

Mentorship - advantages and disadvantages concerning personnel training programs

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Abstract: Throughout my article I do not claim to revolutionize the human resource management. Still, I believe that in light of the profound economic crisis that we are getting through, new solutions or even insufficiently explored ones are necessary in order to attract new personnel or keep and better motivate the already existing one. In the hypothesis of maintaining the quality of the personnel, as one of the key factors of the success of a company and considering that any extra expense has to have a very solid base, a cheap but effective way to train the personnel should attract the attention of a great number of companies. The mentorship is not a new concept or not even a revolutionary one. Still, its potential is far from being fully exploited by the Romanian economical environment.

Keywords: Mentorship, human resources management, motivation, training, personnel retention

Motto:

The attitude is as (or even more) important as our skills. And yet, we spend most of our time, developing our skills. It is time to develop our attitude.

Mr Dan Ward, U.S.A.F

1. Introduction

Through my paper, I will underline certain positive aspects concerning the use of

mentorship programs as part of the personnel development strategy of companies acting in an economy.

As any concept of human resources management, which contains elements bound to the human personality, the mentorship concept has a wide range of meanings and may be used in various ways. However, considering that the theme of my paper is the management of small and medium enterprises, I will reduce its range to the business mentorship.

The renowned American researcher John P. Kotter, teacher at Harvard Business School, stated in his article *What Leaders Really Do*, published in the *Harvard Business Review* (1990) that the main goal of the systems and structures is to help average people that act normally to accomplish their every day tasks, day after day. It is nothing extraordinary or glamorous. But this is management. Considering this reality, the constant research for methods of training and motivation of the employees throughout their daily routine in an enterprise is becoming increasingly important.

The theories of human resources management pass in review a series of methods in personnel training. Intensive training programs, job-training, internships, all of these methods have advantages or flaws depending on the situations that may occur. The mentorship, as a training method, can be used successfully in recruitment, training and the development of the loyalty of the new employees towards the company.

Although the concept has been intensively used in institutions in the U.S and world wide (The Industrial Society Studies, 1980-1990 – Europe, CIPD, 2005- England, Geber, 2003 – South Africa or Macgregor, 1999 – Australia, have shown the fact that the majority of the companies, and especially the large ones used the mentorship as a tool), the interest of the economic literature for this topic has been relatively low, especially in Europe.

However several innovative and successful programs must be underlined: - “Women in Leadership Program” (2008), a Norwegian project with its declared goal to support women in middle management to become successful leaders. The mentors

were selected from men with a wide experience from other companies. One of the main achievements of this program was the increase of the level of self confidence concerning their role in the company for more than 83 percent of the mentees and more than half of the mentors; - IBM has three formal major mentoring categories. Expert Mentoring helps employees acquire specific technical, business, functional and leadership skills. Career Mentoring addresses long-term career development and succession planning. Socialization Mentoring helps new hires adjust; - American Express has formal programs including New Hire Mentoring, in which each new hire is assigned a peer mentor who explains tasks and responsibilities and serves as a sounding board. The mentors help create an on-boarding roadmap, which outlines a course of knowledge for the first six months on the job. Another formal program is the Professional Development Program, in which employees are mentored and trained to help them grow professionally and personally; - The “National Graduate Development Programme” for local government (ngdp) within the UK combines the desire of applicants to develop and make a difference with local government’s drive to develop its future leaders and serve people and places better. The mentoring process within the programme grants access to independent advice and counsel to the mentees such as: an objective sounding board for ideas and issues, inspiration and confidence building, a valuable source of insight on the wider national perspective, an opportunity to reflect on applicants’ learning, career advice.

Being used formally from the second part of the 1990s, the concept has developed through different forms and areas of use as:

sports, theater or the educational system. Although major achievements have been accomplished by the use of mentorship in areas that needed radical change, it was rarely used in business.

Considering this aspect and having in mind the constant change that Romanian companies have to adapt to, I truly believe the mentorship may be an extremely interesting concept to be researched, adapted and exploited in order to answer the needs of the small and medium enterprises in our country.

2. Mentorship- History and definitions

The concept of mentorship has its genesis in the Antic Ages. In Greek mythology, Ulysses departs for war to Troy and leaves his son and his palace to the care of his friend Mentor. Although in Homer's *Odyssey*, the teachings that Mentor had provided to Telemachus are not underlined, this moment is considered to be the root of the concept of mentorship, considering that at some point the goddess Minerva turns into old Mentor and guides Telemachus to find his father.

Through the ages there were more famous mentor-mentee couples as Krishna - Arjuna, Socrates and Platon, Platon - Aristotle, Aristotle - Alexander the Great, Paul from Tars - Timothy.

Moreover, some of the greatest personalities from different areas have received the guidance of a mentor: Business men: The owner of the Virgin brand (Virgin Records and Virgin Atlantic Airways), sir Richard Branson was guided by the founder of Laker Airlines - Sir Frederick Alfred Laker; Movie directors- Oliver Stone was guided by Martin Scorsese; Actors- Heath Ledger was

guided by Mel Gibson; Composers – Johann Christian Bach, the son of Johann Sebastian Bach, that had a great deal of influence on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

The first biographical references to the concept of mentorship, in modern terms can be discovered in the book of the French writer Francois Fénelon, *Les aventures de Télémaque* published in 1699, with Mentor being the main character, a very popular book during the eighteenth century.

This document can be considered the source of the modern concept of mentorship, which can be defined as a trustworthy friend, a counselor or teacher, a person with greater experience. Some professions as lawyers or notaries have so-called mentorship programs or internships – when the new comers spend a period of time with a more experienced person in order to receive guidance and council and to learn from genuine best practices.

Nowadays, mentors share their personal expertise with less experienced people in order to help them advance in their careers, improve their education and form their own connections. Mentor's role, as David Clutterbuck, one of the founders of the mentorship as a formal method of personnel training, claims is to use one's wisdom to help other people develop their own [1].

Under these circumstances it is easy to comprehend the fact that this concept has known various forms of expression as emerging from different cultural environments. Thus it has been quite difficult to introduce the idea of a structured mentorship in Europe, with American coordinates, where the concept initially developed. Mentorship, in its informal existence, was used more or less on purpose, at a large scale in different organizations. Still, methods of using it as a

management tool were not conceived yet.

Nowadays, in every day work we can find two forms of relationship mentor-mentee: formal and informal. The informal ones are developing naturally between two people with similar values that share a mutual feeling of appreciation. They may or may not work in the same area of activity. The formal ones, on the other side are defined explicitly and are often associated with programs of organizational mentorship, implemented in order to contribute towards personal development.

This divergence of perception regarding the nature and the goal of the mentorship can be observed also from the variety of definitions. Lots of educators considered the mentorship to be a mean towards career development. Still, it has not been achieved so far (and possibly never will) a widely accepted definition. Or, in this case, the efforts to develop a data base of know-how on mentorship are to be considerable. There have been some attempts to define the mentorship in order to help the research in this area and to serve the mentors, the mentees and the sponsors, by underlining the critical elements of the mentorship program.

Thus, the mentorship – is a term used, in generally, to describe a relationship developed between a less experienced person called mentee or protégé and one more experienced called a mentor.

Mentoring, or the process of mentorship, is really a growing, strengthening bond that occurs between a mentor, who is more experienced, not necessarily older, but who is certainly wiser; and his or her protégé, a mentee or someone who is less experienced and wise, and who therefore needs to be guided by the mentor [9].

Another definition, more concentrated on the role of the mentorship as part of the politics for the development of human resources, states that: the mentorship refers to a development – effect relationship, during which a person with a greater experience helps a less experienced person, still called – protégé, apprentice, mentee or a mentored person – to develop a specific competence [2].

Traditionally, the mentorship is considered to be a teaching relation, face to face, on long term between an adult with a supervising role and a novice student, that spurs the personal development of the mentee from an academically, professional and personal perspective [3].

3. Types of mentorship

In practice, the mentorship has developed in many shapes. Yet, no matter which form was more efficient, adapted to the requirements of the different types of organizations, the main principles have not changed.

Concerning the structure, the mentorship can act through a one-on-one relationship type or a relationship with more than one mentor.

Concerning its development as time sequence, there are forms of mentorship in which more mentors are active simultaneous or in stages.

Concerning the mentorship network, there is the waterfall mentorship, when a group of young researchers form a scientific educational work group, in which a professor supervises the young graduates or the advanced students from the senior years, which supervise, as well, the junior students.

Moreover, the mentorship relations can be established formally or informally, on

short or long term, electronically or face to face. Regarding the functions of the mentorship, generally, there are two categories used to describe the role of the mentors: psychosociologically and career development. The first type is considered to describe the type of mentor–friend or counselor, while the second is suited for the sponsor–mentor or coach–mentor. There are some opinions that consider the role-model to be a third category.

The mentorship should not be considered as an all or nothing process. A mentor could cover a single role for a single need of the mentee, or could assume more than one role. An efficient mentor could differ from the mentee from a gender, area of expertise, ethnic profile or socio-economic perspective, although the students prefer, in most cases, a mentor to whom they can relate from several demographic variables.

Each structure of mentorship can be more or less suited, depending on the functions or the results that it is aiming for. For example the structure of stability pillars or peer-monitoring is more adapted to the development of the psycho-sociological functions, while the mentorship based on supervisors may be used for career-development. Also, a structure that is using more than one mentor is more suited for the development of multiple functions of the mentorship and to the personal training than a structure with one mentor.

As to the function of the mentorship as a way to train the personnel, we can also meet multiple types: - The mentorship for the new employees – there are multiple programs through which the newly arrived in the organization (protégées) are paired with more experienced people (mentors) in order to obtain information, best practices examples and

advices. Studies have shown that the new employees that were submitted to a mentorship stage were twice as motivated to stay in the organization as the others; - The mentorship for the employees with great potential – there are also situations when the mentorship is used for the development of the employees that have an important potential, so they could assume the role of leaders in the organization. In this case, the young employees are paired with one or more leaders from a top management level for a series of interactions concerning the career development. A similar method distributes the high potential employees in different positions in dispersed areas of the organizations, for brief periods of time, in order for them to understand thoroughly the organizational culture, the structure and the company methods. A mentor does not have to be necessarily a manager or a director in order to participate to the process.

Overall, the alternatives to the classical methods of personnel training can be essential to the support of the under sampled groups inside and outside of the scientific research. Acknowledging the complexity of the mentorship concept, including its structural diversity and the multitude of roles associated to the mentor, would support the planning of efficient and innovative research.

4. Essential elements of the mentorship

There is a certain divergence of opinions between the theory of the mentorship in the U.S and the European one. The main two forms of mentorship are the sponsorship and the developmental types [4].

The main principles of the sponsor based mentorship are: the mentor is more influential and hierarchically senior, the

mentor gives, the protégé receives, the mentor actively champions and promotes the cause of the protégé, the use of mentor's network by the protégé, a career driven protégé and a one way learning process. The mentor may or may not be the direct superior of the protégée.

On the other hand, the mentorship based on personal development includes a strong difference regarding the experience but not necessarily from a hierarchical perspective, as the power and influence of the mentor are irrelevant, the focus of the process being on the development of the personal competences as a mean to achieve professional or career objectives and last but not least mutual learning. The mentor helps the mentee towards personal insights from which he or she can steer his or her own development. The direct superior must not be a mentor, as a rule, in order to ensure the independence of the learning dialog

To understand these two models as simple results of the cultural differences would be a mistake. Even if, without a doubt, the cultural differences have played an essential role in the evolution of the concept, there has been a gradual evolution of the term in the U.S as well as in Europe.

The main elements of this change would be: - Evolving from the use of the mentor as a source of knowledge transfer to its use as a resource in order to help the mentee to develop his own knowledge; - From focusing on doing to the creation and use of the reflection space (focused thinking); - From focusing on good answers towards good questions; - From guidance to dialogue; - From one strong and long relationship, initiated at the beginning of the mentee's career to several learning stages throughout his career [5, 6].

As a consequence, we can observe shared features of the behavior as [7]:

Expression - The mentor must be capable to explain the best practice examples and illustrate them through stories or anecdotes. He will have to empathize with the mentee and motivate him in order to stimulate reflection- through the use of suited language. Moreover an efficient mentor has to be capable to help the mentee to express his ideas, feelings and thoughts. By asking the right questions and by using visual support.

Listening - The efficient mentors spend less than 20% of the time speaking. They are acknowledging the importance of the assistance provided to the mentee in solving his own problems and building his own perspective. They use questions to change, frequently, the approach, so that the mentee would be able to understand the whole picture. They are also skilled in the art of silence, encouraging the mentee to take a few moments of reflection before forming his personal opinion. Moreover, the mentee has to develop his abilities in the use of silence, considering that it often happens that the mentor speech presents subtleties.

Respect - It is essential for the existence of a fully open dialogue. Respect is based on the mutual acknowledgement of quality as dialogue partners, as intellect, experience and sheer value for the company.

Analytic abilities - The quality of the dialogue can be harmed is neither the mentor nor the mentee does not wish to increase the depth of the relationship. Identifying the most suited methods, connections and themes between events is crucial. The co-analysis of the events helps the mutual understanding on several levels and creates a bond between the two.

The clarity of the purpose - Both the mentors and the mentees must have a very clear understanding of the mentee's objectives. If the objectives change, they must acknowledge it and adapt accordingly. Moreover, a clear understanding of the mentor's objectives will help the mentee to understand that the relationship is mutual. Among the abilities requested for a clear image of the goals are the support for the individuals to identify what they don't want, devising the major objectives in smaller objectives, setting smaller and feasible actions to reach these objectives.

The ability to challenge - One of the main complaints of the mentors and of the mentee is that their partner does not challenge them as often or as intensively enough. The mentorship relationship allows constructive confrontations more than any other type of relationship, considering that both sides are questioning each other's conceptions.

Self acknowledgment - Both the mentor and the mentee need a minimum development of their emotional intelligence to understand their own motivations and to be able to develop a mutual empathy. The self acknowledgment is essential for the mentor in order to become a deep, pro active role model in order to know when and how to use his own experience. For the mentee, the acknowledgment of his quality is a practical foundation for the selection and future implementation of the advices provided by the mentor.

Commitment towards learning - Recent studies have shown that the commitment towards learning is more important than the commitment towards the relationship, in order for the mentee to adopt the right behavior, and his future results. The mentors that have given up on the concept of active learning have the tendency to be more

self-absorbed and more authoritarian, than those that consider the relationship as an opportunity to develop his own abilities and to grasp new perspectives.

Reflection/preparation - Along the lack of time for the meetings, one of the main failure factors are that both sides are deficient on the analytical perspective before and after the mentorship dialogue. It is crucial that the mentee informs the mentor, a few days ahead what he would like to discuss at the next meeting. Thus, until the actual meeting, the mentor can form an opinion, understand what the mentee wants to comprehend as a result of the dialogue, and to search for the most efficient and pertinent examples. After the meeting the mentee must spend at least one hour to reflect on the information received and on its deeper implications. The mentor will also have to answer him self to questions as How can I help? How have I been helping so far? And after the meeting, How did I help?

The mentees need to understand thoroughly the mentorship process and contribute to its development - help the mentors help them. This type of pro active behavior can transform them, in time, into mentors.

Certain competences, as the ability to see the big picture or to be able to say I have been there, I have seen this, I have done this without imposing their own opinions, are required, exclusively, to the mentor. Still the majority of the competences and attitudes must be developed by both sides.

5. Conclusions

The mentorship is an extremely complex concept, which takes many forms into practice. Even if we can't presume it to be a new concept at theoretical level, when it comes to

practice, it is under-developed compared to its potential. The reason is an element that has not been discussed in this article, the fact that it requires a certain period of time in order to function.

In general, the companies, nowadays, are increasingly put under pressure by the global competition, which has infiltrated in all economic areas, and consequently they cannot afford to allow to a new employee, time to adapt. The organizational changes are extremely expedient and any employee that can't keep up is automatically eliminated by the system.

However, the mentorship remains a very important tool for the personnel training. Ignoring the needs, thoughts and aspirations of the personnel, leads to a high degree of fluctuation of the human resource, phenomenon that harms the economic performances of the company.

Considering the expediency of the economic world, we can identify four main principles of the mentorship [8]:

The mentorship has a strong personal touch. In the hypothesis that a top manager, with a large experience in the company will succeed in passing on his knowledge to a younger employee, or to one with similar pattern of thinking, he will have managed to create a special bond with that employee

and the continuity of his company will be ensured. The loss of know how determined by the departure of an old employee and the arrival of a new one would be minimal.

Not all the employees are exceptional. Ideally, all the employees of a company would be A level. However, in most of the cases, the majority is formed by level B employees. Thus, the mentorship would be a complementary measure to ensure that the majority would relate and keep the rhythm with the best employees. The choice of task is usually imposed. Most of the time tasks are delegated directly by the line managers to the inferior levels of the organization, without allowing any choice for the employees. So, a better understanding of the goals of each action, as well as of the general vision of the company, would be facilitated by the existence of the mentors. The mentorship goes both ways. We must remember that the mentorship is a win-win procedure, both sides gaining from each other's experience. Let's take for instance, the case of an old employee that is in a mentorship relation with a new employee of the company. The newcomer will receive in short time information about the mission, goals and procedures of the company, while the senior employee will gain abilities, competences or know how, that could improve his efficiency.

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