

Corporate Mentoring at Firepro Systems

Dr.R.Satish Kumar

Professor & Dean-Research & International Relations, IFIM Business School,#8P & 9P, KIADB Industrial Area, Electronics City, Phase 1Bangalore- 560100, India.

Abstract: *This paper attempts to provide insights into the best practices in mentoring followed by the Indian companies and the benefits derived by these companies. Paper compares the Global best practices in mentoring and the mentoring processes of Indian companies. Today Organisation Development(OD)interventions and mentoring programmes are becoming increasingly popular among Indian companies and how these companies are leveraging mentoring as a tool of competitive advantage are discussed in detail. Global companies such as AT&T Bell Labs, Johnson & Johnson, NCR Corporation, and Merrill Lynch have created formal mentoring programmes and have reaped the benefits of mentoring. Today, the trend toward mentoring continues with approximately 75 percent of all the executives under the age of 40 have a mentor. As these mentees continue to grow to the level of senior leadership positions their need for mentors reduces and will in-turn end up in taking up the role of mentors for their junior executives. In India many of the CEOs are not giving due importance to mentoring. On the other hand, CEOs like Adi Godrej, Nandan Nilekani, Azim Premji, KV Kamath, Pramod Bhasin and Anand Mahindra, have given high priority for mentoring and successfully implemented mentoring programmes in their respective companies. In today's competitive business environment mentoring will help organisations in nurturing their talented workforce thereby enhancing their productivity levels, and reducing employee attrition rate. One of the organisations which has successfully implemented mentoring programmes is Firepro Systems (Panasonic Group Company) situated in Bangalore, India. In this paper the author attempts to provide insights into the mentoring programme at Firepro Systems.*

Keywords: *Mentoring, OD Interventions, Mentor, Protégé, Mentees, Competency*

I. Introduction

In today's competitive business environment Indian companies need to focus on enhancing the competencies of their employees. Formal mentoring programmes have become popular in many organisations and generally consist of junior members of the organisation being paired with senior members of the organisation. Mentoring will definitely help in revitalising employee's confidence and interest in work accomplishment by aligning the competencies with Organisation's vision and mission. It will also facilitate employees in fulfilling their individual developmental needs .It will provide opportunities for the mentors to evaluate themselves in the leader/coach roles leading to increased self-awareness. It will provide professional assistance on work projects as and when needed. Mentors will get opportunity to assist organisation and enhance mentee's growth. Once the competency levels of the employees are enhanced it will in turn reduces recruitment and selection costs due to higher employee retention. This will facilitate diversity and equal opportunity in the workplace resulting in improved inter-personal relations among various functions. This will help in forming effective cross-functional teams resulting in increased productivity, product/services quality, customer satisfaction and retention. Today mentoring is one of the most important OD interventions in Indian companies. What makes mentoring so useful is the willingness of mentor to share knowledge and experience with younger managers helping them to develop as effective leaders. Mentoring is a developmental guiding relationship and a critical management foundation in all successful global companies and organisations. The purpose of a "mentor" is to provide leadership and inspiration at all levels of the organisation, and support and assist executives in their learning on how to drive a successful organisation.

II. Literature Review

The mentor is a trusted counsellor who accepts a guiding role in the younger or less-experienced member. Mentors use greater knowledge, experience, and status to help develop their protégés. Not to simply pull the protégés up the organisation on the mentors' coattails" (Bass 1985: 90). Mentoring relationship is an intense reciprocal interpersonal exchange between a senior experienced individual (the mentor) and a less experienced individual (the protégé'), characterised by guidance, advice, counsel, feedback, and support provided by the mentor for the protégé's personal and professional development (Eby, Rhodes & Allen, 2007; Kram, 1985;Fletcher & Ragins, 2007; Kram, 1996). Mentoring enhances employee skills, aids their socialisation to a new work setting and improves career outcomes for mentees. Perceived and actual benefits of mentoring for

mentors include visibility, sense of fulfillment, and having a loyal support base (Eby, Durley, Evans & Ragins, 2006; Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

Organisation with formal mentoring programmes attempt to facilitate the development of mentoring relationship between organisational members (Farrel, 1985, Hennecke, 1983, Phillips Johns, 1983). Historically, mentoring has played a significant role in the continuity and evolution of art, craft, and commerce (Murray & Owen, 1991). Early mentoring research (Kram, 1983; Kram & Isabella, 1985; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978) and relatively recent scholarly literature have identified mentoring as essential to fostering career development of employees (Burke, McKeen, & McKenna, 1993; Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant – Vallone, 2000). As a construct, mentoring is defined as a complex developmental and interpersonal relationship where personal support and career guidance are provided by a senior, more-experienced organisational member to a junior, less-experienced organisational member (Carmin, 1988; Kram, 1985). According to Levinson & McKee (1978), a mentor is several years older; he is a person of greater experience and seniority, a teacher, an advisor or a sponsor. Pursuant to the mentoring literature, mentoring provides career related benefits to protégés such as promotion, increased compensation, career development, increased job satisfaction and psychosocial benefits such as increased self-esteem, strength of interpersonal bond, confidence, identity and socialisation (Mullen, 1998; Ragins et al., 2000; Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994; Verdejo, 2002)

Although the mentoring literature has proliferated within the past three decades, very little work has been done on the theoretical foundations of mentoring (Zagumny, 1993). This paper uses Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory as the broad explanatory base to address the mentoring phenomenon and the difficulties that are unique to women in mentoring relationships. Bandura's (1977) Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory serve as the theoretical foundation for mentoring because it is based on the tenet that humans can learn by observing others. According to Bandura (1977), a large proportion of human behaviour is learned through observation. By observing others, an individual can develop an approximate sense of appropriate behaviours and how to perform them. In many respects, senior managers who are mentors model desired corporate behaviours so that their young developing protégés can directly observe and learn those behaviours in a mentoring environment without making grave or career ending mistakes. Additionally, social cognitive theory provides a solid foundation for explicating mentoring's role as a socialising process aimed at the personal and professional development of protégés. Louis (1980) defines socialisation as a process wherein an individual or employee learns to value the norms, expertise, expected behaviours, and social knowledge essential to assuming an organisational role and functioning as an organisational member. The work of Kram (1985) and Levinson et al. (1978) have illustrated the effective use of modeling, a component of social cognitive theory in teaching work-related interpersonal skills to developing managers. These behaviors of modeling and vicarious reinforcement form the basis of Bandura's (1977)

Social Learning and Social Cognitive Theory and are encouraged as important modes of learning in mentoring relationships.

Mentoring at Firepro Systems (A Panasonic Group Company)

Company Background

Incorporated in 1992, Firepro Systems is a Panasonic Group Company which offers integrated solutions for fire protection, security and building management systems with a sales turnover of over Rs.1000 Crores.

Since its inception Firepro has successfully implemented over 2500 projects including Technology Parks, R&D Environments, Data Centres, Banks, Hospitals, Corporate offices etc. In the year 2006, Firepro was awarded Emerging Company of the year by CNBC-TV18, ICICI Bank and CRISIL out of 35,000 companies in India. In the year 2007, Firepro was awarded "Best Company of the year 2007". Firepro Systems won Frost and Sullivan "Building Technology Excellence" award in 2008. CRISIL awarded SME1 rating in the year 2010. Forbes magazine identified Firepro as one of the Top Ten Hidden Gems among emerging corporate

III. Need for Competency Management

Today more and more organisations are realising the need for nurturing their talented workforce. It helps every organisation to perform efficiently and effectively thereby preparing for future growth. By nurturing the talented workforce organisations are able to achieve their goals by attaining sustainable growth. Without it, companies will face numerous challenges out of unsuccessful strategic efforts—one after another. Among the wide range of organisational processes related to retaining high-performing employees, corporate competencies have become a focal point, helping successful organisations understand where to focus resources such as incentives, coaching, and training programs. By clearly identifying the right competencies, organisations can make sure they are recruiting and managing talented people in the most efficient way, putting the right people in the right jobs with the abilities to perform at their maximum potential every day. In organisations utilising best practices, a small set of core leadership- and values-based competencies are established across the organisation.

These competencies are broadly applied to all employees and send a powerful message, reflecting the company's culture, business strategy, expectations and unique market dynamics. Measuring competency gaps within the organisation and addressing them proactively allows the organisation to focus on the areas which impact most on its business performance such as employee engagement and retention, and overall profitability etc.

Measuring Competency Gaps

Competency assessment is essential in the process of building an employee's career development plan. One of the critical elements of performance management is coaching people to develop their skills that may be holding them back from achieving their career goals and moving up the corporate ladder. The individual development planning process is traditionally tied to an assessment of the individual's skills gaps—assessed against specific competencies which the organisation believes are valuable. Individuals, managers and HR administrators can each evaluate gaps against the current job or a potential position and devise development strategies accordingly. The assessment sensitises the employee on what is necessary to perform at a higher level, and specifically, what skills and competencies are necessary to achieve their career goals. The organisation, in turn, gains a sense of the employee's fit and potential within the company as well as a clearer understanding of which competencies result in higher performance.

Types of Competencies

The various competencies used in performance management are: Organisational Competency, Leadership Competency and Functional Competency.

Organisational Competencies (Core): The organisational competencies are based upon—the type of company one wants to be—reflecting the type of people and behaviours that are valued. This type of core competency is often designed personally by the CEO and/or selects top executives. Organisational competencies are the unique factors that make an organisation competitive. According to Prahalad and Hamel, organisational competencies (a) provide potential access to a wide variety of markets, (b) make a significant contribution to the perceived customer benefits of the end product and (c) are difficult for competitors to imitate (Harvard Business Review, 1990, pp. 83–84). Authors in this area recommend that organisations focus their efforts on their organisational competencies and outsource other activities. Organisational competencies cannot be outsourced—no matter how much money is available—because they are fundamental to the organisation and its success.

Leadership Competencies: Leadership competencies are those which are used to assess an individual's ability and skills to be a leader or manager. These are usually a unique set of competencies only applied to people with a certain level or certain potential. Some examples of competencies that may be included are: Execution, Energy, Strategic decision-making, and Communication

Functional Competencies: The third type of competencies used in performance management is functional competencies, or those that pertain to a particular job function. These competencies are rarely defined at an enterprise level, but rather are created at the department level since they often take the form of specific skills and are best managed at a group or functional level.

Competency Level Descriptors: Each competency has a proficiency scale comprising of 5 levels. The levels enable all Firepro team members to plan their competency development. Level 1 is the starting level with Level 5 being the highest level for each competency. Each level has a definition, an explanation of the level, and examples of behaviours which validate the presence of the competency. The behaviours for each competency are indicative and not exhaustive. Each competency scale is cumulative which means that each level builds upon the previous one: i.e. the level 1 behaviours are a pre-requisite for level 2 etc. and as one move up the scale by adding effective behaviours to the existing ones. So though behaviors from lower levels are not mentioned at higher levels, they nonetheless apply. Team members are expected to demonstrate specific levels of each competency as per the level of responsibility assigned to them.

Addressing Competency Gaps

Successful organisations focus on the competencies required for their industry at their level of maturity. When desired competencies are clearly articulated, employees can be expected to bear more responsibility for developing those competencies. One way this is done by requiring employees to formulate development plans or goals that arise from competency-based performance reviews. The competency review process includes providing a clear and ongoing communication plan to all employees about what they are doing and why, with a

focus on clear roles and accountabilities and alignment of their talent initiatives with systems such as rewards, recognition and compensation to drive results. One of the ways of addressing Competency Gaps is Mentoring.

Need for Mentoring

Post- liberalisation era in India witnessed the entry of large number of multinational companies with superior products and services. Firepro also faced stiff competition from MNCs such as Tyco, Honeywell, and also from domestic companies. In order to overcome these challenges and attain its corporate goals Firepro introduced Mentoring Programme.

Well designed, properly implemented and adequately resourced mentoring process will help the organisation to:

1. Attract and retain talented employees;
2. Develop people – those who mentor as well as those mentored;
3. Facilitate career planning and progression;
4. Reduce "silo mentality" and increase cross-organisational communication;
5. Increase the return on investment in learning and development and reduce turnover costs.

According to The Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) definition: “Mentoring is the long term passing on of support, guidance and advice. Also a form of apprenticeship whereby an inexperienced learner learns the tricks of the trade from an experience colleague backed up as in modern apprenticeships by offsite training.” Mentoring generally differs from coaching in that it involves a greater focus on specific industry experience and relevance. According CIPD, mentoring relationships are less formal and goal-oriented than coaching.

Mentoring Programme at Firepro Systems

At Firepro Mentoring programme was started initially to handhold and guide Management trainees (MTs) and Graduate Engineer Trainees (GETs). Every year Management Trainees and Graduate Engineer Trainees are hired through campus recruitment. After selection these trainees will go through a structured Management Trainee and Graduate Engineer Trainee programmes for a period of one year.

One of the components of the above programmes is the extensive coaching and support. The objective is to provide continuous support and guidance to the trainees during their one year training period. This is being carried out through mentoring, periodic review, personal development programme, and support organisation.

Initially the trainees are exposed to the organisation through induction programme followed by soft skills training, technical training, on the job training, and training on project management. After successful completion of one year programmes the MTs and GETs are allocated to various departments based on the trainees’ interests, competency levels and functional specialisation. During the allocation of roles, and departments due weightage is given to the feedback from the mentors and the line managers. The following role holders are responsible for the design, development and implementation of the Management Trainee and Graduate Engineer Trainee programmes

Head-Organisational Development

The entire trainee programme will be managed by Head-Organisation Development with the assistance from Human Resources Department.

Functional Line Manager (Parent)

The functional line manager will be usually the functional team leader and will be overall responsible for the programme management as far as the GET /MT in his/ her function is concerned. It is the functional line manager who is responsible for the execution of the Management trainee and Graduate Engineer Trainee programmes. In essence, the functional line managers will play a parenting role to the trainees within the organisational context.

Mentor

Every GET and MT will be assigned to a senior manager within the organisation who will act as his/her mentor during the first year. The role of the mentor is to act as sounding board to the Trainee and also to coach and counsel the trainee during the first year. Mentors will help trainees clarify their personal goals and aspirations and also at times may be able to assist the trainee in gaining meaningful assignments and projects to work on. Here the trainees are expected to play an active role in managing their mentoring relationship and meet with them at regular intervals.

Host Manager:

For every assignment / module which a Trainee participates in, an assignment guide/project manager will be identified and assigned. This manager who will typically represent the function in which the Trainee is undergoing training will act as his/her host and will be responsible for their programme design and execution within that module. Trainees will report to and be accountable to the Host Manager for the duration of the module /assignment and will also be evaluated by the manager /assignment guide.

Here the role of the mentor is to encourage the personal and professional development of mentee through sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience. The mentoring relationship is built on mutual trust, respect and communication. Here at Firepro Mentor and Mentee will meet once in a fortnight at mutually agreeable time and place. During this session the discussion between mentor and mentee is captured as minutes of the meeting. The role of the mentor is to encourage the personal and professional development of a mentee through the sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience.

Benefits to the Mentees

The guidance from the mentors will help the mentees in personal goal setting. This also helps them to choose their career path and enhance their competency levels.

Some of the key benefits to the mentees are:

- Exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking
- Advice on developing strengths and overcoming weaknesses
- Guidance on professional development and advancement
- Increased visibility and recognition within the organisation
- The opportunity to develop new skills and knowledge

According to Mentee, Praveen: “Mentoring process has helped me to define my career goal and put all my efforts to achieve the same”.

Benefits to the Mentors

The reciprocal relationship will provide opportunity for the mentors to share their success stories, and provide guidance for the mentees in their career path. This will also provide tangible benefits to the mentors from the organisation.

Some of the key benefits to mentors are;

- Recognition as a subject matter expert and leader
- Exposure to fresh perspectives , ideas and approaches
- Extension of their professional development record
- Opportunity to reflect on their own goals and practices
- Development of their personal leadership and coaching styles

According to Mentor, Bala Kathrivel: “Being a mentor I got the opportunity to guide and help trainees, which gives me immense satisfaction and pride. During the process I also get the new ideas, and approaches towards problem solving”.

Benefits to the organisation

By introducing mentoring program the organisation is able to connect trainees (mentees) with the most knowledgeable, and experienced performers (mentors) and keeps them engaged and energised. This also helps the organisation in transferring critical business knowledge and skills to the trainees and transforming them as future leaders. Mentoring programme enables the organisation in nurturing and motivating talented workforce thereby reducing the employee attrition rate.

The key benefits to the organisation are:

- Develop a culture of personal and professional growth
- Share desired company behaviours and attitudes
- Enhance leadership and coaching skills in managers
- Improve staff morale, performance and motivation
- Engage , retain and develop performers

According to Chondamma, HR Manager: “Mentoring programme has helped the company in motivating and guiding our trainees and transforming them into future leaders”.

At the end of 52 weeks the feedback from Line Managers and Mentors on the performance of the Graduate Engineer Trainees and Management Trainees are assessed by the Human Resources Department. Based on the

mentors' advice and guidance the trainees will choose their career path and give their preference to Human Resources Department. Accordingly Human Resources Department will assign the roles and departments to these trainees.

IV. Conclusion

In Indian context mentoring program is to be designed and implemented considering our cultural background. It is important that the mentors understand the importance and nature of each stage and do not jump into suggesting solutions before they have fully appreciated the context and needs of their mentees.

There is always a debate on whether the mentoring should be formal or informal. The benefits of establishing a formal framework of mentoring is evident from the literature. What is required is clear objective and commitment from both the mentor and the mentee. But equally important is that the relationship needs to be informal and flexible to create positive impact which is beneficial to the mentee. At the end of the mentoring programme it is important to measure the benefits of the mentoring. The organisation should design and develop a tool to measure the impact of mentoring programme. There should be clear organisational policy on mentoring programme including provisions for terminating the mentor relationship. If all these requirements are taken into consideration definitely mentoring programme will help the organisations to achieve their business goals and achieve sustainable growth. At Firepro Systems the corporate mentoring programme helped the Graduate Engineer Trainees, and Management Trainees to define their career goals and channelise their efforts to meet those goals in an effective way. The productivity and motivation level of these trainees were high due to the regular mentor and mentee interactions which also reduced the trainees' attrition rate. In the long run company got immense benefit from mentoring programme.

References

- [1]. Botha D. (2006), Mentoring Revisited, in Delmus Williams, Janine Golden (ed.) (Advances in Library Administration and Organization, Volume 24), Emerald Group Publishing Limited, pp.151-189
- [2]. Brockbank A, McGill I, Facilitating Reflective Learning Coaching Mentoring and Supervision, Second Edition, Kogan Page, pp 56-72, 89-100, 236-238
- [3]. Clarke M. (2005), University of western Sydney, New south wales, Australia, Reconceptualising mentoring: A conceptual framework that supports and contributes to the professional learning of research colleagues? pp 3-5,
- [4]. David Kay and Roger Hinds (2008) A Practical Guide to Mentoring, 4th edition, Macmillan Publishers India Ltd. pp. 46-52
- [5]. Elkin J. (2006), A Review of Mentoring Relationships: Formation, Function, Benefits, and Dysfunction, Otago Management Graduate Review, Vol 4 pp. 11-23
- [6]. McDowall-Long, K. (2004) Mentoring relationships: Implications for practitioners and suggestions for future research. Human Resource Development International, 7(4), pp 519-534.
- [7]. Women and Mentoring: A Review and Research Agenda, The Academy of Management Review, Vol. 13, No. 1 (Jan., 1988), pp. 65-78
- [8]. Ragins, B. R., & Cotton, J. L. (1999) Mentor functions and outcomes: A comparison of men and women in formal and informal mentoring. Journal of Applied Psychology, 84(4), pp529-49.
- [9]. Ramaswani A,& Dreher G (2010) Dynamics of Mentoring Relationships in India A Qualitative Exploratory Study, HRM Volume 49, Issue 3, pp 501–530, June 2010 ,Wiley Periodicals
- [10]. Srivastava Sushmita , " Development of a Unique Conceptual Framework on Mentor – Mentee Pairing in the Indian Context", Conference Proceedings of IHRM MDI Gurgaon 2012
- [11]. Ensher, E.A., Thomas, C. Murphy, S.E. (2001). Comparison of Traditional, Step-Ahead, and Peer Mentoring on Protégés' Support, Satisfaction, and Perceptions of Career Success: A Social Exchange Perspective. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, Vol. 15, No. 3, 419-438.
- [12]. Foa, U. G. & Foa, E. B. (1974). Societal Structures of the Mind, Springfield, IL: Thomas Publications
- [13]. Geiger-DuMond, A. H., & Boyle, S. K. 1995. Mentoring: A Practitioner's Guide- Training and Development, 49: 51-54.
- [14]. Gouldner, A. W. (1960). The Norm of Logical Review, 25, 161-178. Reciprocity: A preliminary statement. *American Sociological Review*, 25, 161-178.
- [15]. Homans, G. C. (1974). Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- [16]. Jones, E. E., & Gerard, H. B. (1967). Foundations of Social Psychology. New York: Wiley
- [17]. Kram, K. E. & Hall, D. T. (1996). Mentoring in a Context of Diversity and Turbulence. In S. Lobel & E. E. Kossek (Eds.), *Human Resources Strategies for Managing Diversity*. London, UK: Blackwell Publishers.
- [18]. Kram, K. E. & Isabella, L. A. (1985). Mentoring alternatives: The role of peer relationships in career development. *Academy of Management Journal*, 28, 110-132.
- [19]. Kram, K. E. (1985). Books, Mentoring at Work. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company.
- [20]. Leavitt. C. (2011). Developing Leaders through Mentoring: A Brief Literature Review. Capella University Levinson.
- [21]. D.J, Darrow, C.N, Klein, E.B, Levinson, M.H & McKee, B. (1978) The Seasons of a Man's Life. A.A. Knopf Inc. New York.
- [22]. Maniero, L. A. (1994). Getting anointed for advancement: The case of executive women. *Academy of Management Executive*, 8(2), 53-63. Mentoring Type, Mentoring Experience, and Mentoring Needs. Portland State University.
- [23]. Murray M. (1991) Beyond the Myths and Magic of Mentoring. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- [24]. R.Satish Kumar, Nagabhushana.R (2014) "Salesforce Competency Mapping: A Case Study of Firepro Systems" published in Zenith International Journal of Business Economics and Management Research, April 2014.
- [25]. Satish Kumar R (2015) Competency Management through OD Interventions IOSR Journal of Business and Management, July 2015.