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Page 67

Mentoring Relations in the Aircraft Industry: A Case Study In Turkey*

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to evaluate the mentoring process in a private organisation which utilises a very high technology and innovation process. In this organisation, the top managers consider themselves as informal mentors who facilitate the transfer of the organisational culture and knowledge to the working personnel, especially to the engineers. From this perspective, the study investigated the relationship of perceived mentoring functions and gender of the mentees and gender of the dyad relationships in a sample of 85 white-collar employees. Furthermore, interpersonal trust was analysed as the determinant of perceived mentoring relationships. As hypothesised, interpersonal trust was found as a strong factor in mentoring relationships. However, gender of the mentees and gender of the dyad mentoring failed to make significant contributions to perceived mentoring relationships. The findings from this preliminary study suggest that the need for more in-depth research on multicultural issues in mentoring. Specifically organisations under the impact of modern technology and management need more future multicultural quantitative studies.

Keywords: Mentoring, Career functions, Psychosocial Functions, Turkish Managers, Aircraft Industry

Introduction

Under the increasing impact of the globalisation, organisations have to adapt themselves to the changing technology and also prepare themselves for the new demands of knowledge society. Under these new challenges, transferring and creating knowledge play a vital role. In this context, the recognition of mentoring is an important transfer mechanism for knowledge within organisations. Individuals learn a great deal through their interactions with others in the workplace (Swap, Leonard, *et al*, 2001). One of the salient working relationships that can serve as a forum for transferring knowledge and learning is mentoring. A number of studies have found that individuals who are mentored perform better and are promoted rapidly presumably because they have learned and gained knowledge from their mentors (Lunding, Clements, *et al*, 1978; Scandura, 1992). Mentoring is a learning centered process for both the mentees and the mentor and has been defined as a one to one, non-judgmental relationship in which an individual voluntarily and professionally gives time to support and encourage another. Mentoring is therefore crucial for both individual and organisational development.

The most systematic and detailed work regarding the mentoring process was conducted by Kram and her associates (Kram, 1983; Kram and Isabella, 1985; Higgins, Kram, 2001). Kram (1983) conducted in-depth biographical interviews with 18 managers in a public-sector organisation in order to identify

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the function provided by mentors. Content analysis of the interviews revealed that mentors provided career and psychosocial functions (Noe, 1988). The career functions provided by mentors include sponsorship, facilitating exposure and visibility, coaching, protection and challenging work assignments. Sponsorship means actively helping the individual to get job experiences and promotions. Facilitating exposure and visibility means providing opportunities for the mentee to develop relationships with key figures in the organisation in order to advance. Coaching involves providing advice in both career and job performance. Shielding the mentee from potentially damaging experiences provides protection. Career functions are particularly important to the mentee's future experiences. The psychosocial functions include role modeling, friendship, acceptance and confirmation and counseling. These functions enhance the mentee's sense of competence, identity, and work role effectiveness. These functions include serving as a role model of appropriate attitudes, values, and behaviors for the mentee (role model); conveying unconditional positive regard (acceptance and confirmation); providing a forum in which the mentee is encouraged to talk openly about anxieties and fears (counseling); and interaction informally with the mentee at work (friendship). Counseling helps the mentee explore personnel issues that arise and require assistance (Nelson and Quick, 2000). It has been suggested that the greater the number of functions provided by the mentor, the more beneficial the relationship will be to the mentee (Kram, 1985; Noe, 1988; Dreher, Ash, 1990; Allen, Mc Manus, Russell, 1999).

Aims of the Study

To date, we have analysed the mentoring process and functions within the public sector, especially within the university context. The results have been discussed during the 6th and 7th HRD Congress in Leeds and Tilburg. This year, the aim of our study is to evaluate the mentoring process in a private organisation which utilises a very high technology and innovation process. This is a highly improved engine industry which manufactures some important parts of the jet engines to all over the world, located in Eskisehir, Turkey. Since 1995, the 'Six Sigma' strategy (Tennant, 2001) has been adapted as a competitive management technique by the organisation. Two master black belts and 24 black belts give continuous training to the employees. This is why workplace learning strategy is an essential procedure, improving the quality of personnel in this organisation and making mentoring a very important learning process whilst training the future managers. According to this organisational structure, the top managers consider themselves as informal mentors who facilitate the transfer of the organisational culture and knowledge to the workforce, especially to the engineers. From this perspective, three hypotheses are proposed for this study.

- H1: There is a significant difference in perceiving mentoring functions between male and female mentees.
- H2: There is a significant difference in perceiving mentoring functions between homogeneous and diverse mentoring relationships.
- H3: Interpersonal trust is a significant determinant of mentoring functions.

Methodology

In this research Noe's Mentoring Functions Scale was applied to 83 engineers, 2 technicians, and 18 top managers. Several studies have reported satisfactory test-retest and internal consistency reliabilities for Noe's mentoring scale (Mullen and Noe, 1999; Day and Allen, 2004). Three managers were in-depth interviewed twice for 2 hours. Data were analysed by SPSS 11.00. Respondents indicated on a 5-point Likert-type scale the extent to which the statement described their relationship with their mentors. Internal consistency of this research was analysed with Alpha coefficient= .89, which is a very high rate for this kind of scale. Before applying our mentoring scale, mentors were briefed about the mentoring process and the benefits were explained. At the end of the course, a questionnaire was given to informants. In addition to the mentoring scale, a strong independent variable of mentoring, trust scale was also given to our respondents. Three items concerning trust were

taken from Brockner, Siegel, *et al* (1997). Internal consistency of this research was analysed with Alpha coefficient= .96.

Sample and Results

The demographic findings indicate that 75.3 % of the mentees are male and 24.7% are female respectively. Of the respondents, 36.5% are between 22-26 years of age, 37% between 27-31 and 19 % between 32-36. In our sample 49.4% of our respondents are married and 48.2% are single, only 2.4 % of them are divorced or widowed. Of the sample 64.7% have graduated from a university and 32 % have an MBA degree. Of the sample, 74.2% have been working in this organisation from 7 months to 4 years (Table:1and Table:2).

Table 1: Mentors' and Mentees' Demographic Characteristics

<i>Demographic characteristics</i>	Mentors		Mentees	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Age				
22-26	-	-	31	36.5
27-31	-	-	32	37.6
32-36	2	11.1	16	18.8
37-41	4	22.2	6	7.1
42-46	2	11.1	-	-
47-51	9	50.0	-	-
52-56	1	5.6	-	-
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0
Gender	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Female	1	5.6	21	24.7
Male	17	94.4	64	75.3
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0
Educational status	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
High-school	-	-	2	2.4
Graduate from University	12	66.7	55	64.7
MBA degree	6	33.3	27	31.8
Doctorate	-	-	1	1.2
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0
Marital status	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Married	18	100.0	42	49.4
Single	-	-	41	48.2
Divorced	-	-	2	2.4
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0

In this study, 94.4% of our mentors are male; 50% are between 47-51 years of age, 33% between 32-41. In our sample, 100% of our respondents are married. Sixty seven percent have graduated from a university and 33 % of them have an MBA degree. (Table:1) Of the sample, 62% have been working in this organisation between 17-22 years. This data was gathered from our interviews in this organisation.

Table 2: Mentors' and Mentees' Working Experiences in Current Positions

<i>Working experiences in current positions</i>	Mentors		Mentees	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
0-6 months	-	-	8	9.4
7-12 months	2	11.1	18	21.2
13 months -2 years	2	11.1	26	30.6
3-4 years	7	38.9	19	22.4
5-6 years	3	16.7	8	9.4
7-8 years	2	11.1	2	2.4
9-10 years	1	5.6	2	2.4
13-14 years	1	5.6	1	1.2
No response	-	-	1	1.2
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0

The major perceived obstacles which may cause the main interaction difficulties between mentors and mentees were determined and analysed in our survey. Thirty eight percent of the mentees responded that they have not experienced any interaction difficulties with their mentors. On the other hand, 35 % of the mentees mentioned time shortages. The second important cause seems to be the personalities of the mentors 10.6 %. On the mentor side 39 % of the mentors responded the time shortage as the major cause. The main reason for time shortages as we have observed within the organisation is that people are working under time pressure to complete their tasks. The parts which they handle are very delicate and valuable and mistakes would cause a great loss of money and time for the organisation. The second important cause is not having the same cultural background with their mentees (28 %) (Table:3).

Table 3: Perceived Causes of Lack of Interaction According to Mentors and Mentees

<i>Perceived causes of lack of interaction</i>	Mentors		Mentees	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Time shortage	7	38.9	30	35.3
Lack of sharing the common working hours	1	5.6	4	4.7
Differences in status	-	-	4	4.7
Not sharing the same cultural background	5	27.8	3	3.5
Mentee or mentor personalities	2	11.1	9	10.6
Individuals' own personalities	1	5.6	3	3.5
Other reasons	2	11.1	-	-
No interaction difficulty or no response	-	-	32	37.6
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0

The major important finding is that mentors do not share their world or culture with their mentees. According to our interviews, this is mainly because they come from different

backgrounds and generations. They do not understand each other and also their life styles and leisure time activities are not the same: mentors usually prefer to stay at home and share more family centered activities. On the contrary, mentees prefer to go out and share their leisure time with their friends at one of the many popular places, clubs at the town centre. The mentors and the mentees do not come together very often during their leisure time outside their work.

Another important question asked to the respondents was “How do you conceptualise your relationship with your mentor/ mentee?” Of the mentees, 36% viewed they had a superior-inferior type of relationship; only 23% of them regarded the relationship as an apprenticeship. The third kind of relationship emerged as teacher-student (18%). Many mentors, on the other hand, conceptualised their relationship as an apprenticeship (average 50%). The rest centred on teacher-student (28%). Apprenticeship and teacher-student implies a mutual learning relationship in terms of reciprocal interaction, brain storming and open communication. Both can gain new insights and information from each other.

Table 4: The definitions of mentoring relationship according to mentors and mentees

<i>The definitions of mentoring relationship</i>	Mentors		Mentees	
	Frequency	Valid percent	Frequency	Valid percent
Teacher-student	5	27.8	15	17.6
Apprenticeship	9	50.0	20	23.5
Parenthood	-	-	1	1.2
Superior- inferior	-	-	31	36.5
Friend-superior	-	-	2	2.4
Buddy	-	-	5	5.9
Brothers	-	-	3	3.5
Team workers	-	-	3	3.5
Other	3	16.7	-	-
No response	1	5.6	5	5.9
Total	18	100.0	85	100.0

As mentioned, in this organisation, mentoring relationships stem from the hierarchical structure of the organisation. This means that due to the lack of formal mentoring programme, the department managers act as a mentor. This is the reason why we asked the question “Would you like to choose your own mentor or not?” Sixty eight percent of our sample responded “yes” to this question (see Table 5 below).

Table 5: Do you prefer to choose your mentor?

<i>Preference for choosing a mentor</i>	Frequency	Valid percent
Yes	58	68.2
No	26	30.6
No response	1	1.2
Total	85	100.0

Additionally, 35% of mentees indicated that their selection criterion in choosing their mentors is the professional competency (35%) and the personality of the mentor (30%). This suggests that in private organisations the workforce still prefer to work with a mentor who has excellent proficiency in his career (see Table 6).

Table 6: Selection criterion in choosing his/ her mentor

<i>Selection criterion</i>	Frequency	Valid percent
Age	1	1.2
Professional competency	30	35.2
Personality characteristics	25	29.4
Career position	2	2.4
No response	27	31.8
Total	85	100.0

According to Noe's scale, two mentoring functions are identified: career and psychosocial functions. Career functions include providing sponsorship, exposure and visibility, coaching, protection and challenging assignments. Psychosocial functions include providing role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling and friendship. The mentoring scale was subjected to principal components analysis with varimax rotation. The KMO value was .88, exceeding the recommended value of .6 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity reached statistical significance, supporting the factorability of the correlation matrix. Principal components analysis revealed the presence of five components, explaining 47.3 per cent, 8.3 per cent, 7.0 per cent, 5.6 per cent, 4.3 per cent of the variance respectively. The names of the functions are coaching, friendship, role modeling, exposure and visibility and sponsorship (Table 7).

Table 7: Factor Loadings, Variance Percents for Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation

Factor 1: Coaching

Eigenvalue: 7.887 % of Variance: 46.394 Cumulative %:46.394 Mean: 3.91	FA
My mentor has kept feelings and doubts I shared with him/her in strict confidence.	.812
My mentor respects me as an individual.	.745
My mentor gave me feedback regarding my performance in my present job.	.668
My mentor provided me with support and feedback regarding my performance.	.738
Mentor suggested specific strategies for accomplishing work objectives.	.613
My mentor has demonstrated good listening skills in our conversations.	.578

Factor 2: Friendship

Eigenvalue: 1.476 % of Variance: 8.682 Cumulative %: 55.076 Mean: 3.23	FA
My mentor has invited me to join him /her for lunch.	.842
My mentor asked me for suggestions concerning problems he/she has encountered at school.	.798
My mentor has interacted with me socially outside of work.	.721
Mentor has shared history of his/her career with me.	.615

Factor 3: Role Modelling

Eigenvalue: 1.249 % of Variance: 7.349 Cumulative %: 62.426 Mean: 3.45	FA
I will try to be like my mentor when I reach a similar position in my career.	.856
I admire my mentor.	.700
I try to imitate the work behavior of my mentor.	.695
My mentor reduced unnecessary risks that could threaten the possibility of receiving a promotion.	.621

Factor 4: Exposure and Visibility

Eigenvalue: 1.006 % of Variance: 5.919 Cumulative %: 68.344 Mean: 3.72	FA
My mentor encouraged me to try new ways of behaving in his/her job.	.644
My mentor has encouraged me to try new ways in doing my job.	.552

Factor 5: Sponsorship

Eigenvalue: .798 % of Variance: 4.520 Cumulative %: 72.864 Mean: 3.60	FA
My mentor gave me assignments or tasks in my work to develop my relationship with administrators.	.941

In our research, mentees showed significant perceptual differences between career (M=3.74) and psychosocial (M=3.34) functions. These results are very similar with our previous research in academia. As shown by the means, each function is moderately perceived by mentees.

The first career function is called coaching (M=3.91). The higher mean of coaching would also indicate that what mentors do in their workplace is actually coaching rather than mentoring on this point, because coaching takes place where a learner might ask for specific guidance on a task or where a person might be new to the business and needs to learn the in-house procedures. On the contrary, mentoring takes place when a learner might want to talk about their future or where they might be going through difficult or challenging times at work or even at home (Parsloe and Wray, 2000, p.102.). This is also supported by one of our mentors whom we interviewed. He told us that “I am assigning a task to my mentees and expecting them to show leadership behavior and multiple intelligence.” He said that “Unfortunately, I do not receive enough feedback from them. They hardly come and discuss their future careers and the problems within the organisation.” The other career function is exposure and visibility (M=3.72). On the other hand, the least perceived career function is sponsorship (M= 3.60). There is only one question dealing with this function: “Mentors gave me assignments that increased written and personal contact with administrators.” One acceptable explanation might be that the mentors do not spare much time for their mentees to introduce them to their new colleagues and provide challenging surroundings. Instead, their main responsibility is to accomplish the projects and supply the orders according to their Six Sigma strategies. Furthermore, the mentees are relatively new and don’t have enough work experience in the organisation.

In examining the psychosocial functions briefly, one of the most impressive results observed is inn relation to role modeling (M=3.45). In our previous research, this function was perceived much more by mentees in academic life (Özkalp, *et al.*, 2005). This is most likely

because research assistants perceive their professors as mentors, not as managers. In academic life the people who train and who share their knowledge and experience are the professors. Unfortunately, mentees do not consider their manager in their organisation as a mentor (although they may be seen as a coach). This may be explained by the fact that they do not come together very often and they do not develop a friendship relation.

Friendship is the second psychosocial function in the mentoring scale. Amongst our respondents this function is the least perceived (M= 3.23), suggesting that social relationship and friendship between mentors and mentees is weak. This can be explained by a variety of factors, the main one being that in Turkey it is not easy to develop a close relationship between mentor and mentee because of the hierarchical nature of relationship (Özkalp, *et al.*, 2005, 2006).

To analyse our hypothesis 1 and 2, Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) has been used. There was not a statistically significant difference between male and female mentees on the combined dependent variables: $F=1.917$, $p=.101$; Wilks' Lambda=.892. Our hypothesis 1 was not supported. In addition to H1, H2 was also not supported. There was not a statistically significant difference between homogeneous and diverse mentoring relationships: $F=.980$, $p=.435$; Wilks' Lambda=.942.

After discussing the functions of mentoring from the mentees point of view, in our research we have added another dimension to our discussions and asked the mentees whether they trust their mentors or not. Trust is one of the most significant variables of mentoring relationship: regardless of the nations or backgrounds of individuals, positive mentoring requires trust in the mentor (Chung, Bemak, Talleyrand, 2007). In this study we measured uni-directional trust. Managers, as mentors, have the option to select their employees or mentees. We can conclude from this that managers have also a sense of trust in their mentees. In the mentoring relationship, the *sine qua non* point is to provide an organisational climate to foster trust of mentees, otherwise, it is so complicated for mentees to share their personal problems or ask for advice while performing their jobs. In our analysis, the total mean of the trust dimension is 3.98 (Table 8).

Table 8: Trust dimension of mentoring process

TRUST(Total Mean=3.98)	N	Mean	S.D.
I trust my mentor to treat me fairly.	85	4.13	.856
I can usually trust my mentor to do what is best for me.	85	3.86	.915
My mentor can be trusted to make decisions that are good for me.	85	3.96	.879

This result shows that our mentees trust their mentors and that their fairness is especially highly perceived. This may be explained by the corporate culture of the organization, where the value of fairness is highly supported. Since the firm is not newly established, the main cultural values are mostly accepted by the mentors or by the top managers. This was recognised by the top managers of the organisation during our interviews. Since the establishment of the organisation, this value has always been considered important and conveyed to the incoming new managers. To test our hypothesis 3, regression analysis was used. As can be seen from the table, trust is a significant determinant of all mentoring functions, suggesting that H3 was supported in our research (Table 9).

Table 9: The results of regression analysis

<i>Independent Variable:</i>	Dependent Variable: Mentoring Functions	R square	Adjusted R square	F	F sig.	Beta	t	Sig.
Interpersonal Trust	Role Modeling	.573	.568	111.433	.000	.757	10.556	.000
	Friendship	.241	.232	26.407	.000	.431	5.139	.000
	Exposure and visibility	.542	.537	95.983	.000	.736	9.797	.000
	Coaching	.323	.314	39.515	.000	.568	6.286	.000
	Sponsorship	.342	.334	43.155	.000	.585	6.568	.000

Conclusion

What we highlight as important in this research is that mentoring is a significant process that determines the relationship between mentors and mentees. The mentoring process also supports organisational learning and what mentees learn from their mentors is actually affecting their success within the organisation.

As mentioned earlier, there is no formal mentoring programme in this organisation. In this organisation, mentors are not formally assigned to the mentees. Hierarchically, the top managers mostly provide some kind of mentoring function to the mentees. But what we have explored in this organisation is what we could call coaching rather than mentoring. This is mainly because the relationships between mentors and mentees are formal rather than informal and mentors actually give a range of assignments to their mentees and ask them to complete them. If there are any mistakes, while mentees perform the tasks, the mentors' job is to correct them and show the right way to do it. What we would actually propose in this situation is to deliver a training programme to the managers about the functions of the mentoring process. This would help to improve the relationship between mentors and mentees.

The second important finding in our research is that the psychosocial functions of mentoring are less perceived by the mentees than career functions. Psychosocial functions can not be easily performed by a manager or supervisor (Chau and Walz, 1992, p.626). Similar results were also found in our previous research within the university context. This can be explained by the length of the relationships and also cultural structure of the Turkish society which has recently undergone rapid development and changes. Duration of the relationship is significantly related to perceived psychosocial mentoring functions (Baugh and Fagenson-Eland, 2005, p.948). In our research, 74.2% of mentees have been working in this organisation for between 7 months and 4 years, which implies a short length for support and trust based relationships. In addition, findings from this exploratory study suggest that culture is likely to have an impact on mentoring relationship within the organisation. Generally in the Turkish culture, formal relationships or hierarchical relations are quite common within organisations. An authoritarian kind of relationship is very prevalent and people show great respect to their leaders or managers. So far, under the impact of technological changes, this pattern is also changing among Turkish people who work in industrial settings. Especially

new management systems, such as Six Sigma and management by objectives are affecting the relationship between employers and employees. This is possibly why mentoring relationships within the organisation suffer some difficulties, especially in respect of psychosocial functions such as friendship and role modeling. The findings from this preliminary study suggest the need for more in-depth research on multicultural issues in mentoring.

The third important finding of this preliminary study reveals that mentees trust their mentors in their relationships. This shows that although there are some problems in their social relationship such as friendship, mentees still trust their mentors. This is an important finding since increasing trust relationships between mentors and mentees is a significant determinant of mentoring functions.

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