

Mentoring in Organizations

Mentoring

Mentoring is widely viewed as an essential component of an effective training and development process within organizations (Burke and McKeen, 1989; Hunt and Michael, 1983; Zey, 1988; Scandura, 1992). Mentoring is typically defined as a relationship wherein one person acquires practical knowledge, guidance, support, and feedback from a more experienced person within a particular setting (Haney, 1997). Against the backdrop of institutional change and uncertainty, mentoring has gained strong support as a professional development resource to upgrade skills and enhance employee satisfaction. Additionally, mentoring is viewed as a means to preserve institutional memory and to help employees to function within an organizational culture (Jossie, 1997). Significantly, mentoring is also seen as a means to effect change in an organizational culture (Gunn, 1995).

The workplace demands a wide range of cognitive, interpersonal, and technical skills. Mentoring offers a means for protégés to acquire knowledge in context and to reflect on their experience in relation to more experienced individuals. Current theories in learning accentuate the value of situational or experiential learning (Kerka, 1997). Accordingly, learning is most effective when situated in context where the individual constructs new meaning for himself in relationship to others (ibid.). A mentor facilitates learning by offering models of problem solving and guiding a protégé as he articulates his process (1 Kaye and Jacobson, 1996). Typically, assistance is gradually decreased as the protégé internalizes the process and constructs his understanding. While a mentor facilitates vocational/professional learning, a mentor also offers an interpersonal relationship through which important social learning takes place (Galbraith and Cohen, 1995).

The wide range of mentoring benefits are well researched and documented (2 Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Two broad categories of benefit have long been recognized: vocational benefits and psychosocial benefits (2 Kram, 1980). The acquisition of specific skills, or vocational benefits, is an obvious outcome with a history in traditional forms of

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mentoring such as apprenticeship (Haney, 1997). Psychosocial learning is a fundamental outcome associated with more contemporary models of mentoring.

The protégé's more basic needs within an organization are psychosocial in nature. In a mentoring relationship, the degree to which the protégé perceives psychosocial benefits determines the extent of perceived vocational benefits. The primary intention of mentoring is to socialize individuals into an organizational culture in a systematic and personalized manner (Bierema, 1996). The mentor assists the protégé to reflect on experiences and achieve different perspectives. At the heart of mentoring is an interpersonal dialogue, which allows for collaborative critical thinking, planning, reflection, and feedback (Galbraith and Cohen, 1995). Knowledge that is acquired is constantly reinterpreted and developed through dialogue and practice (Cleminson and Bradford, 1996). Significantly, mentoring is seen as a means to prevent or buffer stress and enhance collegiality (House, 1981).

The mentor governs a process through four recognizable phases of relationship: Initiation, Cultivation, Separation, and Termination (Kram, 1983). An effective mentoring program aims at first developing a positive mentoring relationship, which then permits the mentor to guide the desired behavior changes. The results for the protégé, the mentor and the organization are evaluated within the context of the primary purpose of systematically developing the skills and leadership abilities of organization members (Murray, 1991). Mentoring programs take on a range of structures from very formal to very informal. The literature suggests that both mentors and protégés express a preference for programs that are less formal over those that are very formal (Chao, Walz & Gardner, 1993; Noe, 1988). Whether a mentoring program within an organization is formal or informal, to be successful, the protégé needs to have a voice in the selection of a mentor (Scandura and Siegel, 1995). Mentoring programs are rated as being far more likely to be successful if there is training or orientation. In addition, to be effective, the mentor needs support or coaching, and the process needs to be evaluated (ibid.).

The protégé's perception of the value of the experience is strongly influenced by the actual or perceived similarities between himself and the mentor (Ensher and Murphy, 1997). When a protégé sees himself as having something in common with the mentor, a bond or trust develops more easily. A foundation of trust permits the protégé to try out new ideas and roles with minimal risk (Kaye and Jacobson, 1996). The mentor's beliefs about the relationship also influence its effectiveness. When a mentor has a laissez-faire orientation or sees the relationship as a contingency connected to rewards, the mentoring relationship is less effective than when the mentor sees himself as facilitating a personal transformational process for the protégé.