

RELEVANCE OF MENTORING IN THE WORKPLACE

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Abstract: *The purpose of this article is to provide an understanding about the relevance of mentoring in the work place. Mentoring is a process by which an older and experienced employee of the organization provides necessary guidance and direction to a younger employee of the organization. Mentoring relationship goes through a sequence of steps such as Initiation, Cultivation, Separation, and Redefinition. Mentoring relationship can be formal as well as informal. Formal relationship happens when the mentor is chosen by the organization. Informal relationship in Mentoring occurs when both the mentor and the mentee consider each other as having similar characteristics and mutually accept each other for the conduct of mentoring. Mentoring can also take alternative forms such as Mentoring Circles, Peer Mentoring, Team Mentoring, Consultant Mentoring and Reverse Mentoring. It can offer a lot of opportunities and challenges in organisations. Mentoring can have a great impact on the overall productivity of the employees which in turn lead to achievement of goals of the organization.*

Key words- *Mentoring, Formal and Informal Mentoring, Mentoring Relationship, Opportunities and Challenges*

Introduction

Human resources are considered as the vital assets of a firm. The collective effort of all the employees of the organization are required to achieve organisational goals. Today, the workplace is becoming very competitive with high expectations about performance and growth. It is very important that the employees of the organization are mentored with great care by a well experienced person of the organization. Irrespective of any profession, all human beings would have had some mentors at some stage in their life. Undergraduate, Post graduate, and Doctoral Students pursue their research work under the tutelage of a mentor. The mentor guides the students in the right direction and help them achieve the objective. Mentor is also required for employees in organisations. Mentoring can contribute an important role in enhancing job satisfaction of employees, preventing job hopping, and reducing the stress of employees. It is an important career development tool used in organisations. In the current scenario, there are a lot of mentoring programmes offered by organisations.

Statement of the Problem

The present paper tries to address the relevance of Mentoring in the workplace. Junior and inexperienced employees of the organization can be guided by a senior employee who acts as a mentor so as to get the necessary exposure.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives are framed based on the research problem

1. To understand the concept of Mentoring
2. To know the various steps in Mentoring relationship
3. To understand the various Alternative Mentoring models
4. To identify the opportunities and challenges of Mentoring

Research Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature. Past research studies on mentoring is also analysed. The data is collected from secondary resources such as research articles, books, etc.

Origin of the word Mentoring

The word Mentoring was introduced by Homer in the epic, "The Odyssey". A person named "Odysseus" had to go fight the Trojan war. He wanted his friend "Mentor" to give some guidance to his son "Telemachus" in his absence. Mentor offered Telemachus with some guidance that covered all the aspects of life. It is through this guidance that Telemachus became a competent young man and was able to save the life of Mentor in one occasion. It is through the relationship between Mentor and Telemachus, the concept of mentoring has evolved. A person who receives mentoring is also known as Protege. A person who gives direction and guidance to the Protégé is known as Mentor.

The origin of Mentoring can also be traced to the concept of Apprenticeship that emerged during the Industrial Revolution. The apprentice did the work under the guidance of a Master. The master helped the apprentice to attain skills. The master is also referred to as the Mentor.

According to Reidy-Croft (2005), Mentoring refers to the 'information and advice provided by an older, experienced individual to a younger and less experienced individual to help in latter's growth and development.

The U.S. Department of Transportation Mentoring Handbook (2004) states that a successful mentor is characterized as supportive, patient, and respected, a person who wants to share their experiences, and who facilitates personal and professional growth in the protégé

Review of Literature

Inzer & Crawford (2005) found that “formal mentoring was less effective than informal mentoring. Formal mentoring was found to be more effective to meet the needs for all the employees to have the opportunity to be mentored, to learn from wisdom, experience and mistakes of others”.

Aspfors & Fransson (2015)” stresses the importance of a systematic, long-term, and research informed mentor education that develops mentor’s understanding of teaching and mentoring”.

Payne & Huffman (2005) conducted a study among 1000 US Army officers. It was found that there was a positive relationship between mentoring and affective component. The study showed that Mentoring was found to have a negative relationship with turnover behavior.

Scandura (1992) conducted a study among 244 manufacturing managers. It was found that vocational and psychosocial support had a relationship with salary and promotion levels of the manager.

Murphy (2010) found that in reverse mentoring, junior employees (mentors) may grow in leadership skills and organizational knowledge. Senior employees can help to increase content knowledge, gain technical skills, and develop valuable cultural insights from direct interaction with millennials; and organizations could better develop talent management, social equity and diversity, and innovation.

Chen (2013) conducted a study of seven dyads engaged in reverse mentoring in multinational companies located in Taiwan. It was found that the three functions of traditional mentoring (i.e., career support, psychosocial support and role modeling) largely remain intact in reverse mentoring.

Relationship in Mentoring

Mentoring relationship passes through a series of stage. Kram(1983) suggests that the mentoring process goes through a series of steps – Initiation, Cultivation, Separation, and Redefinition and Retranslation.

Initiation

During this phase, the two parties – mentor and the protégé have respect for each other. The mentee develops closeness with the mentor. The mentor provides guidance and emotional support to the mentee. The mentor also gives some assignments to the protege to test the protégé’s capabilities. The duration of this phase is from 6 months to 1 year.

Cultivation

In this phase, the mentor provides a lot of career and psychosocial functions to the protégé. Both the mentor and the protégé continue to get benefits from the relationship and the emotional bond between the two becomes strengthened. The duration of this phase is from 2 years to 5 years.

Separation

In this stage, the protégé decides to work independently and no longer requires guidance from the mentor. The protégé also gets upgraded to a higher level role similar to that of a mentor and there will be change in protégé’s feeling towards the mentor. Both the parties experience a feeling of loneliness. The separation also ensures that the mentor has accomplished in the task of making the protégé to be successful in the job. The duration of this phase is from 6 months to 2 years.

Redefinition or Retranslation

It is the stage where the mentor and mentee redefine the relationship in the form of a peer like friendship. There shall be mutual sense of gratitude and appreciation for each other. The duration of this phase is for an indefinite period after the separation phase.

Types of Relationship

There are 2 types of relationship in Mentoring –Formal and Informal relationship.

In Formal mentoring relationship, the mentor and the mentee are chosen by the organisation. Here, there is an invention of a third party in Mentoring. There will be a programme coordinator in the organization who will ensure that the mentor and the mentee match each other. Mentoring is structured.

In Informal Mentoring relationship, mentoring takes place spontaneously. The mentor and the protégé will mutually identify each other because they feel that they have some similarities. There is no intervention of a Third party in Mentoring. Mentoring shall be unstructured.

Alternative Mentoring Models

The alternative mentoring models are mentioned below.

Mentoring Circles

It consists of a mentor working with a team of proteges. This method is actually adopted when there are only a few mentors available in the organization. The proteges shall be more in number.

Peer mentoring/Buddy system-

Here mentoring is done among peers. A new employee of the organization is mentored by peers and gets a lot of exposure.

Team Mentoring-

This type of mentoring is done by managers of various departments, representatives of the human resources and senior employees mentoring a group of proteges.

Consultant Mentors

These type of mentors are hired by the organization when there is no mentor with required skill or experience available in the organization to guide the employee.

Reverse Mentoring

In certain situations, the protégé may provide mentoring to the mentor. A younger employee of the organization can provide assistance to an older employee. The older employee may not be well versed with the use of technology and other media. Hence the younger employee guides the older employee in the right direction. It is an excellent tool for senior employees to understand the employees of the younger generation. Reverse Mentoring is a very viable option if the organization wants to consider the views and perspectives of employees from different generations.

Opportunities of Mentoring

1. Mentoring provides an opportunity for mentees to work under the guidance of a mentor who possesses necessary experience and skills on the job. The mentor shall be able to guide the mentee on how to deal with the work, how to prioritize and improve work, maintaining balance in work and family life etc.
2. Working under a skilled mentor also gives an opportunity for the mentee to become a mentor in future. This shall be a big boost to newly joined and inexperienced employees of the organization who may lack necessary interpersonal skills.
3. Mentors provide career development support to the mentee. The mentee shall be put into task by the mentor on challenging assignments. The mentee may also get an opportunity to make a presentation on the assignment to the top management. This helps the mentee to be motivated in the job and improve the performance and capabilities.
4. Mentors also provide emotional support to the mentee. This helps the mentee to become competent in the job.

Challenges of Mentoring

1. From most of the previous studies, it was found that most of the women employees lacked mentors who could help in their professional growth. Women employees occupying senior positions are lesser and there is a dearth of female mentors to guide female proteges. There is also a chance that male mentors may also avoid female mentees because of implication of improper intimacy and fear of office gossips.
2. Cross-gender mentoring is another challenge of mentoring. Cross gender mentoring is a form of mentoring when the mentor and mentee belong to the opposite gender. A major challenge in cross-gendering is managing the degree of intimacy of the mentor and the protégé.
3. The mentor and the protégé can belong to different cultural background, nationality, religion etc. So it is very important for the mentor and protégé to understand differences and move forward in the mentoring relationship.
4. With the rapid development of technology, another form of mentoring called E-mentoring has originated. The mentor and the mentee may be working in different locations. Through e-mentoring, the mentor and mentee can interact with one another according to their convenience with the help of a computer. Due to frequent employee travelling in connection with professional commitments and job transfers across various locations, E-mentoring has become very significant nowadays.

Positive Outcomes of Mentoring

1. New employees who worked under the tutelage of a mentor performed better in their jobs. Employees who had worked as mentors in the organization were also able to make a positive contribution in the organization. The mentors had a very vital role in keeping the mentee motivated in the job and making the mentees stay in the organization for a long period of time without searching for other jobs. Mentoring has made a significant impact in reducing employee turnover.
2. Mentoring also helps to identify potential candidates for higher level positions in the organization. Companies such as Hewlett-Packard and Infosys use Mentoring to identify capable candidates for leadership positions.
3. When an employee joins the organization, everything is new. One has to meet new employees, get adapted to the new culture, environment, and challenges in the workplace. The mentor helps the mentee to go through all these different situations boldly so as to make the mentee fully capable of meeting the future difficulties in life.

Conclusion

Mentoring is becoming a very important aspect in the workplace. Many employees are becoming successful in the job as well as in their personal life with the help of mentoring. Mentoring can be utilized as a change catalyst for the employees of an organization and family. So it is very important for organizations to identify the appropriate mentors for their proteges so that a successful pool of young manpower becomes available in the organization.

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