

A CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF THE SCIENCE AND ART OF MENTORING

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ABSTRACT

Mentoring is a potent organization intervention tool used by human resource professional to help shape career of employees and supports in knowledge transfer. The term mentoring is a buzzword, often discussed by the leadership of the modern management era, especially in context of a dynamic and complex environment. Without an in-depth study of mentoring as a process or technique, the competence of a mentor will be limited to the horizons of his or her own experience. Thus, it is critical to understand mentoring as a structure driven process and as a scientific tool. The article focusses on the softer aspects of mentoring as a process, as well as the science and technique behind.

Keywords: Mentor, Attributes, Mentee, Mentoring program, Techniques, Effectiveness, organization.

INTRODUCTION

Several practitioners of human resources and academician in field of organizational research have propounded mentoring as a training and pedagogical tool program which facilitates up skilling, teaching, supporting an individuals' career progression. In a typical mentoring dyadic relationship a more seasoned senior, is assigned a younger high potential employee, who is supported and guided through his/her journey in the organization. In the recent past several corporates have initiated mentoring program to support diversity initiatives & employees facing career plateauing besides merely being considered a career enhancement tool Adhikari, et al. (2015).

In an environment which is competitive to core, escalating war for talent is given, organizations can build a sustainable advantage by including a well thought mentoring program, code of conduct & a structured process; in the HR strategy and organizational ethos. Regardless of its multiple interpretations, mentoring, if properly conducted is bound to change life of a mentee with a transformed positive attitude and enhanced competence.

Evolution of Mentoring As a Phenomenon

Mentoring as a phenomenon has been in existence since time immemorial and finds first mention, in Greek mythology where king Odysseus entrusted the eponymous character, Mentor, with his son, Telemachus, (Friday & Friday, 2002). Over last several decades mentoring has found mention in several disciplines like sports, law, education, Banking and Finance, healthcare and management. Several practitioner-oriented, academic articles, books and press releases have been published on mentoring over last few decades. Today mentoring has metamorphized in forms of coaching, buddy system, reverse mentoring and e-mentoring as per needs of the workplace. Today HR practitioner's view mentoring as one of the key tool in their training and development arsenal.

Mentoring Construct

Mentoring is traditionally a dyadic relationship, generally lasting long term over several interactions between a adult supervisor and a student mentee. Donaldson, et al. (2000), declared that the mentee's professional, academic or personal development is fostered by mentoring. The historical context that the term "*Mentor*" has been borrowed from mention of male guide, Mentor, in Greek mythology, has an informed traditional manifestation of mentoring. While Levinson (1978) empathizes on criticality of a mentoring relationship which is developmentally important for a man in early adulthood; Flaxman, et al. (1968), defines mentoring as a supportive relationship between someone who offers support, guidance and concrete assistance to a young adult going thru a difficult period. Review of mentoring literature is replete with expression such as "*counsellor*" or "*guru*" which would be misleading to its true meaning; teacher, adviser or sponsor are more judicious descriptors of a mentor.

Science of Mentoring

Mentoring is a key business strategy to employee well being and hence it's critical for the formal Mentoring process to lay down the process, technique, well defined role and expectation from mentor, mentee, the skills required for the job and also be objective on the results and outcome of mentoring. While mentoring is conventionally present in conceptual and fuzzy format, however a in-depth investigation of mentoring viz multiple perceptive of mentor role, process, skill and outcome reveals several aspects which indicate it to be a well laid, logic driven, process and outcome orientated training and developmental tool in the 21st century.

Mentor role perspective

Role of a mentor has continually been under the scanner and several researchers continue to write about functions, types, and responsibility of a mentor in a mentoring relationship. Kram, (1985) was the pioneer who identified two different types of mentoring functions viz. *career development* which includes nominating mentee for paid training program, showcase performance of the mentee, coach, shield mentee from power tussle and assign interesting assignments and *psychosocial functions* which includes mentor being an inspiration, accepting mentee as is, advising, and being a friend. Numerous other researchers (Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Young & Perrew, 2004; Rhay et al., 2010) endorsed the views opined by her. Several other theoretical and practical perspective, encapsulate mentor role with those of a coach, counselor, who will speak on behalf of mentee, supervisor, someone's company mentee can enjoy and also who is a teacher.

Process Perspective

Kram & Kathy (1980) in her work spanning several years' explored functions and phases of mentoring in naturally occurring, informal mentoring relationships. Based on her findings, she suggested that there are four stages in a mentoring process viz. In the initial or first stage both the, mentor and mentee develop mutual respect and trust; in the second stage mentee cultivates skills and confidence with help from the career and psychosocial support provided by the mentor; in next stage the umbilical cord between the mentor and protégé gets separated; and finally the mentoring dyad redefine or recast their relationship to meet reciprocal needs. Renowned researcher Murray & Owen, (1991), described presence of

structure and process in mentoring program which aimed at changing behavior of mentees, evaluating results of various outcome of the mentoring program.

Mentor Attributes Perspective

An ideal mentor is a myth, as it is expected that he/she will be high on knowledge, sound capacity to judge, influencer par excellence, great communicator, empathetic, empowering, having capability to establish rapport, high on self-awareness, constructive critic, trustworthy advisor, A motivator and a listener, and the list is endless. Research on significance of mentor abilities by Okurame, David (2008) inferred that, mentors should possess a variety of skills and attributes, such as having intellectual capital, strong relationship building and interpersonal skills. According to Cardwell & Corkin (2007), mentors apply interpersonal skills to detect the needs of the protégés. Mentors should also be friendly, approachable, understanding, and patient. In addition, mentors should be honest, respectful, dedicated, compassionate, and willing to provide honest feedback (McDowall-Long, 2004).

Measurement of Effectiveness

Mentoring brings out the attitudinal and creative best of every individual involved. Mentor managers are benefited by job satisfaction, organizational commitment, low turnover intentions, sense of rejuvenation, opportunity for higher position, enhanced acknowledgment from team members and leadership, access to critical information and finally satisfaction of having taught and contributed to the mentee's career and life (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000; Scandura & Williams, 2004; Ghosh, et al. 2013). Protégé's are most obvious, benefactors with enhanced job satisfaction, knowledge, self-esteem, motivation, career progression, low turnover intention and networking to name a few.

Eventually, organizations benefit from opportunities of enhanced organizational learning for mentor and mentee, competitive advantage, strategic functioning, motivation of employees, enhanced performance, professional progress and low attrition (Scandura & Viator, 1994; Mullen & Noe, 1999). Mentoring is a win-win strategy, having a ripple effect across all critical stakeholders' viz. employees, management and organization.

Mentoring as an Abstract Art

Mentoring offers a golden opportunity to build a social network with senior resources within and outside the organization and is bound to have elements of emotional connect and subjectivity in judgment. It begins as a teaching process like parental nurturing and might continue through the life cycle of professional and personal relationship. Principally, mentoring is both a responsibility & developmental opportunity for both mentor and mentee, involving social and emotional perspective and hence difficult to terrain bound the process. Through mentoring, the mentee gains from wisdom and experience of his mentor, gaining knowledge of principles, organizational traditions and values, and lessons gained by the mentor's understanding of the job. HR leaders should understand that knowledge and skill are not completely tangible in nature, measuring them is a daunting task, hence excessive processing might not still get the desired results. Since mentoring brings about an edifying transformation in the way mentee views his / her career, personal aspirations and plans his/her future, it's critical to understand and retain the abstractness of its relational aspect.

CONCLUSION

Mentoring is a continual process. It is incumbent on leaders and mentors to nurture, train, and coach and guide their mentees. Mentoring being in practiced informally over several decades, however, it would be safe to concede that a well-executed, scientifically structured mentoring program, can ensure positive change in attitude, competence and performance of the mentee. Mentoring has evolved from being a belief and an informal method of transforming knowledge and grooming younger generation to a more practical, well-structured and result oriented pedagogical tool. Formal mentoring programs seek participation of all stakeholder viz. Human resource professional, leadership team and the organization like never before. Corporate leadership has resonated with the idea of having a process driven mentoring program and hence they include predefined framework including objective of the program, eligibility criteria for participants, selection technique, and training of participants with a targeted outcome of the mentoring process. Finally, mentoring has matured from an abstract and loosely defined art to a more scientific and method driven process. Human resource professional should ensure that gains of such a profound and critical organizational intervention tool are well capitalized upon.

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