the factors that may be present when a firm engages in new entry (Covin & Wales, 2012).

Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) described the etymology of the word “autonomy.” It comes from two words: self (autos) and rule or law (nomos). According to these authors, there is a broad consensus that “autonomy means that individuals make their own choice independent of others” (Van Gelderen & Jansen, 2006, p. 6). Autonomy is one of “the qualities regularly attributed to the entrepreneurial personality” (Kets de Vries, 1996, p. 857). Autonomy is essential for the process to take advantage of a company’s existing strengths; it may help develop new ventures or improve business practices. Autonomy is necessary to cultivate and develop entrepreneurial initiatives. Lumpkin and Dess (1996) defined autonomy as “the independent action of an individual or a team in bringing forth an idea or a vision and carrying it through to completion” (p. 140).

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Based on Kanfer (1990, 1994), Van Gelderen and Jansen (2006) distinguished two kinds of motives for autonomy: distal and proximal. The proximal motive for autonomy is associated with task characteristics, the sources of motivation being located in the work itself. As autonomy is a decisional freedom, distal motives are often present in those wishing to start a business for themselves: to avoid a boss or restriction, to act in a self-endorsed and self-congruent manner, and to be in charge are three distal motives.

Instead of Covin and Slevin’s (1991) model that focuses on the role of entrepreneurship as firm behavior (Lumpkin & Dess, 1996), this article places the emphasis on the entrepreneur as a person.

It is true that business people are often associated with autonomy and freedom or with the need to control their destiny. But this was not completely the case for one of the coauthors of this article, the sole owner of a microbusiness. However, the coauthor’s experience does not seem to be so different from that of other entrepreneurs after all. Narratives by entrepreneurs abound because entrepreneurs are generally inclined to sharing their experiences and are happy to be the subject of discussion (McKenzie, 2007). Most of these narratives involve heroes who have succeeded. This article will present a narrative describing an entrepreneur grappling with difficulties. The entrepreneur had a project that she knew must be changed, resulting in her no longer feeling free and autonomous. The goal of our work was to examine this entrepreneur’s transformation process, from her state of mind at the beginning of her project to the feeling of being dependent. In this article, we wish to understand how supporting entrepreneurs may lead to a decrease in their autonomy and an increase in their dependence. First, we explain the methodology used: an autobiographical narrative method. Second, we present autobiographical narratives and related work: the birth of an idea and the need to review the project.

**Method**

Research in social sciences increasingly uses narratives and biographical methods (Haynes, 2006). Historically, these methods can be traced back all the way to the ancient Greeks (Gould, 2006), but they are not currently used in management studies. For example, Boje and Tyler (2008) and Haynes (2006, 2011) used auto-ethnographies while introspection is emerging in consumer research (Gould, 2012). Different kinds of similar approaches exist under different names: autobiography, auto-ethnography, introspection, personal narratives, narratives of the self, personal experience narratives, self-stories, first-person accounts, personal essays, auto-observations, personal ethnography, and reflexive ethnography, among others. Researchers do not agree on the limitations of each of these categories (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, p. 11) for scientific standards. “Self-study researchers have also exhibited the need to wrestle with the question of the validity of their studies” (Feldman, 2003, p. 26). Even if these methods seem to have no scientific content (in a positivist way; Huckle, 2007; Holbrook, 1995; Rod, 2011), it is more important to be relevant with regard to the epistemological paradigm that has been chosen. For this reason and to help legitimize it, this kind of method has to be developed in a nonpositivist paradigm. In the paradigm of pragmatic constructivism, research legitimizes knowledge by internal and external reflexive work. In this case, knowledge is not found in the narrative, but is built from it.

The paradigm of pragmatic constructivism is based on radical constructivism as conceptualized by von Glasersfeld (2001), Vico, as well as James and Piaget (Avenier, 2010). In this epistemological paradigm, knowledge neither claims to reflect an ontological reality (for nobody could rationally prove its existence) nor does it reveal its characteristics when this reality exists. This constructivism is not so extreme that it rejects the notion of essence entirely (Grint, 1998). In this paradigm, while knowledge is being constructed, there is no distinction between the inquirer and the phenomenon being inquired into. They simply cannot be distinguished because what results from the observer’s viewpoint (an explicit or implicit theoretical hypothesis) is that which influences observations. Pragmatic constructivism considers that truth is meaningless because of the way knowledge is built from human representations to give meaning to situations in which they are involved. Therefore, producing knowledge does not mean having a true representation of reality, but rather possessing ways and means to understand life.

Besides, in a constructivist epistemological framework, the status of knowledge is openly acknowledged as a plausible hypothesis. This relies on the notion of generic knowledge as introduced by the pragmatist philosopher Dewey. Generic knowledge involves knowledge about various kinds of things (Dewey, 1938), rather than knowledge about statistical regularities (Prasada, 2000). Generic knowledge has the particularity that, to be utilized in a specific setting, it needs to be re-contextualized according to the idiosyncratic circumstances of the setting in question.

Reflexive work is what researchers do when they behave as reflexive practitioners of scientific research. It consists of tracking what seems self-evident and digging into the implicit assumptions made and the deep meaning of the notions that are used or newly introduced. The researcher often uses a large body of academic literature to understand local knowledge, not to seem scientific but to stand back and understand it differently. As the word validation has a strong connotation in a scientific context, that of having resisted all the hypothesis testing performed hitherto, following Weick (1979), we prefer to use the term legitimation to refer to
the process by which some kind of validity is assigned to the knowledge that is built. Legitimization is not absolute, but context and goal-dependent. When researchers want to use autobiographical research methods and produce legitimized knowledge within the paradigm of pragmatic constructivism, they have to produce reflexive work. Autobiography is therefore an abductive process (Minowa, Visconti, & Maclaran, 2012), that is to say, a constant back and forth between empirical information and the theories and concepts used to understand this process (Avenier, 2010). From our viewpoint, this means that an autobiographical narrative is not in and of itself scientific knowledge, but helps in its construction.

Some Guidelines Could Help to Legitimize Knowledge That Stems From Autobiography

On Writing Narrative

- “Autobiographical self-studies should ring true and enable connection” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16).
- “Self-studies should promote insight and interpretation” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16).
- “Quality autobiographical self-studies attend carefully to persons in context or setting” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 18).
- “Autobiographical self-study research must engage history forthrightly and the author must take an honest stand” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16).

It is essential that the reader believe the narrative that it seems realistic. This is called verisimilitude (Ellis, 2004). At first, an autobiographical narrative is written in a completely naive way, without trying to understand, at the time of its writing, what happened and why. Narrators simply talk about what they experienced and how they lived it, like talking about their day when they get home from work or recounting their holidays to a friend. To provide specific context, practitioners/researchers must modify, rework, deconstruct, and reconstruct their narrative, until it is as exact and rigorous a reconstruction. This new material must also be put to the test, and so on until saturation. Within the paradigm of pragmatic constructivism, it is essential to carry out reflexive work to ensure the scientific character of a study (Avenier, 2010). This is based on elaborated knowledge and the cognitive process involved in the development of this knowledge. Because this work is deliberate, it consists of questioning the real meaning hidden behind the notions elaborated or mobilized, putting them in theoretical and practical perspectives, articulating them in the currently accepted knowledge, and proceeding to their deconstruction–reconstruction (Avenier & Schmitt, 2005).

In a continuous process, the narrative approach helps us understand the emergence of a phenomenon by identifying the key moments that caused it, rather than by discerning the conditions that made its emergence necessary. The events were explained by the story that made them what they are (Becker, 1998). Practitioners/researchers use this opportunity to revisit their narrative several times to find and develop what was at first implicit or unconscious. With this kind of research, we seek to learn “how” we know rather than confirm “what” we know, which is in line with approaches proposed by Yanow (2006), Shehata (2006), Schön (1993), and Wallendorf and Brucks (1993).

Research must be part of a distancing process, aiming to differentiate facts from perceptions. This process supposes the explicitness of main elements on which this kind of work is based. To accomplish their autobiographical work, researchers must compare and contrast personal experience against existing research (Ellis et al., 2010). They develop personal narratives with diversified and heterogeneous scientific literature and theoretical frameworks from different academic disciplines. In other words, the inquirer could decontextualize knowledge through the systematic study of multiple comparisons (Charmaz, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Conscious that their interpretation of lived events can never be verified, practitioners/researchers have to apprehend these events from diverse viewpoints. These new understandings trigger a reflection process, requiring the writing of the other elements of the story that have emerged. This new material must also be put to the test, and so on until saturation.

On Reflexive Work

- “Authentic voice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the scholarly standing of biographical self-study” (Patton, 2002, p. 571).
- “Powerful autobiographical self-studies portray character development and include dramatic action: something genuine is at stake in the story” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17).
- “Interpretations made of self-study data should not only reveal but also interrogate the relationships, contradictions, and limits of the views presented” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, pp. 19-20).

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On the Production of Generic Knowledge

- “The autobiographical self-study researcher has an ineluctable obligation to seek to improve the learning situation not only for the self but for the other” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 17).
“Quality autobiographical self-studies offer fresh perspectives on established truths” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 18).

Even if the narrative is personal, it has to resonate with readers; what is sought is neither the elaboration of singular stories nor a “self-therapy” exercise. The purpose of setting words to the researcher’s experience (local knowledge), with hindsight and rigor, is the elaboration of actionable knowledge by practitioners (generic knowledge), in other words, of establishing heuristic benchmarks for actions (Avenier, 2010).

This method, where the researcher and the practitioner are one, like any other involving a reflexive practitioner, provides access to information that would not be revealed through questions or observations in other more “traditional” methods. The meaning given to knowledge gained through experience can be innovating or challenge other studies (Ellis et al., 2010). Prasada (2000) and Carlson and Pelletier (1995) pointed out that generic knowledge expresses properties that are considered essential to characterize the studied phenomenon, even if in pragmatic constructivism generic knowledge is not invalidated by the existence of what might be considered a counterexample. However, when using graphical methods in research, we must also consider that there are undoubtedly limits to our knowledge of the past, due to subjectivity, and even authors who are the protagonists of their own story can reach these limits (Filion & Akizawa, 2012). While trying to be as sincere as possible, everything is not related or even relatable.

The generic knowledge presented in this article makes sense to other entrepreneurs and those who support them. We presented this knowledge to several people and they could relate to it. Even if this is based only on the experiences of one coauthor, we can still construct not only local knowledge but also generic knowledge.

**Autobiographical Narrative and Related Reflective Work**

The autobiographical narrative and the reflective work are presented in chronological order to make them easier to read. The narrative is divided into two parts: the birth of an idea and the need to review the project. Each piece of narrative is italicized and followed by the related work.

**The Birth of an Idea**

Almost 20 years ago, my grandfather, who did not know how to read or write, passed away without having left us his “salted onions” recipe. What a calamity! It was one of the family’s favorite condiments. After several years of suffering, without this much enjoyed condiment, I at last found an uncle who had the recipe and was willing to give it to me. Wonderful! Life could now go back to normal.

After having eaten my fill of this much enjoyed condiment for a good while, I thought to myself that this palace “jewel” deserved to be known by all and shared like the Good News! Once I had talked a little about this idea to those around me, I realized that this would not be easy: the product was completely unknown; its name meant “unhealthy”; the necessary investments could be significant; the market for this type of condiment has been mostly taken over by Heinz and others like it, and so on. In spite of all this, I made the recipe and, taking my courage in both hands, presented it to an organization for economic development. Following the interview, I did not receive any news, not a phone call, not a word, not any advice, not even a procedure to follow . . . I was disappointed. I must point out here that, just like probably a good many potential entrepreneurs, I felt insecure, about my idea and the means to turn it into reality. Being supported seemed essential for me to get my project off the ground.

Seven or eight years later, my career was at a dead end. I had worked about 5 years at a job at which I was not successful and for which I was paid solely on commission. I had to find something else, but my personal circumstances made it necessary for me to stay in Rimouski, even though my competences would have been better suited to a big city. In the meantime, I had almost finished an undergraduate degree in Business Management. I felt more confident in presenting a business proposal to those involved. I enjoyed cooking, so I wanted to go back to my idea of the “salted onions” recipe. But as I felt I had appeared completely crazy during my first attempt, this time I wanted to take more precautions.

If my family had almost lost its favorite recipe, there were likely other families in the same situation. The idea of “saving” this heritage seemed interesting to me. I presented a preliminary project to an organization responsible for the economic development of my region. (Obviously, if I had been lucky, this whole story would have been completely different.) The response I received left me puzzled: “Your project is too big. You should think about doing it step by step. Your kind of business is usually done on a very small scale. You build your clientele little by little.” On a small scale?

Yes, you make more than what you would normally at home, then sell what is left over to people in your area who are interested in the product, and so on. This is how your clientele will grow. Once you have enough customers, then you can think about building a company.

But I did not want a lucrative hobby! I wanted my own business to earn a living! Considered stubborn, I went over my project once more to make it “work” within the criteria of the development organization. Instead of a “large factory” to preserve culinary traditions, I would make a very small local workshop, with products on sale locally.

Once more, I presented my project and was told that “our organization is not involved in retail businesses.” How could
I be small and big? No problem! I knew that I was able to finance the project with personal loans as it was, so I decided to risk it all.

At the beginning, the project did not fulfill the requirements of eligibility established by agencies that provide technical assistance and funding, and it was too small for financial institutions. No problem! I decided to start out with a personal loan. The real-estate market in my location did not have any commercial space that met my needs, but never mind, I resigned myself to renting a space that was too big and too expensive, and poorly situated. I would work harder and that was it.

Block and Wagner (2010) noted a difference with respect to motivation when starting a business. The project initiator (the entrepreneur) is either attracted to entrepreneurship, to the opportunities it offers, or brought to the project through necessity. These kinds of entrepreneuri shes are tied to aspirations, motivations, and factors that influence human behavior (Acs, 2006; Hessels, Gelderen, & Thurik, 2008; Johnson & Darnell, 1976). For Hessels et al. (2008), there are three types of motivation to start a business: pull or push motives, cost–benefit motives, depth-psychological motives (need for achievement, the need for power). Opportunity entrepreneurship depends on “pull” factors, that is, whether business start-ups generate material advantages or not, such as autonomy, independence, freedom, money, challenges, social status, or even recognition (Carter, Gartner, Shaver, & Gatewood, 2003; Kolvereid, 1996). Necessity entrepreneurship depends on “push” factors, that is, when development results from the project initiator being in an adverse situation, such as unemployment, layoff, or the threat of losing one’s job (Thurik, Carree, van Stel, & Audretsch, 2008). Despite innovations in the product and concept, the project our article focuses on emerged from a dead end on the labor market, making this a case of necessity entrepreneurship. However, necessity and opportunity can be said to mesh and meld in this project. Dawson and Henley (2012) addressed the conceptual ambiguities linked to the pull and push factors categorization. They distinguish external push factors (lack of alternative opportunities and resources, as well as redundancy), external pull factors (resources, market opportunities, and innovation), internal push factors (job dissatisfaction, as well as family and financial constraints), and internal pull factors (financial resources, autonomy, challenges, and perceived self-efficacy). The entrepreneur felt free to carry out her project at that time: She interpreted the opportunity the project offered as a way of meeting her needs (necessity). She believed in her project. She had both pull and push, internal and external, motivations. But in this case pull motivation was not based on business attractiveness as it is usually viewed (autonomy, independence, freedom, money, challenges, social status, or even recognition); it was based on the will to develop an interesting project.

The coauthor/entrepreneur’s initial project was what motivated her to start a business. Of course, she would have liked to make enough money to live on, but the main purpose of her project was to produce, sell, and promote traditional recipes, not to make money per se.

In this study, the entrepreneur’s representations of her aspirations, skills, and resources, and of the possibilities offered by her environment created a space in which she could plan her business project (Bruyat & Julien, 2001). The project was consequently unique and personal as it was the product of a single individual at a certain point in time. The space was clearly defined by that person’s representations, which were real only to her and reflected her personal view of her environment. This strengthened the specific and unique character of the project that would be developed in this realm of possibilities. The entrepreneur sought to give meaning to the present by projecting on it a potential future. Thus, taking action depended on a perfect balance between the player (our entrepreneur), what attracted her, and the right moment (Fayolle, Basso, & Tornnikoski, 2011). A project initiator’s environment is the goal and the means (Bruyat & Julien, 2001).

Located between the trigger and completion, the commitment stage in Fayolle et al.’s (2011) entrepreneurial commitment theory underlines a certain unrealistic optimism (UO) described by Coelho (2010). UO refers to an underestimation of the likelihood of experiencing negative events and to an overestimation of the probability of experiencing positive events (Weinstein & Klein, 1996, p. 2), that is, a mismatch between subjective and objective probabilities. Hence, UO implies that the mean forecast errors are significantly different from zero.

Most people believe they have above-average abilities and have above-average chances of attaining a better future than others. However, this egocentric bias does not appear only when people compare themselves with others, but also in absolute terms. As commitment develops throughout the project, the entrepreneur considers no obstacle as being too great to overcome. Escalating commitment (Staw, 1976) leads to irreversibility. Creating is perceived as preferable to any other project of change and resistance to change can be overcome (Fayolle et al., 2011). We can therefore ask if UO (Coelho, 2010) is inevitable or essential for business project initiators. Even if autonomy was not a motivating factor for our coauthor in becoming an entrepreneur, it helped her to take control of her situation and start her business.

**Need to Review the Project**

After operating for about a year, the business was not getting off the ground enough to break even, and I believed I was at the end of my financial resources. Once more I appealed to the Local Development Centre, which, this time, agreed to help me. The person responsible for my application was able to get me a small loan for young entrepreneurs and introduced me to another organization that agreed to pay for a marketing consultant. At last, I received financing from a government bank and a micro-credit organization.
After all this preparation, what still remained was the impression that the consultant lacked creativity. Yes, he had brought in a new idea, but without any link to the primary goal of the business or to my own aspirations. This left me with a very strong feeling of being abandoned by the consultant because he didn’t accompany me in the implementation of his solution (i.e., including a restaurant space reserved for soups and sandwiches at the front of the store, for a better use of the space itself). This technical assistant/consultant did not move beyond the theoretical level, then he “disappeared,” and the financial partners agreed to provide only the resources necessary to the survival of the business, not the resources essential for the implementation of the whole plan.

Still, the business survived another year, at which time it became increasingly obvious that its chances of success were very slim. And here we go again! I started over once more: consulting, planning, and giving up before the implementation of the project. In fact, there was no implementation following the second consultation. I did not think I had the resources or the means necessary to make it work.

From that moment, while continuing to kick over the traces, to rant, to get angry, and to fight for this project, I was sad. Reapplying for help was not an easy task. I had to get to be convinced that I could be myself there. I needed support, knowledge, competent support from someone else.

But I had the impression of being left on my own, of being robbed of my project. This was more challenging than it seemed, more than simply accepting help from the consultant and following the advice given. I had to take into account all of my constraints. In fact, I didn’t ask “what to do” or “how to do it” anymore. I asked for support in helping me reach my goal. My enthusiasm, ambition, or dreams no longer had a place. It was like a mountain of rubble that suddenly fell on me. Although I was strong and autonomous and I wanted to stay free in body and mind, at this point I had to accept that I couldn’t do anything more by myself for this project. I felt small and fragile. I no longer had any choices. I was overwhelmed by everything. . . I didn’t know what to do anymore.

Still, it seemed like I remained confident because, over time, I successfully convinced myself that I could still avoid the worst. The consultant’s ideas resurfaced: Transforming my business into a “fondue” restaurant. I said farewell to the original project that I cherished, and presented this new project to financial partners, who accepted it without questioning where it might lead.

And indeed, it was too little, too late, may be too far above my expectations. My responsibilities turned into shackles, and after 18 months I had to close shop. I was in very bad shape, physically, morally, and financially.

Epilogue: This experience certainly left marks, when everything was said and done. After a major surgery, a long period of rest, and a career change, I am now in perfect health, but I don’t love cooking as much as before!

Waele, Morval, and Sheitoyan (1993) defined the appropriation process as the continuous flow of appropriation by people, which contributes (through the learning and awareness stages) to building reference points that enable people to find their place in the organization where they work. One of the flaws of the appropriation process may be the interpretation of information based on prior mental schemas while blocking new data. People then deprive themselves of useful lessons and become attached to outdated and unsuitable behaviors, which likely lead to failure (Waele et al., 1993).

The entrepreneur in this case could not accept advice from the consultants because they did not correspond to her initial project with which she had such strong emotional ties. Consulting changed the entrepreneur’s goal, which was a major motivation to start her business. The consultant modified the project (from the production of traditional recipes to a restaurant). This transformation discouraged the entrepreneur. The new project was too distant from her original project. This created a discomfort that led her to close her business. Advice can be good or bad, but if it restricts entrepreneurs’ autonomy, such advice can cause trouble. Shahidi (2012) explained that some entrepreneurs should refuse to be supported because they need independence, freedom, and the appropriation of their own creation. In our story, the consultant did not show her how, given her resources, she could implement the recommendations. Because of this, she did not manage to detach herself from her prior schemas. From her point of view, the information was not realistic and her projects did not seem to be part of any plausible future. She may have felt as if she was getting double-speak from the consultant. He gave her advice with solutions that took into consideration neither her project nor her means, despite the fact that the project was her first motive to start her business. This kind of behavior displayed by consultants can inhibit awareness and curiosity (Waele et al., 1993). In our case, the consultant refused to get involved in the implementation of the project, using as reason that he did not want to hinder the entrepreneur’s autonomy. These contradictions can make the appropriation process difficult and foster a sense of malaise (Waele et al., 1993).

This can be perceived as a paradox. Autonomy is very important for entrepreneurs. It helps them turn their projects into reality. Seeking support may put the entrepreneur in a weak position, which may increase the perception of their need for help. This perceived weakness may in turn decrease the entrepreneur’s autonomy. There is an unequal relationship between the consultant and the entrepreneur. This support, even if well intended could create a perception of vulnerability where the entrepreneur is concerned. Seeking help may decrease self-esteem. There may be a social stigma attached to seeking professional help, that is, the fear that people may judge a person negatively if he or she seeks help (Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson, & Hackler, 2007). This fear about others’ perception was interiorized by our entrepreneur and influenced her behavior, as Mead (1934/1974) expressed with his generalized “other” that may foster a feeling of incompetence. When consultants propose their own solutions they risk hindering entrepreneurs’ autonomy. With their
advice, consultants apply informal pressure, whether intentionally or not. In our case, the coauthor/entrepreneur felt forced to follow her consultant’s advice, although it was not a formal obligation. Even if she did not like it, she thought that she had to do what the consultant suggested. This informal power seemed to hinder the entrepreneur’s autonomy. Bauman and Döring (2011) distinguished the condition of autonomy from the capacity for autonomy.

Being autonomous presupposes that a person has several capacities, most prominently capacities for self-reflection and rationality (rational self-control). But merely having these capacities does not guarantee that a person is autonomous because other persons or the social environment she lives in might prevent her from effectively exercising them. (Bauman & Döring, 2011, p. 736)

Lee and Lim (2009) measured autonomy with three items: “I always complete everything I initiate. I am always positive about problems arising in my life, and solve them on my own. Even if I fail many times, I will keep on trying until I succeed on this business” (p. 9). If we use this type of measure, our coauthor/entrepreneur could be considered as being autonomous. She maintained autonomous capacities, but in this context, she was not fully autonomous. According to St Jean and Audet (2012), mentors have to adopt a maieutic style rather than a directive style. In this case, the mentored retain their autonomy. “A situation that threatens persons’ self-view, the view others have of them, and/or the quality of their relationships and interpersonal exchanges, may diminish their sense of self-esteem and self-efficacy” (Pierce, Baldwin, & Lydon, 1997, p. 29). “Self-belief does not necessarily ensure success, but self-disbelief assuredly spawns failure” (Bandura, 1997, p. 77). Self-doubt prevents the skillful use of skills already established. If self-efficacy is lacking, people tend to behave ineffectually, even though they know what to do (Bandura, 1997).

Such a situation may lead to dependence and incapacity to act. Support may therefore incapacitate a person and have the opposite effect than intended. Support meant to increase efficiency often supposes an equal relationship between the entrepreneur and the person offering support, where solutions can be co-constructed. Co-construction does not lead to a perception of inferiority and takes into account what is very important to the entrepreneur (in our case, her project). Williams (1995) focuses on the importance of the need and the wish to have a reciprocal relationship between support and recipient. Figure 1 shows how seeking help, feeling weak, and influencing autonomy can interact and induce dependence and loss of the entrepreneur’s capacities.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this article was to examine the transformation process of a specific entrepreneur, from autonomy to perceived dependence. We explained how support may decrease autonomy and develop dependence in entrepreneurs. An unequal relationship between an entrepreneur who needs help and a support person who gives advice may have a very negative impact on entrepreneurs (and their business). Coaches and mentors should work toward the co-construction of solutions (the entrepreneur and the support person) to be more productive and avoid a possibly very negative process. However, entrepreneurs who face difficulties and need help can easily get support from consultants who hand out ready-made solutions, although this may indeed lead to further difficulties.

![Figure 1. From autonomy to dependence.](image-url)
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