Excerpt from Human Resources Guide to Mentoring Programs
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Chapter 1: Introduction

When contemplating the launch of a mentoring program, a helpful starting point is a review of the evolution of mentorship to date. This chapter explores the meaning of "mentoring"; patterns of mentorship development, as revealed by research studies on mentoring; and the social context in which mentoring has become increasingly important and prevalent.

1. WHAT IS MENTORING?

As a concept, "mentoring" has been with us for many years, and may date as far back as the story of Mentors in the mythology of Greece in 800 B.C. (Carruthers, 1993: 9–24; Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003). Since then, the term "mentoring" has generally been associated with individual guidance. Aside from this simple notion, a consensus definition has not been forthcoming. This is largely due to the fact that, empirically, many types of relationships (e.g., coaching, counselling, training, developing, etc.) have been subsumed under the concept of mentoring (Dawson, 2014: 137–145). In addition, there are diverging opinions about the nature of mentoring relationships, and their formality, functionality, mutuality, partnership, power relations, scope of influence, and process (Eby, Rhodes & Allen, 2010: 7, 9–11). Nonetheless, there is a broad acceptance that mentoring is here to stay in one form or another.

(a) Uni-Directional vs. Collaborative Mentoring

The concept of mentoring has been undergoing an evolutionary process. Fewer than 50 years ago, mentoring was associated with the teaching of skills and the grooming of potential leaders or people of high status. The traditional, yet still current, notion of mentoring is a relationship involving a senior, more experienced person who takes the initiative of supporting and nurturing a junior, less experienced person. This traditional view likens mentoring to the parenting and development of children and young adults. The approach is probably rooted in the concept of apprenticeship, in which less experienced persons are "trained" and "guided" by persons with more experience. This top-down, one-directional flow of knowledge and skills development from the mentor to the mentee remains a strong feature in mentorship today. But it is being challenged by a new form of mentoring in which both the mentor and the mentee mutually benefit from each other. This contemporary notion of mentoring is more egalitarian; the relationship is more collaborative and proceeds on a more equal basis. In the workplace context, Wong and Waniganayake (2013: 163) define mentoring as "a facilitated process involving two or more individuals that have a shared interest in professional learning and development", and Rodd (2013: 173) maintains that mentoring is more like "an opportunity for colleagues to engage in reflective dialogue that can enhance feelings of empowerment and success and promote dispositions towards lifelong learning".

Related to this contemporary approach is the idea that skills enhancement does not necessarily need to be based on one-on-one transmission of knowledge and experience; it can also occur through networking with people who have expertise in different areas that are relevant for career development. This network-building is the foundation of peer mentoring or group mentoring, in which the sharing of knowledge and skills can be conducted in a more egalitarian manner.

This gradual shift demonstrates the evolution of the term "mentoring" in changing times, and shows how the democratization of power, often in a work environment, has created numerous ways of looking at mentoring as more collegial in nature. This transition is also reflected in changing terminology, including "comentoring" (Jipson & Paley, 2000), "peer mentoring" (Beyene et al., 2002), "critical constructivist mentoring" (Austin, 2005) and "collaborative mentoring" (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007). These are variations of mentoring that diverge from the traditional senior-junior relationship.

(b) Top-Down vs. Reverse Mentoring

In keeping with the move towards mutually beneficial mentoring there is an emerging trend in which the traditional hierarchical model is turned upside down. It is no longer the case that

only senior persons are doing the mentoring; they are now being mentored by junior persons as well. Demographics are changing, with people moving to and from different jurisdictions, and with an emerging workforce and consumer market made up of younger persons, women, and people with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. As a result, the business sector is encouraging senior employees to better understand the worldviews and perspectives of these emerging groups. The pairing of senior and junior persons who play transposed mentoring roles gives rise to "reverse mentorship". Mentoring in the workplace is no longer solely a learning of career-related knowledge and skills, but is now a more honest exchange of ideas based on diversity and what these junior employees are bringing to the workplace (e.g., knowledge and experience in high technology, consumer cultures, and gender-based and cross-national ways of life).

(c) Mentor-Driven vs. Mentee-Driven Mentoring

Traditional mentorship places mentors at the centre of the relationship. They determine what the mentees need, what they should learn, and how fast their progress should be. This is now considered "old fashioned", as mentorship is shifting to a "mentee-driven" culture in which mentees inform their mentors what their needs are, what they wish to accomplish and how quickly they want to grow. This reversal of roles means that mentoring is no longer a "mentor-directed" relationship and that the mentoring culture favours a more democratic and client-centred approach.

(d) Occupational vs. Personal Mentoring

There is a question as to whether mentoring merely focuses on the occupational skills and work performance of mentees, or extends to all aspects of development in their lives. The latter notion has not quite taken hold in the business sector, where mentoring relationships remain largely related to skills upgrading, career development and leadership development. However, an interest in helping mentees to cultivate their character, values, and guiding principles in life is not that new an idea, as the traditional mentoring relationship often encompasses such a personal component.

(e) Long-Term vs. Short-Term Mentoring

Another emerging trend in mentorship is the notion that mentoring can be a onetime only interaction, rather than the traditional long-term, year-long relationship. This is a major deviation from what people usually think about mentorship. Knowledge, skills and wisdom are not easily learned and acquired in an hour or two. At most, in this short period of time, individuals can pick up information about how to do a simple task, and tips on how to do that task well. This type of information cannot be deemed as "knowledge"; "skills" cannot be viewed as such unless they have been practised several times; and the "wisdom" gained in a few hours can only be classified as insights, at best. However, given the fast-paced world we live in, this acquisition of information is increasingly viewed as mentorship.

(f) Local vs. Global Mentoring

In the workplace context, mentoring is usually seen as an affiliation based on a working relationship within an organization, whether it is arranged between one senior and one junior person, or between two colleagues of roughly equal status. With the advancement of computer technology and mobile devices, mentorship takes on another new format. No longer is mentoring limited to a fixed work site, as in the traditional hierarchical arrangement, or even within a jurisdiction (Allen, Finkelstein & Poteet, 2009). It can now be extended to anywhere in the world. As many multinational corporations increasingly note, international mentoring, including "virtual mentoring" and "external mentoring", is now possible. There is, indeed, a lot of flexibility in how mentoring can be structured.