A STUDY ON MENTORING FUNCTIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON PROTÉGÉ'S CAREER DEVELOPMENT IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY(IT) SECTOR, CHENNAI

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Abstract

Employees are the primary pillars of an organization's success, and desire to grow and scale new heights professionally. Given adequate career development opportunities, an employee can pursue his career goals by utilizing his potential fully. He is encouraged when the organization also supports him with a clear career path that is aligned with its corporate goals. Unfortunately, as John Leach points out, organizations are paying scant attention to this particular aspect, owing to a variety of reasons. As a result, they are unable to match employee expectations with their own special needs. Mentoring helps organizations attract the right people, shape them into future leaders, and retain their loyalty for the long term. A survey reported that 67% of all companies will choose to opt for mentoring programs as training and development tools, effective 2014 onwards.

Miscellaneous studies on employee retention indicate that career development is a key factor that determines how long employees choose to stay on. A career development plan is a win – win for both employers and employees. It focuses on employees' need for growth and development. The organization, for its part, supports employees develop and pursue a career path through access to opportunities and information, resulting in helping employees at personal and professional levels. Naturally, IT organizations have introduced career development programs to help retain their employees. The researcher has chosen this area as the topic of the study and intends to explore mentoring functions and their influence on the career development of protégés in the organization.This study was conducted in the city of Chennai. All IT companies with branches in Chennai are presumed to be good sources of information on employees in this niche sector, especially in terms of the companies' perception of mentoring functions and their influence on career development.

Keywords: Mentoring Functions and Career Development

1.1. INTRODUCTION:

Today, the shortage of a skilled and competent workforce, higher expectations in terms of salaries and benefits, and increasing attrition rates has made organizations rethink their current HR practices. This is largely due to changes brought on by increased globalised competition, technological advancements, changing workplace demographics, the information revolution and a definitive trend towards service to society in the business environment. As a result, organizations are forced to initiate new strategies/techniques to remain competitive in business. A popular strategy used to meld business purposes and the developmental needs of employees is "mentoring". Mentoring is a process in which experienced persons act as mentors to provide career guidance and psycho-social directions to help their protégés advance personally and professionally in their career.

Most employees in an organization tend not to stay on for long, partly due to monetary dissatisfaction, unfavorable working conditions, organizational politics, complicated hierarchies, and a lack of challenging work coupled with a lack of supervision. In addition, there is a huge gap between demand and supply in the workforce. Although huge numbers of young people pass out of educational institutions every year and join the workforce, they fail to meet the requirements of industry. Moreover, employees have become more career conscious than before, resulting in improved career development opportunities. According to a research survey conducted by the **Manpower Group (2015)**, "around one-third of United States employers are facing difficulty in filling job vacancies resulting in talent shortages due to a lack of effective career development in today's workplace". Hence, this necessitates appropriate career development practices in the organization.

Career development programs basically assist employees anticipate changes in their career and help them gain new skills as they move up the corporate hierarchical ladder. Today, most organizations provide an open door policy to make employees feel valued and empowered, alongside a career lattice to encourage sideways movement in addition to upward movement, rather than the traditional career ladder. By doing so, they have found that their employees are more likely to stay. The extent of career support received by employees is positively correlated to their stated intention to remain with their current employer (CIPD, 2005).

The process of career development can be better facilitated by the concept of mentoring, which helps employees develop, and establishes a strong relationship between the employer and the employee as well. If mentoring programs are implemented successfully, organizations can expect to see improved employee skill sets while simultaneously curtailing attrition too. Since there has been very little research on the relationship between mentoring functions and career development the researcher has chosen to study the effect of mentoring functions on the career development of protégés.

1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which the career development of protégés has been influenced by their mentors, and to examine the relationship between mentoring functions and selected indicators of career development. The study also identifies the functions performed by the mentors concerned. This research is important because very few studies have examined the relationship between mentoring functions and career development, especially among employees in IT organizations.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Kathy Kram (1985) defined mentoring functions as "those aspects of a developmental relationship that enhance both the individual's growth and advancement" This primarily focuses on the support provided by the mentor to the protégé. She classified mentoring functions into two major categories: career development and psychosocial functions. Over 25 years ago, mentoring functions were still used to predict protégés' career outcomes and their satisfaction with their mentor. Studies that examine mentoring functions and their outcomes are discussed below:

Ragins, B.R. & Cotton, J.L. (1999) examined the effect of mentoring relationships and gender composition on mentoring functions and career outcomes. The study revealed that protégés in informal mentoring relationships received more career outcomes compared to those in formal relationships. Gender composition also significantly influenced mentoring functions and their outcomes.

Fowler, L. Jane & O'Gormans, John (2005) reported that both mentors and mentees are found to have similar perceptions on mentoring functions. They developed an instrument to measure individual mentoring functions in a contemporary organizational environment. The instrument can be used to assess the congruence in expectations and perceptions between both parties, and as a diagnostic tool for reviewing their relationship.

Jyothi Jeevan & Sharma, Poonam (2015) spoke of mentoring as being a valuable resource for the protégé's learning that helps meet the needs of the business and the employee, thereby helping the protégé cope with organizational changes. They examined the impact of mentoring functions on the career development of employees in Indian call centers using predictors such as mentoring culture and mentoring structure. The findings of the study revealed that mentoring functions significantly influenced career development in employees.

Samei Hossein & Feyzbakhsh Alireza (2016) described that effect of mentoring functions in nurturing successors in family businesses. The results of the study stated that mentoring functions have been found useful in the development of protégés' competencies.

2.1. RESEARCH GAP:

Mentoring is an age-old practice that has been as successful as described in the literature and has taken a modern twist in today's IT world. The factors influencing and impacting mentoring have become varied and complex. Although several studies have investigated mentoring and its outcomes, only few have been carried out on mentoring functions and career development in the Indian context. These studies focused only on the quantum of support received by the protégé and the influence of gender, the nature of the mentoring relationship, the mentoring culture and climate, and the career outcomes of the protégé. Factors that contribute to protégés' career development and their level of satisfaction with mentoring and career development have not been explored yet. In the Indian context, the extent to which mentoring support was received has not been analyzed, especially in the IT sector. A few studies have established the relationship between mentoring functions and career development, and bypassed recent factors that have impacted the development of protégés. Hence the researcher has chosen this topic to study mentoring functions, satisfaction with the mentor, career development, and satisfaction with existing career development programmes to help organizations retain their current workforce as well as upskill it.

Five factors found to be affecting mentoring functions are examined in the present study. Given that these factors significantly impact the development of protégés, organizations need to rethink existing career development practices so as to improve the success rate of career development

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This research is done based on the response collected from the respondents through the questionnaire. The Research design used is Ex-post facto research design.

Universe & Sample Size:

The NASSCOM has listed the following IT companies as top 20 companies in the financial year 2016.The list was prepared based on the headcount of firms with IT operations in the country. Out of 20 IT companies, 50% of the companies are randomly selected using lottery method and found to be initiating mentoring programs in their organizations. Hence 10 companies are chosen for carry out the research work. These 10 IT companies were approached for consent to collect data from their employees. However, very few understood the significance of this particular study and consented to have samples taken from them. Out of 10 IT companies, only 6 companies permitted access to their staff to collect data. A total of 6513 employees were considered for the Universe. The researcher has chosen Chennai as the Field of Study to understand the HR perspective of support system followed in the organization. A Probability sampling technique with Systematic Random Sampling method was used to collect the required sample size of 361.

The tools used for this study are: Mentor Role Instrument (Ragins & McFarlin, 1990, 33–Item questionnaire), 4 items on Satisfaction with the Mentor Scale, 20 items measuring Career Development and 4 items on Satisfaction with Career Development. The reliability of the scales i.e. The alpha value for Mentoring Functions *(N=33)* was **0.961** and for Satisfaction with the Mentor *(N =4)* it was **0.675 and** Career Development Instrument *(N=20)* was **0.949** and 0.727 for Satisfaction with Career Development *(N=4)*. A pilot study was conducted in a leading information technology organization in Chennai. Out of 100 respondents, 60 samples were collected from the IT sector. The data collected during the pilot study was analyzed and found to be relevant and consistent.

3.1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE:

To study mentoring functions and their influence on the career development of protégés in the IT sector.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the demographic profile of the respondents in the study.

- To describe the functioning of mentoring systems in the IT sector.

- To assess the mentoring support received by protégés.

- To identify the level of protégés' satisfaction with their mentors as well as with career development in the IT sector.

- To identify factors that contributes significantly to the career development of protégés.

- To evaluate the impact of mentoring functions on the career development of protégés in the IT sector.

- To provide suggestions for managers and future researchers.

3.2. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY:

- **Hypothesis 1:**

There is no significant difference between female and male mentors with respect to a protégé's satisfaction with a mentor.

- **Hypothesis 2:**

There is no linear relationship between career functions and psychosocial functions.

- **Hypothesis 3:**

There is no linear relationship between overall mentoring functions and career development.

- **Hypothesis 4:**

There is no significant impact of mentoring functions on protégés' career development.

- **Hypothesis 5:**

There is no significant impact of career function variables on protégés' career development.

- **Hypothesis 6:**

There is no significant impact of psychosocial function variables on protégés' career development.

- **Hypothesis 7:**

There is no significant impact of mentoring functions (career functions and psychosocial functions) on protégés' satisfaction with career development.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:

4.1. Percentage Analysis

Demographic Profile of the Respondents:

Around 42.93% of the respondents were in the age group 20 to 25 years. A majority of the respondents (53.1%) were male, and a little more than half (57.3%) unmarried. Most (73.20%) had no children, and the majority (74.7%) were from nuclear families. Most

(64.5%) were undergraduates, and the highest percentage (70.47%) drawn from middle management. Around 38.96% of the respondents had a total work experience of 3 to 5 years, and 44.67% had worked 0 to 2 years in the present company. Around 40.9% fell under the annual income bracket of Rs.2, 00,001 to Rs.4, 00,000.

The Mentoring System

The majority of the protégés (80.6%) had been placed in a formal mentoring program. Of the mentors, the highest percentage (83.13%) was drawn from senior management. Of the respondents, 74.2% reported that their mentor was also their immediate supervisor, and most (68.7%) reported to male mentors. Around 31.51% of the mentors were between the ages of 31 to 35, and the majority of the respondents (62.03%) had been in mentoring relationships for duration of 0 to 2 years.

Mentoring Functions:

- The mean value (16.22) of the career function, "challenge", was the most predominant of all the mentoring functions. The average mean level for the "Questions from Sponsor to Acceptance" was 9.3, which is more than the average, meaning that the mentoring functions are good in every category. The "challenge" score was more than 16 in all the categories, showing that this function is given more importance than others. The mean value (12.072) of "parent" was the least scored variable in mentoring functions, compared to others.

- The mean value (87.52) of psychosocial functions was more than the mean value (77.60) of career functions, meaning that protégés received more support from the former than the latter.

Career Development

- The mean value (21.3846) of "skills and responsibilities" was a little more than the other factors of career development. It is evident that the other factors also played an equal role in enhancing protégés' career development.

- The mean value (18.78) of "satisfaction with the mentor" was higher than the mean value (18.64) of "satisfaction with career development". This indicates that protégés were much more satisfied with their mentor, compared to the career development opportunities provided.

T-test Analysis:

- There was a significant difference between female and male mentors with respect to protégés' satisfaction with the mentor.

Correlation Analysis:

- There was a linear relationship between career functions and psychosocial functions. The correlation value of 0.764 establishes a positive relationship between these

variables which means that if career functions are good, psychosocial functions are, likewise, correspondingly good.

- There was a linear relationship between career development and overall mentoring functions. The correlation value of 0.663 establishes a positive relationship between these variables which means that if career development is good, overall mentoring functions are also good.

Regression Analysis:

1. **Impact of Mentoring Functions on the Protégé's Career Development**

   - The R value of 0.695 shows that there is a good relationship between the dependent variable, career development, and the independent variables, career functions and psychosocial functions. The R square value establishes the contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable. The value 0.480 is converted into a percentage, i.e. 48%. The independent variables contributing together to the dependent variable are 48%. Based on the findings above, we reject the null hypothesis, thereby concluding that mentoring functions significantly impact the protégé's career development.

2. **Impact of Career Functions Variables on the Protégé's Career Development**

   - From the table above, the R value of 0.703 establishes a good relationship between the dependent variable, career development, and the independent variables, career functions. The R square value shows the contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable. The value 0.487 is converted into a percentage, i.e. 49%. The independent variables contributing together to the dependent variable are 49%. Based on the findings above, we reject the null hypothesis, thereby concluding that career functions variables significantly impact the protégé's career development.

3. **Impact of Psychosocial Functions Variables on the Protégé's Career Development**

   - From the table above, the R value of 0.623 establishes a good relationship between the dependent variable, career development and the independent variables, psychosocial functions. The R square value shows the contribution of the independent variables to the dependent variable. The value of 0.379 is converted into a percentage, i.e. 38%. The independent variables contributing together to the dependent variable are 38%. We reject the null hypothesis, thereby concluding that psychosocial functions variables significantly impact the protégé's career development.

4. **Impact of Mentoring Functions (Career Functions and Psychosocial Functions) on the Protégé's Satisfaction with Career Development**
   - The R value of 0.459 points to a good relationship between the dependent variable, satisfaction with career development, and the independent variables,

career functions and psychosocial functions. The R square value shows the contribution of independent variables to the dependent variable. The value of 0.207 is converted into a percentage, i.e. 20.7%. The independent variables contributing together to the dependent variable are 20.7%. We reject the null hypothesis, thereby concluding that mentoring functions (career functions and psychosocial functions) significantly impact the protégé's satisfaction with career development.

4.2.IMPLICATIONS:

The implications of this study play a key role in helping HR managers implement mentoring programs and career development in the organization so protégés are provided opportunities to access information related to their career, and look to their mentor for guidance. The overall results of this study reveal that mentoring functions (career functions and psychosocial functions) impact protégés' career development. However, findings reveal that career functions have a greater impact on career development than psychosocial functions, which implies that the mentor contributes more to career functions than to psychosocial functions. Hence it is suggested that organizations promote informal rather than formal mentoring to encourage personal relationships, benefitting the organization and the parties involved in the mentoring relationships. Further, to establish a strong relationship between mentoring functions and career development, organizations should devise individual development plans to suit protégés' requirements. If mentoring programs are aligned with appropriate organizational career development practices, they are perceived as add-on activities that help reach the desired goals. By enhancing these programs, organizations will be better able to utilize their resources and enrich vibrancy and productivity.

The findings also reveal that there is a significant difference between the mentor's gender and the protégé's satisfaction with career development. The mean of "parent" (12.072) was, comparatively speaking, lesser than other mentoring functions. So then, organizations that practice mentoring must take the necessary measures to make their employees feel comfortable and secure, especially in the IT sector, where it is necessary that the mentor offers the protégé counseling and guidance. Also, it is essential that the mentor makes the protégé aware of problems likely to be encountered in the course of their career, thus reducing the anxiety and stress involved in handling such problems.

Although these mentoring functions are significantly related to career development, the degree of psychosocial support provided is low. The facilitation of an informal mentoring culture will help strengthen mentoring relationships. This study is also significant for managers/employees, given that most organizations today place their talented employees in key international assignments. This is where mentors extend the guidance necessary in terms of career and psychosocial issues and help the protégé adjust to the milieu and culture in which he operates. Thus, mentoring facilitates mentor-mentee interactive learning, transfer of knowledge, and contributing to putting in place an efficient work culture in the organization.

4.3. SUGGESTIONS:

Mentoring and career development are great tools for enhancing organizational commitment. Through mentoring, protégés are exposed to a network of contacts, challenging assignments and diverse career opportunities, thereby ensuring their growth and upskilling. This indicates that employees will be well taken care of by the organization. According to Singh (2006), organizations can help employees meet their career goals by providing adequate learning and development opportunities.

In the present study, career functions are found to significantly impact the protégé's career development. Also, it may be noted that the lack of adequate psychosocial functions can be frustrating to IT employees, as emotional support from their mentors is the need of the hour. Moreover, the three variables - coach, protect and exposure - in career functions and the three - social, parent and role model - in psychosocial functions are found to be insignificant in the protégé's career development. Organizations may also focus on these variables which are not especially significant in this study, but could well be in the future. Hence, mentors could be offered the kind of training that helps them arrive at a better understanding of the protégé's expectations.

Based on this study, the following recommendations are made to the companies concerned:

- Mentoring and career development are basically spearheaded by top management. There could be a sharper focus on the alignment of organizational goals with the protégé's own career goals.

- Mentoring can be made cross-functional and offered at different organization levels.

- Organizations may appoint a mentoring manager who will be solely responsible for identifying mentor-protégé pairs and sending them relevant material. The mentor-protégé pairing must be so done that it is safe and realistic. This means that the protégé is not intimidated and can, instead, feel led to build trust with the mentor so that genuine solutions can be worked out and realistic transformations made.

- Mentor managers may be trained to develop coaching skills so they can have robust conversations relating to the protégé's annual performance and the direction their career is headed in.

- Mentors may be encouraged to provide emotional support to protégés by serving as parents and effective role models during times of inherent conflicts between work and family. Moreover, employees in IT industries are more prone to stress and health issues than those in other verticals. The mentor can make recommendations to the protégé to help handle these issues effectively.

- Mentors are great sources of information and career guidance. Numerous studies have shown that the number of promotions the protégé receives is increased by the presence of a mentor in the company. Hence, organizations may choose to support a one-on-one mentoring program instead of a self-service online portal for the development of their employees.

- Organizations may frequently evaluate protégés' performance to check that their expectations are aligned with organizational goals. In addition to face-to-face

mentorships, organizations may also provide adequate technological support on WhatsApp or other social media to ensure the program's continuity.

- The latest forms of mentoring, such as reverse mentoring, could be adopted for millennials so the mentee can better associate with the mentor. But the assigning of mentors needs to be carefully handled, as young mentors will be dealing with older mentees.

- Apart from the mentor's evaluation, the protégé's career development has to be evaluated by a third party in order to appraise the protégé's progress and the effectiveness of the mentorship.

- An effective career development program is to be devised to draw out the undiscovered talents of protégés so as to tap into their potential more fully.

- Career development strategies need to be clearly spelt out so employees at every level will tend to stay on in the organization. Creating a learning culture at every level also plays a vital role as it propels employees towards career advancement by their continuous acquisition of new knowledge.

- Organizations must have different career development options, such as a career lattice instead of a career ladder, to get employees to explore different career paths that encourage sideways movement, in addition to upward movement.

- Career development programs are to be evaluated constantly to ensure that the employee's expectations are met, alongside the different outcomes of the organization, thereby reducing obsolescence and maximizing benefits to employees in the form of new skills gained.

- More career counseling can be encouraged to reduce employee stress, anxiety and frustration.

- Qualitative investigators can research the career development options and mentoring support systems offered to millennials by IT companies. These will provide a different perspective on millennial employees' career satisfaction and contribute to a more in-depth understanding of how employees view their career.

Thus, organizations should re-think their employees' long-term well-being through mentoring and career development, for they indirectly promote organizational effectiveness and goodwill.

4.4. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is of use to administrators, mentors and protégés as it helps the first two to design, implement and evaluate mentoring programs in line with mentees' requirements. This study investigated the relationship between mentoring functions and career development, an outcome of mentoring. The same can be done for the other outcomes of mentoring as well.

More research is needed to further investigate the potential relationships that affect these and other extraneous variables, such as the mentoring structures and mentoring culture that impact career development initiatives in the organization. Only employees (protégés/mentees) were contacted for data collection. In future research, data can be collected from both mentors and mentees.

5. CONCLUSION

Mentoring and career development are not new. For decades, these programs have helped organizations develop and retain talent. However, traditionally, these programs had only been offered to a few employees but now, with the use of technology, expert guidance and research, organizations have rethought the prospect of involving senior leaders in these programs, and scaling them across the organization to positively affect employee career growth, engagement, and retention at all levels. The primary purpose of the study is to ensure that mentors enhance employee competencies. Career development is also assessed to help employees evaluate their current position and prepare them for upcoming positions. Thus, to make these programs successful and effective in the long run, organizations need to leverage them effectively, for which individual goals need to be aligned with organizational goals. Additionally, career development programs must enable organizations to equip employees realize their expectations. Incipient changes must be incorporated ahead of time so that consistency is reflected in employees' performance throughout their career. This will eventually ensure that employees continue to stay on in the organization.

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