

THE NATURE OF MENTORSHIP IN AN INDUSTRIAL GOODS AND SERVICES COMPANY

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Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of a mentorship programme and to develop a holistic mentorship model to assist organisations in the effective implementation of mentorship programmes.

Problem investigated: Mentorship programmes are often implemented in an uncoordinated fashion, resulting in failure. Organisations do not experience the true benefit of mentorship, because not all the factors that have an impact on the success of such an intervention are considered beforehand.

Methodology: Phenomenological, semi-structured interviews were conducted with mentors and protégés (N=10), to gain insight into their experience of mentorship programmes.

Findings and implications: The results indicated that the mentorship programme and relationship are processes that function interdependently to ensure the success of such programmes. The results further showed that this process needs to be well planned, implemented and evaluated in an attempt to increase the return on investment.

Value of the research: Mentorship programmes have the potential of improving organisations' effectiveness. It is therefore of value to approach mentorship in a holistic, well-planned and integrated manner.

Conclusion: A holistic, systems view of mentorship would assist organisations in implementing successful mentorship interventions.

Keywords: Mentorship benefits, mentorship influences, mentorship pairing, mentorship programme, mentorship relationship

INTRODUCTION

The business world has been speeding in a new direction that tends to disregard the human focus to a large extent. Technology, electronic communication and information transfer, globalisation and virtual organisations, to mention but a few, are setting new trends in the business world. As Thomson (in Goosen & Van Vuuren, p. 2005) indicates, the information age has isolated individuals and changed business from a relationship-based to a technology-based entity. Certainly, business can thrive in such an environment, but the question is whether individuals can.

People are continuously confronted with a multiplicity of new demands on their mental ability and judgement, psychological stability and emotional resilience, due to the increased speed, scope and depth of change. To cope with these demands, managers are faced with the difficult challenge of establishing and sustaining meaningful relationships in the workplace. Rapid responses to the marketplace will only be possible in those organisations showing continual advances in knowledge within their cultures. To achieve this, organisations and members alike must radically shift the way they think, act and emphasise learning. **In this regard mentorship can add value, as it is an organisational vehicle available to establish and maintain relationships, as well as to facilitate change demands.**

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The literature on mentorship is vast, but tends to focus more on the internal dynamics of mentorship pairs than on organisational issues such as the conditions needed to ensure successful mentorship programmes. The field of mentorship appears to be characterised by diversity – diverse views, for example, exist on the definition of mentorship as well as the types of mentorship programmes.

Applied within the South African context, there is much disagreement on the differentiation between what mentorship actually is, and similar activities such as coaching, counselling and teaching. This lack of commonality on the use of certain terms can result in programmes – which are referred to as mentorship programmes – actually containing more elements of coaching, counselling or teaching. It is, therefore, of importance to scrutinise the various definitions that exist of the concept of ‘mentorship’. Literature on mentorship often provides diverse and sometimes conflicting definitions of the term (Clutterbuck, 2001; Clutterbuck, Garrett-Harris, Garvey & Stokes, 2006; D’Abate, Eddy & Tannenbaum, 2003; Gibb & Megginson, 1993; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Kochan, 2002; Phillips & Stromei, 2001). It would appear that this may be due to the relative recency of mentorship emerging as a management practice; to differing schools of thought on mentorship (such as United States (US)-based sponsorship mentorship and European-based developmental mentorship models); confusion surrounding concepts related to terminology; the very wide range of applications of mentorship; or the use of the term as an umbrella concept for other activities.

Traditional African societies have very specific socialisation processes for rites of passage such as reaching manhood/womanhood. These socialisation processes, which sometimes involve the older generations of the community or slightly older peers, are aimed at passing on societal norms, values and customs, and therefore represent forms of mentorship. The West-African approach, described by Some (1999), follows the notion that “mentorship is aimed at increasing security, clarity, and maturity in the young person”. He describes mentorship as an essential social responsibility for everyone in the community, adding that mentors tend to step forward wherever their ability and experience match the needs of the youth.

The New Zealand Mentoring Centre (2002) defines mentorship as a formally structured, non-reporting relationship used to enhance professional practice, personal knowledge and organisational development. Mentorship takes place in many ways: sometimes it occurs as a direct, one-on-one relationship of involvement, and at other times it takes the form of a philosophy or methodology instilled in an organisation. Growing an organisation requires a philosophical approach to mentorship, but this must be combined with practical “things to do” in order for the idea to take hold. Instilling a mentorship mindset within an organisation takes both time and perseverance.

According to Bard and Moore (2000), there are several other definitions of mentorship. They argue that mentorship is about achieving personal growth and development. A further definition is that mentorship is a confidential, one-to-one relationship in which an individual uses a more experienced (usually more senior) person as a sounding board who also offers guidance. Lastly, Bard and Moore state that mentorship is a protected, non-judgemental relationship which facilitates a wide range of learning, experimentation and development. According to the authors’ definition, mentorship facilitates professional development by promoting the capacity to cope with difficulties and develop new competencies at the personal, interpersonal and institutional levels. It is apparent, though, that the mentorship relationship forms the foundation of mentorship.

In support of the above, Faure (2000) defines mentoring as “a supportive learning relationship between a caring individual who shares knowledge, experience and wisdom with another individual who is ready and willing to benefit from this exchange, to enrich their professional journey”. The definition used in this study is based on the definition adopted by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, where mentorship is “off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking” (Clutterbuck, 2001, p. 3). With some additional elements added to the above definition, the working definition for this paper is as follows:

Mentorship occurs in a relationship and consists of off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work, thinking or coping with life challenges. The discussion agenda within the relationship is determined by the protégé and the mentor can play various roles and adopt a broad range of approaches in helping the protégé.

According to Clutterbuck (2001), a lack of information about programmes has led to a consequential lack of integration of good practice and experience across programmes. There appears to be considerable difficulty in establishing the actual prevalence of structured mentorship programmes not only in South Africa, but also in the US and Britain (UK). Various sources (see Clutterbuck, 2001; Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Meyer & Steinmann, 2008; Murray, 2001) mention the widespread use of mentorship, but add that a lack of accurate data exists. In

addition to a lack of information on where exactly mentoring is occurring, there appears to be no consensus on the best structure, process flow or elements of a structured scheme. Several authors, however, suggest components, steps or structures (Klasen & Clutterbuck, 2002; Murray, 2001; Phillips & Stromei, 2001).

At this point the South African landscape or population of structured mentorship programmes (in formal and informal organisations) has not been mapped, although there are many reports of the existence of mentorship programmes in a wide range of societal institutions. In March 2008, a survey of coaching and mentorship programmes was launched which provided some idea of where mentorship programmes are occurring, although the large majority of programmes reported are in the corporate sector (Meyer & Steinman, 2008).

In essence, mentorship means efforts are being made to challenge and develop people to think and do for themselves, and grow their capabilities. The goal of mentoring is thus the growth and development of the protégé beyond intellectual and skills areas. While this goal may be less practical in some short-term mentorship programmes, the benefits of mentorship need to be fully recognised. The relationship between people, in which skills, knowledge and attitudes are transferred from a trusted advisor to a protégé, is referred to as mentorship. It incorporates the notion that senior members of the organisation will share their wisdom and provide guidance to junior members.

THE NATURE OF MENTORSHIP

In order to understand the full extent of the nature of mentorship, one needs to investigate the functions, the mentorship relationship, mentorship programmes as well as the value of mentorship.

The functions of mentorship

The context of structured mentorship programmes is any situation where knowledge, wisdom or experience needs to be passed on from people with more of the required attribute, to people who need to acquire more of this attribute – for whatever reason. In corporate situations, the attribute to be passed on is typically some aspect of leadership, organisational knowledge, technical knowledge or the ability to constructively work with diversity. Meyer and Steinmann (2008) found 13 reasons for South African organisations to implement coaching and/or mentorship programmes, namely: management development, talent management, competence enhancement, sustainability, employee retention, succession planning, skills shortages, graduate development, employment equity, learnerships, professional requirements, and the fact that other companies are doing so.

Kram (in Torrington, 1998) further identifies two broad functions of mentorship: firstly, career functions, which are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance career advancement; and secondly, psychosocial functions, which are those aspects of the relationship that primarily enhance a sense of competence, clarity of identity and effectiveness in the managerial role. These functions would then ultimately facilitate professional development by promoting the capacity to cope with difficulties and develop new competencies at the personal, interpersonal and institutional levels. Having a mentor has been identified as a positive factor in career choice, retention, promotion and advancement.

Ultimately role-players should have clarity on the objectives of such a mentorship programme. According to Meyer and Steinmann (2008), objectives might include developing black and female managers, empowering the disabled, fostering inter-cultural understanding and awareness, doing succession planning or implementing fast-tracking to achieve employment equity targets.

The mentorship relationship

Mentorship relationships have proven to be key to a number of desirable outcomes in organisational life. For example, mentored individuals report greater satisfaction (Fagenson, 1994), greater career mobility and opportunity (Scandura, 1992) and a higher promotion rate than those who were not mentored (Dreher & Cox, 1996). It is evident from the literature that the mentorship relationship is built over time and is not a once-off occurrence. Mentorship is not an all-or-nothing relationship, nor is it static in nature. Some or all of the roles may

be provided and they can change, since the purpose of the relationship is to enable the protégé to acquire new knowledge, skills and standards of competence. It is believed that mentorship relationships will be positively associated with performance, citizenship behaviours and individual intent. Given that mentorship involves a partnership where the point is to share and transfer knowledge, expertise and skills, this intervention must aim to build capacity, in order to meet future leadership challenges and demands.

Certain attributes are common to all mentorship relationships, namely that mentorship is an intensified personal relationship in which (i) both mentor and protégé share enthusiasm for a particular domain or endeavour; (ii) the mentor's expertise and the protégé's zest and thirst for the expertise combine to foster outstandingly creative accomplishments on the part of the protégé; and (iii) the mentor's wisdom and experience shape the guidance and counsel given to a protégé of whom the mentor has particularly high expectations, which become uniquely well defined as the protégé develops, not necessarily as a match or replication of the mentor (Georgiou & Demetriou, 2008). Expertise in a specific context does not qualify a person to be a mentor. Mentorship is a skill which in itself needs to be developed.

Types of mentorship relationships. One-on-one mentorship is the traditional form of mentorship in which a senior-level mentor assists a junior-level protégé. Organisations that intend implementing mentorship programmes need to take certain aspects into consideration beforehand, including the matching process-formation of mentor/protégé partnerships and the establishment of clear objectives, expectations and timelines which are realistic for and understood by both parties. An agreement needs to be reached between the mentor and his protégé, key skills development areas need to be identified and an ongoing evaluation process that serves both parties needs to be included.

Stages of mentorship relationships. Mentorship relationships typically go through various stages, though the sequence and pace may vary. According to Leisey (1993), a mentorship relationship progresses through four main stages: in the first stage, exploration, the mentor and protégé establish whether they are compatible. The second, the negotiation stage, gives the mentor and protégé the opportunity to set ground rules, establish goals for mentoring, and clarify expectations. The third stage, known as affirmation, outlines the duration of the mentorship relationship. The last stage, termination, is of crucial importance to the mentor as well as the protégé. Proper preparation needs to be done in this regard to minimise disappointment – especially for the protégé. Many mentorship relationships might continue beyond this stage, but the roles may then vary.

Qualities of successful mentorship relationships. The following qualities need to be present to ensure a successful mentorship relationship. Participation is voluntary, which also means that the relationship can be terminated at any time without fear of punishment. Mentors are selected based on their record of accomplishment in developing people; their willingness to serve as a mentor; and evidence of positive mentorship, communication and listening skills. The purpose of the mentorship relationship is clearly understood by all involved. A minimum level of contact between the mentor and the protégé is specified. People being mentored are encouraged to make contact with one another and network to discuss problems and share successes. The mentorship relationship is evaluated through interviews, questionnaires etc., information is gathered, analysed and interpreted, and the results are shared so that the appropriate corrective action can be taken. The mentorship relationship offers the protégé a nurturing and confidential environment in which to ask questions, share concerns and learn from an individual who has greater experience in the particular field.

Roles and responsibilities within the mentorship relationship. Mentors can serve in a variety of roles, depending on their level of commitment to the relationship. Since the protégé has chosen to find a mentor, this person is most likely looking for a role model, a leader to look up to, someone who has what he/she wants. Mentors can convey their aspirations and goals and share with the protégé the knowledge, skills and attitudes (competencies) necessary to get where he/she wants to be. The mentor can assist the protégé in assessing his/her strengths and weaknesses, and determine which competencies need to be developed. According to Henrichs (2001), the role of the mentor is to stimulate the person being mentored, to facilitate the ability to reason and be self-aware, to enhance the objective analysis of situations and the application of insights in the workplace, to unlock an individual's own potential to maximise their performance and to influence another to achieve important goals or outcomes.

A mentor should provide support and encouragement; help the protégé learn from his/her mistakes; demonstrate personal integrity; help the protégé to identify and work with his/her strengths and weaknesses; provide opportunities for the protégé to develop independence; have good communication skills (especially the ability to be an active listener and provide feedback in an effective manner); assist others in a positive, constructive way; be someone the protégé feels comfortable with; be creative; provide the protégé with meaningful direction; and be able to provide the protégé with the information he/she seeks. According to Leisey (1993), protégés should be open to feedback and advice. They should also exhibit a commitment to advancing both themselves and the organisation.

Mentors should demonstrate the ability and commitment to obtain and share knowledge about the institutional environment, and transfer knowledge of institutional politics. A study among employees in a South African mining company revealed that the mentor's commitment is regarded as an important characteristic in improving the quality of the mentorship relationship (Gilmore, Coetzee & Schreuder, 2005). Mentors should further define expectations and provide advice regarding career advancement: as role models they should therefore lead by example and establish an environment in which the junior protégé's opportunities for advancement are maximised (Coetzee, Coetzee & Schreuder, 2005).

Gibb and Megginson (1993), who reviewed 30 schemes in the UK, note that the respondents in their survey regard various roles as important for the mentor – the authors therefore conclude that “formal schemes are acknowledging that mentorship is a synthesis of roles”. Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) build on this and propose an integrated approach to mentorship because “mentorship derives its immense effectiveness in employee learning and development from being an integrated method that flexibly combines elements of four other one-to-one development approaches”. Mentorship utilises each of these approaches at different points. The integrated approach of Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) is summarised in Figure 1. According to the authors there is a clear distinction between mentorship behaviours and non-mentorship behaviours, which might shed some light on the “confusion” in defining mentorship and other related concepts.

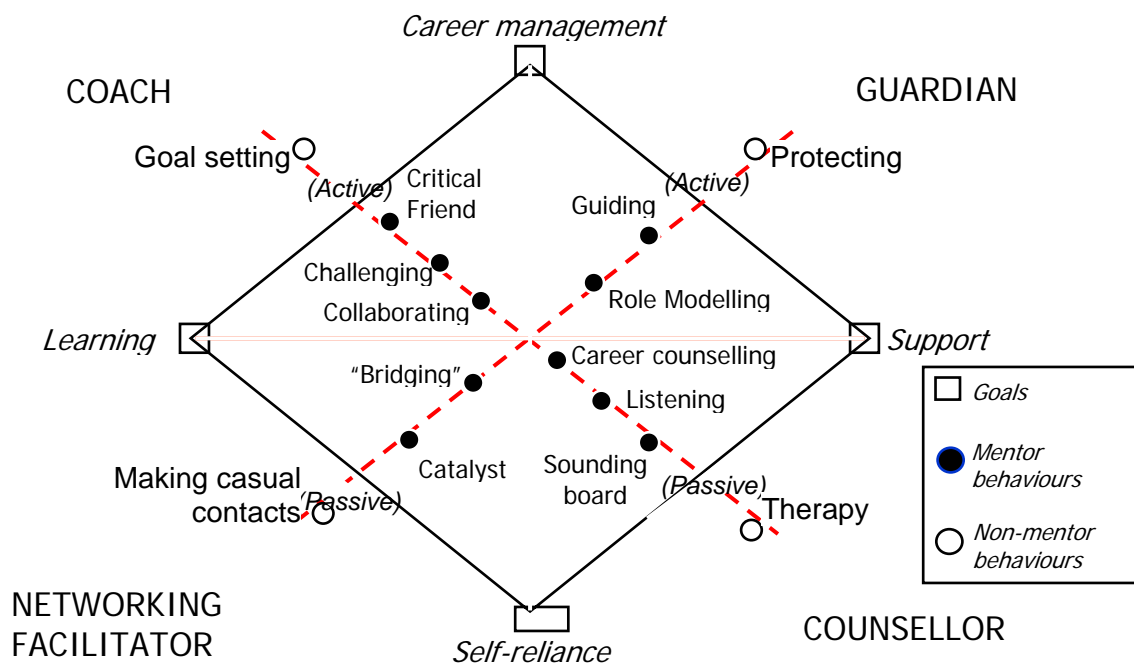


Figure 1. Mentorship model – Klasen & Clutterbuck (2002)

It is evident from Figure 1 that various behaviours fall under the auspices of the mentor, in an attempt to fulfil very specific goals. Some of the behaviours are: being a catalyst, listening, offering career counselling, role modelling and guiding. Some of the goals mentors strive to achieve by means of a mentorship relationship are:

self-reliance, support, learning and career management. According to the Klasesen and Clutterbuck model (2002), certain behaviours fall outside the parameters of mentorship, such as providing therapy, making casual contacts and offering protection.

In a South African study, Meyer and Steinmann (2008) found that protégés valued the following mentor characteristics (in order of importance): experience, general knowledge, access to networks, passion to develop, emotional maturity, inspirational, caring, ethical, communication, subject field knowledge, insight and learning, identify development and holistic development. On the other hand, the protégé should demonstrate a commitment to assume responsibility for his career development and actively initiate the mentorship relationship. The protégé should participate in the development of a constructive mentorship relationship and facilitate the development of such a relationship.

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMMES

The focus of mentorship programmes is not only on job expertise, but also on developing the kind of skills needed by anybody who is destined for growth, leadership and better performance (Jensen, 2003). Harshman (2000) states that while mentoring subordinates is one of the typical functions of an effective manager, the term 'mentorship' is being used in a broader organisational context to describe particular human resource interventions, often referred to as 'mentorship programmes'. Although there is a high degree of variability among the models, the purpose of mentorship programmes seems rooted in the need to retain and promote promising junior-level employees.

A mentorship programme requires an investment of resources for it to become a natural part of 'the way we do things'.

The typical mentorship programme consists of two phases, namely the planning phase, (which gives attention to issues like time scheduling, screening and matching of mentors and protégés, as well as training of mentors and protégés). Key elements of this planning phase are planning and development, decisions on how the programme should be launched and who it should be aimed at. The second phase is the implementation phase (which gives attention to the clarification of responsibilities of the mentors and the protégés, as well as the methods for evaluating the success of the mentorship programme. Meyer and Steinmann (2008) found that organisations utilise the following methods such as performance management, 360-degree feedback, competence assessment, monitoring of agreements, surveys, business impact /return on investment, or promotions to evaluate the effectiveness of mentorship programmes.

No organisation should thus implement mentorship programmes without evaluating the effectiveness of such programmes – this will also assist organisations in establishing the value and benefits of such interventions.

THE VALUE OF MENTORSHIP

The value of mentorship is one of the aspects that need attention in an attempt to define the nature of mentoring. Over the years, it has become evident that those organisations which are relationship-based entities, are distinctly more successful than those which are not. The payoff from successful mentorship programmes is a mixture of easier recruitment of the best talents, the more rapid induction of new recruits and improved staff retention (Goosen & Van Vuuren 2005). Mentorship might also be of value in that it reinforces cultural change and improves networking and communication. Mentorship programmes cannot be successful without the enacted support of the executive leadership of the organisation. Mentors need to be well trained before they embark on a mentorship programme. Formal mentorship programmes need to be coordinated and aligned with the organisation's direction. The last, but probably most important element, is that buy-in of protégés, as well as mentors, needs to be created to ensure the success of such programmes.

Guest (2001) identifies the benefits of a mentorship programme, which normally comprise a mixture of elements. Some of these elements are easier recruitment of the best talent, the more rapid induction of new recruits, improved staff retention, improved equal opportunities performance and diversity management, the increased

effectiveness of formal training, the reinforcement of cultural change, improved networking and communication, and the reinforcement of other learning initiatives. Guest (2001) further states that the organisational benefits of mentorship manifest in many and varied ways, including in greater productivity and profitability perhaps, but also in improved communication, morale, two-way loyalty and reduced staff turnover.

Mentorship is a powerful and popular way for people (protégés) to learn a variety of personal and professional skills (Galbraith, 2003). It is a way of helping others understand more fully, and learn more comprehensively from their day-to-day experience. Mentorship works best in a confidential relationship, which affords protégés the opportunity to speak freely about any concerns they may have. The range of skills and other qualities required by mentors will vary according to the objectives of mentorship and the way in which the organisation concerned has chosen to meet those objectives.

The mentorship relationship provides specific benefits. Protégés benefit by learning and practising new skills with a trusted 'friend', receiving multiple examples of appropriate behaviours from mentors, experiencing multiple interactions with individuals from different backgrounds, and learning and practising the expected norms of the working environment. In addition to the benefits that protégés gain, mentors gain improved self-esteem by modelling appropriate skills and knowledge to a peer, increased opportunities to interact with peers who are different from themselves, and mastered social competence. Clasen and Clasen (1997) summarise some of the main benefits for protégés as receiving high-level learning experiences, opportunities for talent development, aid in career exploration, greater psycho-social development in areas of responsibility, self-directed learning, feelings of competence, a sense of identity, ethics, and self-monitoring of feelings, and greater clarity on the connections between the protégés interests and the world at large.

Mentorship gives mentors a broadened sense of responsibility and a sense of being trusted by the organisation. It is an opportunity for mentors to pay back past mentors (who mentored them) and a challenge to advise rather than direct their protégés. Mentors are also able to learn from protégés and to experience the satisfaction of seeing someone grow. The positive outcomes of meaningful mentorship partnerships are increasing productivity (as staff members know what the goals are and how to achieve them); developing a sharing of leadership responsibilities; and enhancing motivation through positive recognition and constructive feedback. Goosen & Van Vuuren (2005), states that these partnerships facilitate creativity and innovation as staff members feel secure enough to take risks, mentorship reduces surprises and defensiveness in performance management, and increases the likelihood of quality outcomes being achieved.

Mentorship benefits both the mentor and the protégé in that it creates an opportunity for a mutual and long-lasting friendship; it consolidates and redefines personal ethics, and leads to renewed zest on the part of the mentor (Goosen & Van Vuuren, 2005). In addition, mentorship appears to serve a dual role in psycho-social development, as regards both mentor and protégé. It is believed that if implemented effectively, mentorship benefits the mentor, protégé and the organisation. Multiple benefits of mentorship have been cited in the literature, such as the development of emotional support and friendships, improved self-esteem and confidence for both mentor and protégé, an increased set of knowledge and skills, and an improved social network.

According to Meyer & Mabaso (2003), managerial incompetence is often the main reason for the failure of mentorship interventions. They further state that if one compiles a list of the reasons for mentorship programme failures, it is abundantly clear that the majority of these issues relate to ineffective management. The following reasons are provided: lack of commitment to the mentorship programme, lack of planning, ineffective communication, resistance to change, insufficient training, lack of monitoring, poor selection of mentors and fragmented mentorship programmes.

From the preceding it is evident that a vast number of organisations attempt to utilise mentorship programmes for a variety of reasons. It is also clear that mentorship holds many benefits for mentors, protégés, as well as organisations, if implemented effectively. The problem, however, is that very little consensus exists as to the definition of mentorship, that the factors contributing to the success of mentorship programmes are seen in isolation, that mentorship is implemented as an ad hoc training method, and lastly that organisations do not evaluate the mentorship they provide. The implication is, therefore, that organisations become reluctant to invest in mentorship, as they do not envisage the eventual return on investment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is thus to investigate the nature of a mentorship programme and to develop a holistic mentorship model (see Figure 2) to assist organisations in the effective implementation of mentorship programmes. More specifically, the aim is to address the following research questions:

- What is the nature of mentorship in organisations?
- What factors impact mentorship in organisations?
- What are the benefits and value of mentorship for mentors, protégés and the organisation?

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research approach

In this section, the selected research approach will be defended, by elaborating on the key scientific beliefs.

Ontology is a researcher's belief that explicates the reality or nature of the unit of analysis within the context of an inquiry. This belief then acts as a guiding framework – it is the logic used to fashion arguments and the practices following from such logic (Schurink, 2007). From a social research perspective, this refers to whether social reality exists independently from human conception and interpretation; whether there is a common, shared, social reality or just multiple context-specific realities; and whether or not social behaviour is governed by laws that can be seen as unchangeable, and which can therefore be generalised.

According to Goodly, Lawthorn, Clough, and Moore (in Bester, 2007), *epistemology* is the grounds on which theory is built. Theory, according to the epistemology of the author, is built on the co-constructed meaning or representation of the world, informed by cognitive processes and social interaction between individuals. Alternatively, events are understood through mental processes of interpretation which are influenced by and interact with social context – mutual simultaneous shaping (Bester, 2007). The view of the researcher is to draw on methodologies residing in the social sciences, by which the rich experiences of mentors and protégés can be captured, described and appreciated to identify the elements necessary for implementing mentorship effectively in organisations.

The ontology and epistemology of the researcher are rooted in the interpretive-constructivism paradigm (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004, p. 21). Interpretive research, which is fundamentally concerned with meaning, seeks to understand social members' definitions and understanding of situations. The interpretive paradigm does not concern itself with the search for broadly applicable laws and rules, but rather seeks to produce descriptive analysis that emphasises a deep, interpretive understanding of social phenomena. The qualifying factor for "interpretive constructivism" draws on the ontology of the researcher, which stipulates that reality is co-constructed between members. This is also a reflection of the researcher-participant relationship during the research project.

Drawing on the researcher's ontology and epistemology, interpretivism allows an inquiry into the meaning that results from discourses. Furthermore, the meaning is dispersed and distributed, forcing the researcher to look at different places and things (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). This belief ultimately impacts the sampling strategies that will be utilised to locate the sources of data or those holding the meaning. Therefore, the intent is to study mentors' and protégés' experiences and perspectives on mentorship programmes, and the factors that influence the value of such a programme to the organisation. More particularly, the intent is to explore, describe and appreciate mentors' and protégés' concrete experiences and perspectives in this regard. From the findings of the information gathered, a model was developed that may be used by organisations to implement effective mentorship programmes.

Research paradigm

The next logical step in the research process is to select a paradigm that would effectively and appropriately meet the requirements of the research, as described in the research objectives. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative and quantitative paradigms were analysed from a naturalistic perspective.

Since the research question pertains to understanding and describing a particular phenomenon about which very little is known, the qualitative paradigm would appear to be most suitable for this inquiry. The qualitative approach allows the researcher the opportunity to explore meanings, variations and perceptual experiences of the phenomenon from a rich and in-depth perspective of the subjects, as observed and recorded through their words, actions, behaviours and practices (Crabtree & Miller, 1992; Patton, 1990). This method provides adequate information, appears to be cost effective, and shows sensitivity towards the settings and resources (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

As the aim of this study involves the exploration and description of social and human phenomena, the researcher proceeds to analyse exploratory and descriptive methods of inquiry. The exploratory method is thus used to gain insight and understanding into social and human phenomena, of which mentorship is an example.

Research methodology

Within the qualitative research paradigm a phenomenological approach was adopted. This method of data collection is most frequently used in exploratory and descriptive inquiries. Secondly, the phenomenological approach allows the researcher to study the subject's experiences as he/she has experienced them (Omery, 1983). The aim of the phenomenological approach, as is the case in this study, is to try to understand the social and psychological phenomena from the subject's point of view (Huysamen, 1994). These direct experiences of the participants would thus be taken at face value (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Given the nature of the approach adopted, the research could best be described as exploratory and descriptive.

The research elements and findings are presented below, after which the findings are used to construct a theoretical model (see Figure 2), from here on referred to as "The nature of mentorship: a systems view model" to explain the nature of mentorship in organisations.

Research setting

The study was conducted at a Johannesburg Securities Exchange-listed holding company. This company manages businesses in the electronics and low-voltage electrical engineering sectors, supplying value-added products, systems and solutions to local and international growth markets. This company introduced a mentoring programme which took the form of a developmental process aimed at guiding less experienced employees by allowing them to be mentored by more experienced employees or mentors.

Entree and establishing researcher roles

In order to collect and analyse data for this study, the researcher had to gain access to the site, select a sample for this study, choose a data collection method, and analyse and code the data gathered. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Human Resource Development (HRD) manager of the company where interviews were conducted. Secondly, the researcher determined convenient dates for the interviews to commence. The first contact between the respondents and researcher was on the day when a particular interview was conducted. Respondents were briefed on the reason for and format of the interview by means of a short introduction. They were given the opportunity to decline participation in the study, but none chose to do so. Each respondent then signed a letter of consent. Once all these formalities had been attended to, the interviews commenced.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling implies that only information-rich cases are selected and studied. Phenomenologists depend on in-depth interviews to obtain their information, and it is therefore important that interview participants be purposively selected (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994). Only those subjects who had been exposed to mentorship relationships were approached to participate. Purposive, convenience sampling was therefore used to select the participants in this study. Members of the sample group had to have been involved in a mentoring programme for longer than six months. Although it was a multicultural sample, all the interviews were conducted in English. Considerations such as gender, age and religion were not taken into account. Interviews were conducted with five mentors and their protégés.

Data collection methods

In naturalistic research, the inquirer “draws on and combines a variety of data collection strategies” (DePoy & Gitlin, 1994, p. 216). For the purpose of this study phenomenological interviews, literature review and peer debriefing were used as data collection methods.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature, since such an interview format is more flexible and open. The semi-structured format also seems to be of value when the subjects included in the inquiry consist of a purposively selected group who are familiar with the research topic. This approach created the opportunity to take each respondent through the same set of questions in a systematic fashion. Several open-ended questions were formulated that could guide participants on the topic being investigated, in order to learn about their beliefs, attitudes, reported behaviours or prevalent experiences. Two sets of interviews were done: five interviews were conducted with mentors, with a specific set of questions, and five interviews with their protégés, with their (slightly different) set of questions. The questions asked were directed at collecting information relating to the topic under investigation. The interviewer was aware of the possible effect her perspectives and biases may have had on the outcome of the interviews.

Recording of data

Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All field notes and memos were integrated with the transcribed interviews, to ensure that the context and understanding of the interviews did not deteriorate.

Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis is to transform the acquired data obtained from the phenomenological interviews into rich descriptions of the findings. An analysis involves not only the translation of the information but also the interpretation thereof. Data analysis is the means by which a researcher brings “order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 111). In the qualitative research approach, the analysis of data is an interactive process, not linear (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). In this study, the analysed results contain words and/or phrases obtained from the raw data. These words and/or phrases were arranged according to themes, categories and subcategories, to illustrate and substantiate the findings of the inquiry.

A transcript-based analysis infers that data analysis can only begin once the audio-taped recordings have been transcribed verbatim. The verbatim transcriptions of the recordings form an essential part of the data analysis, as the researcher tried to incorporate all meanings and nuances expressed by the participants. Verbatim transcriptions of the interviews provided rich forms of data. The interviews were read again with the purpose of identifying the major units of analysis. All categories and subcategories that were not considered meaningful were eliminated, while the remaining categories were counted and assigned to various themes.

The researcher analysed the transcribed interviews using marginal notes to capture frequently recurring words, ideas and phrases relevant to the study. Once all the data from the interviews had been collected and transcribed, the next stage entailed the coding thereof.

Strategies used to ensure quality research

In this inquiry, credibility was ensured by the fact that verbatim transcriptions of the individual interviews were used, and the fact that an attempt was made to block out all prior knowledge and preconceptions surrounding and pertaining to this investigation. Peer consultation is another strategy applied by the researcher to enhance the credibility of the study. Feedback from peers served as an aid to the researcher (i) in identifying validity threats, biases and assumptions on the part of the researcher, (ii) as well as flaws in the logic of the researcher's arguments and methods. Thick description and purposive sampling techniques were applied to improve the construct of transferability. To enhance the criterion of dependability in this study, the constructs of dependability audit and thick description were applied.

A confirmability audit was done to improve confirmability. This audit included all forms of raw data (tape recordings), theoretical notes (analysed data and the formation of the study) and the process of the study (methodology). Confirmability was strengthened as the researcher left an audit trail which aids the reader in deciding on the trustworthiness of this study.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Primarily through the process of data analysis, the captured data from the ten interviews was analysed and subsequently interpreted. "Key phrases in text" were utilised as the units of analysis, and categories, themes and sub-themes were identified on the basis of similarity and dissimilarity.

The number of responses did not determine whether a theme or sub-theme would be included; inclusion depended solely on the relevance of the response to the study. It also has to be made clear that themes and sub-themes should not be seen as exclusive: a degree of overlap existed in most instances, and a holistic (Gestalt) approach was followed in the final interpretation to illuminate important links and relationships between different concepts.

Three themes were identified:

1. Formal mentorship programmes:

Sub-themes are the content of the formal programme, participants' experience of the formal programme, the pairing of participants, the goal of the formal mentorship programme, and the training of mentors.

From the analysis it is clear that the formal mentorship programme of the company continues for approximately one year and consists of various modules, like 'knowing yourself', 'personal finances' and 'interpersonal skills'. The mentorship pairs met once a month, where a single module was addressed and discussed. For the purpose of the formal mentorship programme, the Human Resource Department of the organisation chose mentoring pairs.

For the purpose of this programme, the Human Resource Department chose the mentor-protégé pairs, and the reason for this particular choice was unknown to both mentor and protégé. The participants in this study clearly had no say in the pairing process. Both mentors and protégés were also unsure of the organisation's reason for implementing the formal mentorship programme, although a few mentors thought career advancement might be the reason. No training was provided for mentors or protégés in terms of mentorship. Contradicting thoughts about the training of mentors came to the fore: some mentors were of the opinion that mentorship training would not ensure 'better' mentors. On the other hand, some participants believed they would have benefited from training.

Three important aspects are evident from the responses:

- (i) It was particularly apparent that the pairing process followed a rather coincidental path. This is in contrast to the conventional wisdom reported in the literature review, which suggested organisations consider established informal mentorship relationships when pairing candidates for a mentorship

programme. It was argued that the dynamics of 'forced pairing' relationships might be incompatible, and may lead to mentoring being unsuccessful. It is possible for informal mentorship relationships to exist before **participants** enter a formal relationship.

- (ii) It was also noticeable that even if the organisation had a goal for the formal mentorship programme, neither mentors nor protégés were well aware of it.
- (iii) Another important aspect of the formal mentorship programme, which was not addressed by participants, was any form of evaluation of the mentorship programme. The literature overview argued strongly for some form of evaluation (formative and summative) of such an intervention. Certain outcomes needed to be set for such a programme, and a measuring tool used to determine whether these outcomes were met.

In order to present an integrated model of mentorship (Figure 2), responses regarding a formal mentorship programme were re-phrased and summarised under specific headings (Table 1), to cover all of the important aspects believed to be relevant.

Table 1: Aspects related to a formal mentorship programme

Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear purpose for the programme • Consider organisational goals.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work-related • Personal and interpersonal.
Pairing of candidates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally voluntary • Of critical importance.
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work related • Interpersonal skills and problem solving.
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures effectiveness of programme • Indicates return on investment.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More effective, competent and knowledgeable staff • Satisfying experience for mentors • Holistic development of protégé.

2. Mentorship relationships

Sub-themes are prerequisites and characteristics of mentorship relationships, relationship development, mentors' roles in mentorship relationships, and protégés' experiences of mentorship relationships. The mentorship relationship was regarded by most as the 'golden thread' that runs through the mentorship process. The implication was clearly that, without a mentorship relationship, mentorship could not take place. It also seemed that effective two-way communication was regarded as a prerequisite for a mentorship relationship to be successful. In this study, most participants indicated that their mentors followed an open-door policy, and that they had informal discussions on a regular basis. What distinguishes these informal discussions from the training in the formal mentorship programme is that 'theory' is applied by formal mentors, whereas informal mentors tend to use real-life situations to assist them in solving problems and making decisions.

It is further noted that the forming of a mentorship relationship is a natural process whereby a senior person in an organisation gives advice, assists and models job-related and personal 'know-how' to a junior employee. If a protégé chooses a mentor in an informal mentorship relationship, it would be someone the protégé looks up to, feels comfortable interacting with, is willing to assist, and finds trustworthy. The mentor need not necessarily be the protégé's direct supervisor, but can be any person in the organisation, depending on the aim of the organisation's mentorship programme.

These participants' responses are mostly in line with the ideas from the literature review reported earlier, which suggest that the mentor should be a good example as regards interpersonal relations, decision-making and conflict management. It is also argued that these informal relationships could possibly continue when a formal

mentorship relationship is established, and that organisations should consider when the pairing of mentors and protégés takes place. An alternative scenario might be when a new mentor is assigned to a protégé. Mentors and protégés interviewed for this study were of the opinion that mentors would have a better understanding of their role if they had themselves been protégés in a mentorship relationship.

Because the formal mentorship programme continues for approximately one year, participants felt they were 'forced' to remain in the mentorship relationship for at least that period of time. Participants indicated that they often initially did not feel comfortable within the relationship, but that the relationship grew over time.

To assist in the development of the mentorship model later in the discussion, the following headings are considered to cover all that needs to be taken into consideration when considering effective mentorship relationships (Table 2).

Table 2. Aspects related to mentorship relationships

Pairing of mentor and protégé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary • Critical predictor of success
Process of relationship building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process not action • Developmental of nature
Prerequisites for effective mentorship relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication • Trust relationship • Personality fit
Characteristics of mentor for a successful mentorship relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisor • Coach • Job related expertise
Characteristics of protégé for a successful mentorship relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open to learning • Must have the potential to develop

3. Benefits of mentorship

Sub-themes are the benefits of mentorship for the organisation, the mentor and the protégé. It is clear that mentorship holds multiple benefits which pertain to both the formal programme and informal mentorship relationship. Only fleeting references are made to the fact that mentoring can benefit the broader aspects of an organisation's functioning, if implemented effectively. On the operational level, though, participants identified two benefits, namely that mentorship develops employees which, in turn, leads to more competent and efficient employees. From the responses one has to assume that either very little thought had gone into the benefits an organisation could derive from mentorship, or that the respondents had limited knowledge in this regard.

Although mentorship focuses on developing protégés, it appears as if mentors also benefit from mentoring in various ways. Mentors feel that if they mentor a protégé effectively, their own workload can be reduced meaningfully. Protégés do not make as many mistakes, and are better at problem solving and decision making, therefore mentors have a vested interest in the success of their protégés. Mentorship gives mentors the added benefit of feeling good about themselves, as they play an integral role in the holistic development of their protégé. Most of the mentors interviewed for this study indicated that they feel good because of what they contribute to the lives of their protégés. Lastly, mentorship contributes to the mentor's learning curve, as it is not only the protégé who has developed, but also the mentor.

It was clear that protégés benefit most from mentorship. The protégé is holistically developed, which means that he/she not only acquires job-related skills, but gains skills, knowledge and expertise in his/her personal and work life. Thus, personal and career growth takes place. The protégé is developed by means of a transfer of knowledge and skills from the mentor to the protégé. The mentor takes a personal interest in the protégé, and provides him/her with advice and assistance. It was made clear that mentorship is a positive experience for protégés that leads to increased confidence, improved problem-solving ability, and greater self-esteem, self-

worth and independence. Mentors assist and guide protégés in developing their decision-making and problem-solving capabilities.

The following headings are considered relevant for inclusion in a final explanatory model to cover all aspects related to the benefits of mentorship (Table 3).

Table 3. Aspects related to the benefits of mentorship

For the organisation:	Competent, efficient and knowledgeable staff
For the mentor:	Adds to mentor's learning curve, reduces mentor's problem-solving load, vested interest in protégé's success, added benefit of feeling good about him/herself
For the protégé	Mentor takes personal interest, gives advice, assistance, transfers knowledge and skills, sees to the holistic development of the protégé (increased confidence, self-esteem, self-worth), protégé gains experience and independence, experiences personal and career growth and increased problem-solving ability

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of a mentorship programme and to develop a holistic mentorship model to assist organisations in the effective implementation of such programmes. Although mentorship is a well-used developmental methodology, the implementation of mentorship in a structured way is not that well understood. Organisations implement mentorship as an ad hoc intervention, without clarifying the objectives and expected outcomes of such an intervention. There is no clear definition of mentorship in the literature, and to compound this, there is great confusion regarding related concepts, such as coaching. This, in itself, complicates the choice organisations have to make when implementing such interventions.

Organisations do not experience the true benefits of mentorship, because not all the factors that have an impact on the success of such an intervention are considered. By means of this research, as well as a literature review, it was established that mentorship consists of two equally important processes: the first is the mentorship programme, and the second the mentorship relationship (Research question 1). In an attempt to clarify the confusion surrounding mentorship, a systems model of mentorship was developed, incorporating all relevant factors contributing to the success of mentorship in organisations.

The model consists of an integration of Tables 1 to 3. However, it is believed that certain aspects of this approach were still lacking, and therefore information from the literature study was used to complete the model. The model is built on the systems approach: on the input side are the protégé and mentor with their unique knowledge, skills and attitudes when entering the mentorship relationship. As a result of exposure to the formal mentorship process (programme and relationship), the expected output is a protégé with (i) an attitude which portrays, for example, awareness; (ii) skills which depend on the goal of the programme; and (iii) skills that will make him/her competent to take decisions, solve problems and interact within the expected standards of that particular organisation, to mention but a few. Organisations implement mentorship programmes as ad hoc interventions without taking into consideration the impact of organisational factors.

The formal mentorship programme continues for a specified period. (In the case of the organisation studied, the period was one year.) The core of the mentorship process is the mentorship relationship that has developed. As Clutterbuck (2002) states, mismatches between mentor and protégé are quite common and often underestimated. Scandura and Williams (2002) aver that the pairing process in mentoring programmes is critical to the development of mentorship relationships. Mentors should be well chosen in terms of their suitability to mentor specific protégés. Mentors and protégés should also be compatible in terms of personality, thus enabling the transfer of knowledge, skills and experience to take place within the mentorship relationship. Organisations need to ensure that the organisational context is conducive to the development of such a relationship. To create

such an environment, organisations need to have a learning culture as well as a culture of trust and integrity. All of the above unfolds within the organisational context.

The formal process as well as the mentorship relationship needs to be monitored and evaluated throughout the mentorship process. Clutterbuck (2001) states that the absence of structure, measurement and control of the formal process as well as the mentorship relationship makes it difficult for the company to wield any influence over the nature and quality of the mentorship relationship. Various systems or practices to evaluate the effectiveness of mentorship programmes exist, such as formal evaluation forms, informal feedback from protégés, and structured interviews with mentors and protégés (Scandura & Williams, 2002). This would give the person responsible for training and development in the organisation an indication of the extent to which the mentorship process enhances productivity, learning and development. It would furthermore indicate possible improvements organisations can make in terms of the mentorship processes (e.g. the pairing of participants, the training of mentors and protégés, and the content of the formal mentorship programme).

The outcome of mentorship would largely be determined by the mentorship intervention (Research question 3). If this intervention is well planned, implemented and evaluated, it can have numerous benefits for the organisation, mentors and protégés – including the opportunity to transfer knowledge and skills to protégés and provide them with the chance to build meaningful relationships with their mentors.

It is apparent that mentorship could be used as a vehicle to effectively instil various organisational factors (Research question 2). The reasons for organisations utilising mentorship might differ, but most organisations find the mentorship process – if well-planned, implemented and followed through – to be beneficial. Well-documented research on the process, content, advantages and disadvantages is available to prospective researchers. The fact remains that, depending on the organisation's goal for introducing a mentorship programme, each mentorship programme needs to be tailor-made for that specific organisation and its participants. It is thus possible for organisations to make use of mentorship as an intervention, and to ensure the growth and development of their employees.

An effective mentorship relationship paves the way for senior staff (mentors) not only to transfer organisational principles, but also to be role models in this regard. This type of transfer takes place both formally and informally. As the respondents of this study commented, more effective transfer takes place within the setting of a one-on-one relationship with an ethical trusted advisor (mentor). A learning culture, management support, training, participation, communication, and evaluation and feedback are organisational factors that play a significant role in the success of a mentorship intervention. It is also here that organisations neglect to view mentorship holistically, taking into consideration all the factors that contribute to the success of mentorship programmes. Guest (2001) identifies some of these factors as recruitment of the best talent; the induction of new recruits; performance management; the effectiveness of formal training; organisational culture, networking and communication, and other learning initiatives.

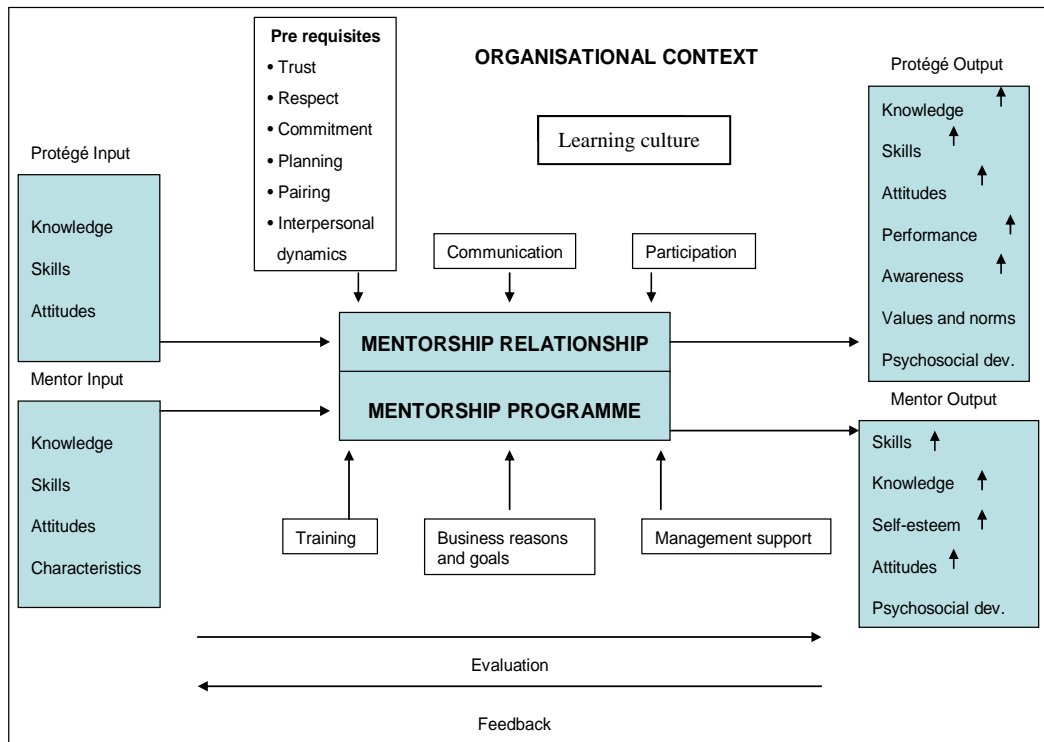


Figure 2. Mentorship in organisations: A systems view (Authors own interpretation)

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mentorship should be a well-planned and well-implemented process. Mentors should be formally trained in the mentorship process, as well as the requirements of a mentorship relationship. The pairing of mentorship participants is of the utmost importance.
- Introducing a mentorship programme in an organisation must be a process that is well thought through and well planned. Mentorship offers numerous benefits to organisations of all sizes, if it is correctly implemented and followed through. It is evident from the literature review as well as the empirical study conducted, that these interventions, when implemented by organisations to improve their effectiveness, are typically neither well planned nor integrated.
- Organisations that already implement mentorship programmes should consider using mentorship to create awareness, educate and develop employees, and through the mentorship relationship ensure that employees incorporate this awareness and newly acquired knowledge and skills into their everyday work life.
- Designers of mentorship programmes can now possibly design these programmes not only as mere ad hoc interventions for career advancement, but also to assist organisations in institutionalising newly acquired knowledge and skills. In the planning process certain elements, which are critical to transfer, need to be built in. The formal mentorship programme should make provision for the training of mentors on issues related to the mentorship process, the goal of the mentorship programme, and their role in this transfer process. Protégés need to be trained in order to create an awareness of the goals of the

mentorship programme and to familiarise them with the content to be covered in the mentorship programme.

- An important component of this process is the mentorship relationship. If the designers of mentorship programmes are involved in the pairing of mentors and protégés, attention should be given to the choice of mentorship pair, which forms the basis of the mentorship relationship.
- Finally, designers should incorporate evaluation interventions when planning a mentorship programme to ensure that effective transfer takes place.

Suggestions for further research

- Evaluate the nature of implementation and the impact of mentorship in organisations.
- Investigate to what extent mentorship programmes are used to fast-track junior employees in organisations.
- Investigate whether the effectiveness of mentorship improves after thorough implementation of the systems model.

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