EMPLOYEE MENTORING: A TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT TECHNIQUE IN ENHANCING ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

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ABSTRACT

Many organizations do not understand, encourage and apply cost effective techniques like mentoring in training and developing employees. That is where the problem of this paper lies. To find solutions to this problem therefore, the paper seeks to give an overview of mentoring and examine its effectiveness and efficiency as alternative technique in training and developing employees as oppose to other training techniques that are directed only towards improving employee skills. The paper is descriptive in nature and draws largely from many research works in mentoring. Literature findings indicate that mentoring is not only beneficial to the mentee but also to the mentor and the organization at large. It also tends to improve both individual and organizational effectiveness and efficiency as illustrated in a case study of Nottingham University. The recommendation of the paper is that employees should be mentored so that the personal development of the mentee and mentor and organizational effectiveness and efficiency would be enhanced. It is suggested that further research be conducted in similar training techniques like coaching and counselling.

Keywords: Mentoring, Training, Development, Organizational, Effectiveness and Efficiency.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no gain in saying that over the years there has been considerable interest in organizational programmes aimed at training and developing employees. Literature and researches abound to suggest that effective training techniques may improve employee skills, knowledge and abilities thereby enhancing their performance in organizations. Some of the training techniques relate
to both in company on-the-job and off-the-job and include: demonstration, coaching, enlarged assignment, job rotation, seminars, workshops, apprenticeship, assistant to, committee membership, job instruction, case studies, lecture, group exercise and so on (Armstrong, 2003, Butler & Rose, 2013). These programmes or techniques have been used in various organizations with varying degrees of success.

However, one of such programmes that seek to improve employee skills, knowledge and abilities has not been given the desired attention and is rarely practised in organizations. This training and development technique is employee mentoring: the process of using specially selected and trained individuals to provide guidance and advice which will help to develop the careers of the ‘protégés’ allocated to them (Armstrong, 2003). Mentors may be required to provide assistance regarding the improvement of employee performance, informal clarification of roles, job expectations and so on. Debates also exist as to roles and effectiveness of mentoring as a programme of training employees. The focus and major thrust of mentoring is to develop the whole person and not just his skills (Daloz, 1990). Despite the usefulness of this technique, it appears it is not fully explored in training employees for career development.

This paper therefore aims at providing an overview of mentoring and to examine its effectiveness as an alternative technique in training and developing employees believing it would enhance both the employee and organizational performance.

2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

In consideration of its effectiveness, efficiency and worth, it is pertinent to examine certain theories of mentoring (Rhodes, 2005, Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). Some of the theories to be examined in relation to mentoring include: the GROW theory, the Self-Organized Learning theory and the Development Alliance theory.

The GROW (Goal, Reality, Options and Wrap-up) theory revolves around structured, in-person conversations. It is said to be structured in the sense that it begins by defining the topic in order to understand what specifically the mentor and mentee want to talk about, what environment they are in and the scale of the problem they face, the importance of the topic to be discussed and so on. This model is fashioned in a four-step structure. Step one starts by both parties identifying and agreeing on a number of clear and achievable goals or outcomes bearing in mind that the goals are not long-term in nature. Step two is the reality. In this step, both players brainstorm together, make self-assessment and offer specific examples to illustrate their points and achieve the most accurate picture of goal in question or to come up with specific ideas. Step three is the specification of options. The mentor draws out a list of all possibilities and expects the mentee to offer suggestions or ask effective questions. The mentee is not evaluated or judged. He is then guided towards making the right choices. The last step in the theory is the wrap-up where the mentor’s intention is to gain commitment to action by the trainee. Both select the most appropriate options, commit resources to action, define action plan, and other actions necessary to overcome obstacles to achieve their objectives. This theory is popular where the official system of mentoring is employed but does not work effectively and efficiently in an informal approach to mentoring. (http://www.1000ventures.com/business guide/cross cuttings/coaching grow.htm/).

The Self-Organized Learning (SOL) Theory developed by Brunel University’s Centre for the Study of Human Learning focuses on the process of learning itself rather than specific academic knowledge. SOL borrows some elements of the Humanistic, Cognitive and Behavioural Schools of Psychology. Mentors in SOL expect their mentees to take active role in their own growth process, and assume that each mentee knows him/her self and understand how he learns best. Mentees define their own goals, develop and execute strategies for success and evaluate their own performance.
However, many employees find goal setting as a difficult task since they may not have the required skills and experience.

The Development Alliance Theory (DAT) frames mentoring as a process that involves three parties: the mentor, the mentee and the larger organization that sponsors (or is expected to sponsor) mentoring. This is because since the sponsoring organization stands to benefit from the mentee’s success, all the three parties have the same goal and emotional distance between them is equal. What is common to the three parties is the desire to succeed. However, the downside of the theory is that if the mentee fails in his responsibilities and duties to the sponsoring organization, the organization will no longer have the same interest in the mentee’s success. Moreover, should the mentor becomes too close to the mentee, he may act in the best interest of the mentee and not in the best interest of all the three parties. All the three theories are relevant to employee mentoring and for this paper.

3. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Mentoring as a training technique is very complex. It varies from one situation to another and is interpreted in different ways by different people (Head, Reiman & Theis, 1992). However, it is important that the intent and purpose of mentoring in a particular context be explicit to all stakeholders: the mentor, the mentee and the organization. Defining mentoring is multidimensional. But there are some common elements in the definitions. Megginson & Clutterbuck (1995.13) defined mentoring as ‘off the line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking’. On his part, Armstrong opined that mentoring is the process of specially selecting and training individuals to provide guidance and advice which will help to develop the careers of mentees allocated to them with the aim of complementing learning (training) on the job in order to acquire particular skills and knowledge the job holder needs. It is the individual guidance from experienced employees who are ‘wise in the ways of the organization’. This paper gives credence to Bozeman & Feehey (2007) conceptual clarifications that mentoring is a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development and entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the mentee or protégé). The common element in these definitions is that mentoring is a process of transferring knowledge on a face-to-face basis from a senior, experience person to another who does not possess the necessary knowledge and experience.

Historically, mentoring is a very old concept but now in a new guise. It can be traced back to Greek mythology when Odysseus entrusted his son Telemachus to the Goddess Athena, who disguised herself in human form as Mentor, an old friend of Oddysseus. Her function, according to Hormer, was to act as a wise counsellor and helper to the youth. Mentoring then became common practice in the time of the guilds and trade apprenticeships when young people, having acquired technical skills, often benefited from the patronage of more experienced and established professionals (Roberts, 1999).

Today, it on record that established ‘stars’ encourage and nature younger ones and most successful people, in any walk of life, probably have had one or more people who have exerted a particular strong influence over their lives and careers. A study conducted by Aubrey & Cohen (1995) found the commonly used mentoring techniques to include: accompanying, sowing, catalyzing, showing and harvesting. Though different techniques may be used according to the situation and the mindset of the mentee, personal credibility is essential to quality mentoring. Mentoring is experience-based way of developing leadership capabilities. It is typically an informal relationship based on compatibility between two personalities. The standard approach to mentoring relationships is to make oneself visible through outstanding job performance and volunteering for...
assignments (Dubrin, 1995). From this beginning, a long-lasting relationship that aims to enhance the mentees’ capabilities, understanding and advancement within their professional career is established.

### 3.1 The importance of mentoring

Entering into practice in any profession offers a major challenge to young, newly qualified practitioners. The entry period is a formative one where the knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired during a programme of education are applied in practice. It is a transition period which can be stressful as well as challenging as new demands are made upon individuals who are seeking to consolidate their skills and experience. It is therefore a period when a practitioner is in need of guidance and support in order to develop both competence and confidence. Mentoring is therefore well established in many professions like lecturing (teaching), social work and other organizations. It is considered to be a programme or scheme. Anyanwu (2014), and Jones & Jowett (1997) studies indicate that mentoring programmes may be implemented for reasons that are highlighted below:

a. to identify potentials more effectively  
b. to induct new staff more quickly  
c. to improve the retention of staff  
d. to encourage and support high flyers  
e. to encourage and support minorities and disadvantaged groups  
f. to encourage and support women to get a breakthrough  
g. to support self-development and work-based learning  
h. to help individuals cope with transitions (moving into a new job)  
i. to support organizational change and so on.

### 3.2 Values and Principles of Mentoring

Hay, (1995), Jowett, Shaw & Tarbitt (1997) in their separate studies, emphasized that the mentoring process is underpinned by a number of values and principles some of which are outlined below:

a. Recognising that people are good  
b. Realising that people can change and want to grow  
c. Understanding how people learn  
d. Recognising individual differences  
e. Empowering through personal and professional development  
f. Encouraging capability  
g. Developing competence  
h. Encouraging collaboration and not competition  
i. Encouraging scholarship and a sense of enquiry  
j. Searching for new ideas, theories and knowledge  
k. Equal opportunities in the organization  
l. Reflection on past experiences as a way of understanding  
m. Looking forward and developing the ability to transfer learning and apply it in new situations.  
n. Realising that a new meaning of mentoring can be created

### 3.3 Mentoring Skills and Roles

From the foregoing, it may be clear that effective mentoring requires certain skills. From the research report conducted by Schein (1978), David & Garrison (1979), McKimm, Jolie & Hatter (2007), mentoring skills can be grouped into two: organizational and interpersonal. Organizational
skills revolve around planning, contracting, recording, structuring sessions, time management, scheduling, evaluating, assessing, report writing, action planning, prioritising, facilitating and so on. Interpersonal skills focus on the following: negotiating and influencing, listening, giving constructive feedback, intervention, questioning, motivation and encouraging, self-awareness, coaching/teaching, reflection, non-judgemental, non-prejudicial and so on.

Armed with appropriate skills and at a point in time over the duration of the relationship, a mentor will probably fulfil the following roles: teacher/educator, counsellor, motivator, facilitator, coach, adviser, guide, sounding board, devil’s advocate, learning consultant, process consultant, translator/decoder, interpreter, time manager, planner, problem-solver, catalyst, energiser, expert, guru, sponsor, role model, target/pace setter, friend, talent developer, guardian, confident, master, door opener, patron, pioneer, successful leader, helper, monitor, commentator and so on.

These skills and roles can be seen and used by all organizations: small, medium and large to further the training, development and retention of employees. Be it formal or informal, mentoring programmes serve a variety of specific objectives - acclimation of new employees, skills development, employee retention, diversity and in some cases, cultural enhancement. Based on the preceding, it becomes clear that mentors bring experience, perspective, objectivity and distance into the mentoring relationship. They offer a long term view for the organization and the individual. They are also influential in terms of helping the mentee/learner reach their goals and aspirations: caring about the mentee, they focus on the needs of the individual; they provide empathy, openness and honesty, willingness to share their expertise and so on.

To accomplish these roles, a mentor should have the following characteristics: good interpersonal skills, advocacy, sincerity, warmth, commitment, objectivity, role model, flexibility, peer respect, demonstrable competence, reflective practitioner, non-threatening attitude, learning facilitator, open mindedness, approachability, self confidence, understanding etc. The mentee on the other hand must exhibit the following characteristics: willingness to learn and develop, willingness to participate, intelligent, ambitious, keen to succeed, loyal, committed, conscientious, able to develop alliances, flexible, self-awareness, well organized, able to accept challenge and able to receive constructive feedback.

3.4 Mentor-Mentee Relationship

Research findings from the work of McKimm, Jollie & Hatter indicate that a mentor-mentee relationship is a special one where two people make real connection with each other. In other words, they form a bond: building on mutual trust and respect, openness, and honesty. It is a powerful and emotional relationship. In this case, the mentoring relationship enables the mentee to learn and grow in a safe and protected environment. Further, the quality of the relationship is crucial to a successful outcome. Successful bond is contingent upon the comfort of both the mentor and the mentee within the relationship. Otherwise mentoring cannot be sustained. Therefore, a good mentor-mentee relationship recognises the need for personal development and the partners have some idea of where they want to go (Clutterbuck, 1991).

It is important to understand that as a process, the mentee will be relatively dependent and the mentor will need to be supportive, helpful, friendly, and encouraging to nurture the mentee to learn and grow. The relationship will change with time and subsequently the mentor’s role will have to change. When the mentee becomes more confident and independent, the mentor will need to challenge, stimulate and encourage reflection. Mentoring should not remain a dependent relationship. Neither should it become an excuse for a chat session. Hay (1995) opined that since mentoring is a two-way process with the mentor having as much to gain as the mentee, the crux therefore should be to encourage both partners to contribute freely and operate as equals. Factors like age, wisdom and experience are not relevant in a mentor-mentee relationship. The mentor may take the initial initiative to ensure that the relationship gets going. In this stage the mentor will be concerned with
motivation, supporting, enabling and empowering activities. As time progresses, the mentee will develop independence and autonomy and in the end may even surpass the mentor.

4. ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

Mentoring influences organizational effectiveness which in itself is multi-dimensional as there are multiple definitions. It may refer to the concept of how an organization is in achieving the organization intends to produce. It also captures organizational performance plus the myriad internal performance outcomes normally associated with more efficient or effective operations and other external measures that relate to considerations that are broader than those simply associated with economic valuation (Etzioni, 1964, Herman & Renz, 2008, Richard et al, 2009). In organizational effectiveness, activities such as administration, funding, and volunteer training are important inputs into specific, measurable impacts. In summary therefore, organizational effectiveness is how well the job gets done and how good the end result is. Closely associated with organizational effectiveness is efficiency – how frugally a job gets done using as little time and as few resources as possible. Resources for this purpose refer to money, materials, people, energy, time, information and so on. Both effectiveness and efficiency are ways an organization can measure the success of a task outcome (Mitchell, 2012).

Going by this conceptual clarification, mentoring is considered beneficial to the organization, the mentor and the mentee. These benefits can be assessed in the following dimensions:

At the organizational level, mentoring widens the skill bases and competencies in line with the organization’s strategic goals. That is, mentoring increases staff morale and job satisfaction, reduces the gap in service and education, serves as an alternative to external training, more cost effective personal development programme and develops habits of trust and confidentiality. Further, mentoring gives senior management a more informed view of the organization’s talent and assists in succession planning. It also helps the organization to achieve its mission and vision thereby developing a mature management population and improved quality of service through increased competence of supported practitioners and experts. In addition, mentoring also improves teamwork and co-operation in the organization.

To the mentor, mentoring improves awareness of own learning gaps and develops ability to give and take criticisms; it develops up-to-date organizational and professional knowledge and offers networking opportunities. Further, mentoring is beneficial to a mentor in the sense that it develops ability to challenge, stimulate and reflect thereby raising organizational profile. Again mentoring increases job satisfaction and offers opportunity to pass on knowledge and experience. Lastly, it provides stimulation and may offer advancement opportunities.

On the part of the mentee, mentoring basically develops learning, analytical and reflective skills as well as developing both organizational and professional knowledge. Again, mentoring develops the following in a mentee: political awareness, own practice, self-confidence and willingness to take risks, ability to accept criticism, autonomy and independence. In most cases mentoring supports the mentee through transition and accelerates professional development just as it broadens horizons and increases job satisfaction. It reduces reality shock and offers opportunities for effective role modelling. It is also on record that mentoring encourages the mentee’s ongoing learning and developing/identifying learning opportunities in the working situation while offering individualized one-on-one teaching and opportunities for experiential learning and so on (McKimm, Jollie & Hatter, 2007).

From the literature review above it becomes clear that mentoring impacts the organization, the mentor and the mentee. As stated earlier, mentoring is more likely to be effective if the parties are willing volunteers. It is also helpful if the mentee is able to select his mentor. This may however require a matching and pairing process within a facilitated mentoring scheme. Despite the numerous
benefits of mentoring as a training technique, it is regrettable that very few organizations and employers understand and encourage the technique. The case study below further demonstrates the importance some organizations attach to mentoring. The case study is that of Nottingham University, United Kingdom.

5. A CASE STUDY OF MENTORING

Mentoring in Higher Education: Nottingham University

This mentoring scheme covers all grades of staff within Nottingham University. Guidance about the scheme includes guidance notes for mentors and mentees and guidance on mentors for probationary Academic Staff, Staff in the Registry Department, Clerical, Secretaries, Junior Administrative Staff and Technical Staff.

The scheme is designed for all new staff that from the beginning of the 1997/8 Session are entitled to a mentor if they wish to have one. Different mentor arrangements have been organised depending on individual departmental/school circumstances. The formal scheme is therefore intended to be relatively flexible, presenting options and indicating “the norm” rather than prescribing universal rules.

The scheme sees mentoring as ‘a process in which a person (mentor) is responsible for overseeing the initial career and development of another person’. The emphasis therefore is on the relationship (rather than, the activity). In some circumstance mentoring is used as a way of preparing established colleagues for new roles or posts.

The Mentor is seen as a trusted friend, counsellor, guide, advocate, role model, information provider and door opener. As a minimum, mentors are expected to assist with induction and introducing the new person to the University and Departmental processes and procedures. In addition the mentor may have a role in providing guidance and support in relation to job requirements and performance. The precise role varies according to the experience and needs of the people involved. The importance of discussing and agreeing on the nature of relationship at an early stage is emphasised.

The Nottingham University scheme identifies two models of mentoring although it emphasises the fact that mentor relationships change over time, that some combination of the models is possible and that participants need to be conscious of the different models and the approaches that they imply. Misunderstanding and confusion may arise if the mentor partners have different models of the relationship in mind or fail to appreciate how it is changing. One model is based on peer development, in which the partners are of relatively equal status and in which learning and development is collaborative and a two way. This model supports the view that a peer who has recently gone through the same period of induction as the new person is the most appropriate person to take on the mentor role. This suggests that normally the mentor should be a member of staff who has a minimum of two years experience within the current Department/School but not more than five. In this approach, age, seniority and subject area are secondary considerations. On the other, more traditional approach, is based on a developmental model in which the more senior person is largely passing on his/her wisdom and experience to the new person. This approach argues that more experienced members of staff are better able to advice and guide the new person. In this approach length of service and seniority may be decisive factors. Whichever approach is adopted, it is regarded as vitally important that the mentor is committed to the role. It is also a prerequisite of the scheme that new members of staff should have the option of changing their mentor where it becomes clear that the relationship is not working. Rules for confidentiality are also agreed at the outset in order that the new members of staff feel professionally “safe” with the mentor. The mentor is not normally the mentee’s appraiser or head of department or equivalent (in order to separate the mentor role from ‘line management’ and judgements required about probation, promotion etc.). Where for
practical reasons this is impossible to achieve, it is emphasised that great care should be taken to ensure that the two roles are kept separate.

In most mentoring scheme, it is anticipated that there will come a point when the mentoring relationship will and should end. It can be suggested that the mentor partners review the agreed focus and ground rules at least annually.

Preparing and training of mentors is organised by University Training & Staff Development Unit and detailed briefing notes and courses are provided on the scheme and its operation. Mentors are encouraged to agree with their mentees the frequency and length of meetings, venues, rules about contact (only at work?), agendas for meetings and whether or not to hold an annual meeting and to emphasise the importance of both giving and receiving feedback.

The above case study is culled from an article by Richard Blackwell, Head of Staff Training and Development, Nottingham University, United Kingdom and illustrates how Department and Schools at the University consider mentoring as a very important learning and training scheme. A mentor is looked upon as a trusted friend, counsellor, guide and so on. The emphasis on mentoring is on establishing relationships rather than activities. Two mentoring approaches: the peer development and the traditional approaches are used in mentoring employees at the university. It is interesting to note that mentors are trained by the Staff and Development Unit of the University and encouraged to meet with mentees on regular basis. The University has a mentoring scheme. The application of this technique results in effective and efficient training of employees for a higher position in the organization.

6. CONCLUSION

There are many and varying literature and concepts of mentoring. The basic ingredient being a situation whereby an experienced, highly regarded, knowledgeable, abler and senior colleague called a mentor, by talking, listening in confidence, guides another individual called a mentee, working in the same organization or field, in the development and re-examination of the mentee’s own ideas, learning, personal and professional development. Mentoring is seen as voluntary activity and not imposed and that confidentiality is essential. It is equally important that both the mentor and mentee fully understand the purpose and limits of the mentoring relationship. The benefits of mentoring are legion and impacts in various ways on the organization, the mentor and the mentee. Therefore, mentoring is a valuable technique to support and develop the mentee personally, professionally and educationally.

Regrettably, in many organizations, be it manufacturing, educational, service-based, non-governmental, military and para-military, health care providers or the public sector have not understood and encouraged the application of mentoring as a training and development technique to enhance employee effectiveness and efficiency. Further research could be conducted in coaching or counselling as an alternative technique in developing employee skills on the job.

7. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the literature findings above, it is hereby recommended that organizational leaders should imbibe the practice of mentoring for its effectiveness and efficiency as an alternative technique in training and developing employees in the organization. If this technique is understood and applied, it is very likely that the mentor, the mentee and the organization would benefit from mentoring thereby increasing the level of performance and productivity in the organization.
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