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What are Mentoring and Sponsoring and How do they Impact Organizations?

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What are Mentoring and Sponsoring and How do they Impact Organizations?

Abstract
Redefined Question: What are mentoring and sponsoring? How do they impact organizations? What are the guidelines for effective mentoring/sponsoring programs?

Keywords
human resources, mentoring, employee sponsorship, impact mentoring has on organizations

Comments
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Jing Cao & Yu-Chung (John) Yang  

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Redefined Question
What are mentoring and sponsoring? How do they impact organizations? What are the guidelines for effective mentoring/sponsoring programs?

Definition of mentoring/sponsoring
There is a lack of clarity and consensus on the definitions of mentoring and sponsoring. On one hand, much of the research conceptualizes mentoring as the career and psychosocial developmental support provided by a more senior individual (mentor) to a junior (protégé), and viewed sponsoring as a sub-function of providing career support by upward mobility. On the other hand, some research suggests that sponsoring is a distinct concept. An attempted universal definition categorizes mentoring as the guidance process that takes place between a mentor and a protégé, while sponsoring as the process of a sponsor nominating or supporting a protégé's promotion.1

A mentor gives advice and helps prepare the protégé for the next position. A sponsor goes out on a limb and makes the case for the protégé that could make his or her career.2 An individual might be overlooked for promotions regardless of his or her competence and performance, if not sponsored by someone in a position to weigh in at the decision making table.3,4 Mentoring and sponsoring may be used independently or concurrently based on needs. For example, for aspiring executives developing career strategies it is suggested that mentors be selected to enhance their competence and effectiveness on the job, and that sponsors be selected to assist them in advancing within the organization.1 The political processes inherent in promotion decisions are pervasive; as one climbs the organizational ladder, competition for promotions increases and sponsorship becomes more essential.3

Types of mentoring/sponsoring
Mentoring relationships can be formal (assigned) or informal (naturally developed) in nature. Both informal and formal mentorships can be either intraorganizational (mentor and protégé are employed by the same organization) or interorganizational (mentor and protégé are employed by different organizations). Similar to mentoring, sponsoring can be formal or informal, and can occur intraorganizationally and interorganizationally.1

Mentoring programs are mostly formalized in today's organizations in recognition of its contribution to develop talents 5 and achieve competitive advantages.1 Formal programs are designed to meet objectives developed by the organization and take different formats:9 supervisory mentorship where a line manager also acts as mentor; peer mentorship where peers offer support, encouragement, and knowledge transfer; team mentorship where a team share knowledge and skills, provide support and networking opportunities 5; virtual mentoring program where mentees are matched via an online system based on self-evaluations and communication goes virtually.6

Outcomes of mentoring/sponsoring
Meta-analytic research has provided evidence that mentoring empowers protégés to achieve better career outcomes as indicated by both objective measures, such as compensation and promotions, and subjective measures, such as job satisfaction, career satisfaction and commitment.9 Benefits for mentors include support network building, intrinsic satisfaction, self-learning, career enhancement, and recognition from others.7 Organizational outcomes may be as diverse as improved organizational commitment, talent attraction and retention, organizational communication, managerial succession, institutional memory, productivity or job performance, and perceived justice.9

Recent research has revealed that successful sponsoring relationships helps the protégés to get raises and promotions and find satisfaction at work.8 The sponsors benefit through enhanced credibility and future reciprocate support as protégés reach senior status.3 Company use quantitative metrics such as promotion and percentage representation of the targeted group in executive roles to measure the program's success.6

Guidelines for effective mentoring/sponsoring program
1. Objective clarity and alignment
Organizations may initiate mentoring and/or sponsoring to support a variety of human capital and business goals such as diversity and inclusion, talent development, and knowledge management. Successful initiatives align the nature and format of the program with specific objectives. Recognizing the different focuses between programs
for newcomers (i.e. having a socialization objective) and those for high potential managers (i.e. having a leadership development or succession planning objective) implies that elements from psychosocial and career support functions need to be selected accordingly to contextualize the program.9

IBM, for instance, launched a global initiative to enable knowledge transfer and career development. Different types of programs address different challenges: mentoring for specific skills (i.e. IT), long-term career advancement (i.e. sponsorship program for senior women), and specific roles (i.e. socialization of new employees).10 To tackle succession planning, Deloitte, while has a strong mentoring culture in place, instituted formal sponsoring programs for rising leaders below partner level to obtain stretching assignments and gain executive exposure.11

2. Participant selection and matching

Effective programs select protégés based on criteria that demonstrates proven capacity and development needs. The selection of mentors and sponsors are based on a combination of skills, availability, organizational stature, and motivations in light of program goals. Typical matches include one or a combination of administrator-assigned, choice-based, and assessment-based methods (see Appendix 2). Matching mentors and mentees on the basis of complementarity of needs and similarity of interests, and allowing some mentee choice in selection of mentor are crucial factors to build strong relationships.7,9

Unilever’s program with the explicit objective of career advancement for high-potential women selects sponsors on two key criteria: experience in protégés’ developmental areas, and presence at the table when the appointment decisions get made.12 While for P&G’s company-wide program targeting personal development of junior managers, matches are made to increase the likelihood of frequent contact and good chemistry.9

3. Program support and training

Organizational support and resource allocation play important roles. Successful program addresses larger strategic visions, coordinates both cooperate and local efforts (i.e. manager and supervisor involvement), and integrates with other organizational systems (i.e. performance-appraisal process, succession planning and communication systems). In addition, there should be visible support from top management, along with a supportive organizational culture. Comprehensive training system such as orientations, provision of guidelines, skill and relationship development workshops need to be put in place. Programs offered to mentors and sponsors typically address communication and feedback skills, while those to protégés focus on skills and competencies.9

Deutsche Bank’s mentoring program is one facet of a comprehensive initiative endorsed by top executives that also involves external coaches and leadership workshops.12 Deloitte’s Leading to Win identifies both mentorship and sponsorship opportunities and provides extensive training to build gender sensitivity.11

4. Outcome accountability and measurement

An established process for allocating accountability, monitoring program processes, assessing the effectiveness of an initiative, and making program improvements is important. This implies that program evaluation and monitoring strategies should be clearly defined well before the actual implementation.13 The monitoring process needs to be linked to the strategic business needs and a chosen evaluation strategy should assess both process and outcome variables (i.e. program satisfaction, leadership behavior improvement, retention). In addition, results of the monitoring process should be communicated with participants and senior management.8

Sodexo’s mentoring program measures what is effective and uses the data analysis to drive improvement. It holds people accountable for diversity results by linking 25 percent of the compensation of its senior executives to their successful completion of diversity goals. Sponsors in IBM’s career advancement program are charged with ensuring that their protégés are ready for promotion and failure to do so is viewed as failures of the sponsors.13

Conclusion

Depending on resource constraints and larger organizational context, organizations might consider improving on the depth of formal mentoring relationships that select supportive mentors to eventually become a sponsor, to increase the breadth of available mentoring relationships to address different needs, or to offer mentoring and sponsoring programs separately. However the perceptions and utilisations of mentorship and/or sponsorship (see Appendix 3), they remain essential components of effective knowledge transfer, well planned career development and professional networking. Varying formats of programs may be particularly suited to different environments and needs. Still, one of the most important elements seems to be a commitment and openness to change, and in order for the programs to achieve organizational objectives, they need to be well crafted to take into holistic
considerations in design and implementation.
Appendices

Appendix 1. Mentors v.s. Sponsors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MENTORS</th>
<th>SPONSORS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Can sit at any level in the hierarchy</td>
<td>Must be senior managers with influence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide emotional support, feedback on how to improve, and other advice</td>
<td>Give protégés exposure to other executives who may help their careers</td>
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<td>Serve as role models</td>
<td>Make sure their people are considered for promising opportunities and challenging assignments</td>
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<td>Help mentees learn to navigate corporate politics</td>
<td>Protect their protégés from negative publicity or damaging contact with senior executives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strive to increase mentees’ sense of competence and self-worth</td>
<td>Fight to get their people promoted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on mentees’ personal and professional development</td>
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</table>

Adapted from Ibarra, H., Carter, N., & Silva, C. (2010).
## Appendix 2. Matching Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types</th>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>Applications</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Administrator-assigned</strong></td>
<td>Goal-driven</td>
<td>Administrator has personal knowledge of participants and program</td>
<td>Matches are tightly aligned with organizational goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hunch method</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mentors and protégés have little or no input in the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choice-based</strong></td>
<td>Priority lists</td>
<td>Multiple possible pair combinations exist, and participants are invested in process</td>
<td>Increases psychological ownership and commitment, sense of intimacy, meeting frequency</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mutual selection activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentor or protégé choice</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greater facilitation needs</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment-based</strong></td>
<td>Myers-Briggs Type Indicator</td>
<td>Goals of the program indicate desirability of more prescribed matches</td>
<td>Increases likelihood of complementarity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PeopleMatch</td>
<td></td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007).
### Appendix 3: Mentoring/Sponsoring Program Design and Implementation Characteristics and Guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Program Objectives</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Matching</th>
<th>Program Support and Training</th>
<th>Outcome Accountability and Measurement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talent management</td>
<td>One-on-one</td>
<td>Mentor –</td>
<td>Subjective choice</td>
<td>Orientation guidelines</td>
<td>Anecdotal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversity and Inclusion</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Knowledge,</td>
<td>Mentor /protégé choice</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Programmatic</td>
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<td>Succession Planning</td>
<td>Reverse</td>
<td>Skills,</td>
<td>Complementarity / similarity</td>
<td>Manager involvement</td>
<td>Mentee assessment</td>
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<td>Leadership/Personal Development</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Abilities</td>
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<td>Ongoing support</td>
<td>Organizational metrics</td>
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<td>Retention</td>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
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<td>New Employee Induction Knowledge</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>and availability</td>
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<td>Management</td>
<td>Sponsoring</td>
<td>Protégé –</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentoring and Sponsoring</td>
<td>Performance</td>
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<td>Level requirement</td>
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Adapted from Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007).
List of References


