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Mentoring in Selected Commercial Banks in Kerala

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Abstract

Individuals learn from their interactions with others, especially those with expertise and seniority in their workplace. Mentoring is a relationship between a senior employee and junior employee which promotes such interactions for facilitating learning and support in the workplace. This study investigated whether formal mentoring received is related to learning i.e., job related learning and personal skill development among the employees of new generation private sector banks in Kerala. The results indicated that mentoring has a strong positive correlation with personal skill development and there is no significant correlation with job related learning. This paper is an account of quantitative research study based on primary data derived from select commercial bank employees. The data derived through pretested structured questionnaire.

Keywords: Mentoring, Relational Job Learning, Personal Skill Development

Introduction

The radical economic, social and cultural changes in the labor market within recent decades have helped to highlight the important role played by the learning process in individual career development and organizational success. In such a fast moving working environment skills and competencies easily get outdated and need to continuously improve (Kahle-Piasecki 2011). Our working environment is currently facing many global changes. Transitions from college to work are not as distinct and linear as they once were. Learning is now not limited to occasional formal activities in classroom environments. Work and career are not stable and predetermined entities. Knowledge is not individualized (Manuti et al. 2015) and the way in which an entire organization learns can be instrumental in its innovation and profitability. Learning has a broader project and capability to link development of the individual with development of the organization or business. Individuals learn a great deal through their interactions with other members in the organization with expertise and experience (Hayes & Allinson 1998). Mentoring is such a work relationship that acts as a tool for personal learning in organizations (Kram 1996).

Relevance of the Study

Many organizations implemented mentoring program (Hezlett & Gibson 2005). Carrying out a formal mentoring program demands the investment of organizational resources. Financial efforts are required for program implementation and coordination (Armstrong, Allison & Hayes 2002). Also, formal mentoring programs often demands dedication from organizational members with highly regarded experience to serve as mentors (Baugh & Fagenson-Eland 2007). These resources are needed for the formal mentoring programs to be

developed and carried out successfully. Surprisingly this topic has got not enough attention, so there is a need for research aiming at understanding the effectiveness of resource-consuming interventions (Wanberg, Kammeyer-Mueller & Marchese 2006). So this study envisages the relationship between mentoring and learning among new generation private sector bank employees.

Learning in Workplaces

Although the general concept of learning has a rich history, organizations are implementing it recently. Organization's effectiveness depends on its "continuing redesign in response to changing values and a changing context for action" (Schon 1975). He considered the concept of deuterio-learning (learning to learn) (Schon 1975) to refer to the process of continuing redesign and urged the exploration of conditions under which organizations can improve their capacity for on-line learning. This learning model centers on organizational capacity "to set and solve problems and to design and redesign policies, structures, and techniques in the face of constantly changing assumptions about self and environment" (Schon 1975, p. 10). The learning issues of most of the organizations are that most individuals do not know how to learn and that those individuals assumed to be best at learning (i.e., professionals) are not good at learning (Argyris 1991). To resolve this issue, traditional organizations must overcome their resistance to and conflict with new insights, initiatives, and mental models and develop collaborative learning capabilities "among, equally knowledgeable people" (Senge 1990b, p. 14). These steps will assist organizations in developing talents for today and future. In the management literature, learning has generally been studied in the context of information-seeking during the socialization process (Morrison 1993).

Acquiring technical job knowledge, information and details about the organization are no longer sufficient learning outcomes. Kegan (1994) notes that in response to the overwhelming environmental change individuals must strive towards the development of higher-level mental models. Such models represent (Lankau & Scandura 2002) systems thinking, which is the ability to look ahead of self and see interrelationships among organizational aspects. In the adult learning literature, learning constitutes personal progress (Lankau & Scandura 2002) and change in behavior, attitudes, or even the personality of the learner (Rogers 1983). Adult development is characterized by transformations in how individuals see themselves in relation to others and requires sophisticated interpersonal skills (Merriam & Heuer 1996). Rawson (2000) discusses the importance of "learning to learn," which includes developing new ways of (Ndebele, Heerden & Chabaya 2013) understanding, communicating with others and self-awareness, resulting in personal development. Kram (1996) defines "personal learning" as knowledge updation, skills or competencies leading to individual development, including interpersonal competencies of self-reflection, self-revelation, dynamic listening, empathy and feedback. Such development invokes a greater understanding of oneself "as increasingly connected to others" (Kram 1996).

The importance of interpersonal skills and organizational awareness is further highlighted by Hall's (1996) work on the "boundaryless" career. He recommends that the capacity to

regularly grow and change by learning will become indispensable for successful careers. Development will entail more self-direction, self-reliance, and the potential to network with one's coworkers and think through organizational issues (Hall 1996). Employees today must expand their awareness of the links between actions and results, pay attention to others' viewpoints, and develop competencies through working with others (Gherardi, Nicolini & Odella 1998).

From the above literature it is identified that there are two important types of personal learning. One type is learning about the background of work to see the self in relation to others (Merriam & Heuer 1996; Kegan 1994). This learning is known as relational job learning and it is defined as increased understanding about the interdependence or connectedness of one's job to others (Lankau & Scandura 2002). The other type of personal learning emphasized in the literature relates to interpersonal skills learning (Kram, 1996). Employees need to be able to communicate more effectively, listen attentively, solve troubles, and be innovative in developing rapport with others in the organization. This type of learning is named as personal skill development (Lankau & Scandura 2002).

Relationships with others in the organization helps individual to learn. Interaction with others is a vehicle through which a person engages in reflection (thinking about the needs of the self and others) (Hall 1996). Mentors may facilitate such learning through specific coaching behaviors. Specific behaviors comprise cheering employees to step out of their own mental frames and into another are, exposing personnel to diverse people and departments, and discussing different viewpoints so that they might see different possibilities (Ellinger & Bostrom 1999). Besides, Kram and Cherniss (2001) discuss how relationships with senior managers represent untapped potential for social and emotional learning.

Learning through Mentoring

Now a days organization are investing in monetary as well as non monetary resources to develop their internal talent. Mentoring at workplace is proved a successful strategy to promote career development and employee growth in earlier studies. Mentoring is accepted as a powerful human resource development (HRD) tool (Hegstad & Wentling 2005; Liu et al. 2009). In general, a review of the workplace mentoring literature suggests that whether traditional or informal, the outcomes associated with mentoring are positive (Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett 2003). Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett (2003, p. 85) also stated that there is a lacuna in the research on formal mentoring' and found out that there were some 'black box' gaps in relation to formal mentoring and specifically learning. The last 10 years has witnessed research on factors that influence mentoring process like similarity in the learning goal orientation (Egan 2005), the quality of the learning environment (Kilcullen 2007), and interpersonal factors (Huang and Weng 2012). Even though there is a striking dearth in the number of articles about formal mentoring and the process of learning (Hezlett & Gibson 2005; Lankau & Scandura 2007).

Some studies have supporting evidence for a relationship between mentoring and learning. Lankau and Scandura investigated antecedents and consequences of personal learning in mentoring relationships. The authors explain two forms of personal learning, relational job learning and personal skill development (Lankau & Scandura 2002). Relational job learning means an increased understanding of the interdependence of one's job to others' jobs. Personal skill development means the acquisition of new skills and abilities that will promote better working relationships (Lankau & Scandura 2002). The findings of the study substantiate that protégés get greater relational job learning compared to their non-mentored counterparts. Specifically, career mentoring shows a positive relation to relational job learning. This study contributes a key aspect in the area of mentoring and learning. These results prove learning benefits for the mentee and the unique contribution a mentor can make in a protégé's career (Lankau & Scandura 2002).

Personal learning refers to with gaining knowledge, skills, and/or competencies, which result in an individual's personal development (Kram 1996). According to Hale (2000) formal mentoring programmes helps mentees to acquire knowledge, skills and behavior than traditional training settings. His study of two formal mentoring programmes in the UK, found that mentees learnt through four different processes, they are (1) mentors explain their own views and experiences, (2) mentors share key information being discussed at top hierarchical levels, (3) mentors discuss organizational politics, and also through (4) personal reflection. This research discussed how protégés are assisted by mentor in the learning process. It also taken into discussion that how the similarities in social style and basic values may help in rapport building and the strength of the relationship.

A study by Hezlett (2005) in a large public sector organization suggested that there are three ways for a protégé to learn from mentor: (1) through observation, where mentees can observe their mentors while interacting with others, (2) through mentors' explanations, advice and information given, and (3) from gaining worthy insights into the impact of their own interactions with their mentors (through reflection).

A study conducted by Kilcullen (2007) on the impact of mentorship on nursing students learning found, the protégé learning can be improved by (1) support/offering feedback, (2) acting as role models, (3) performing socialization roles/helping to settle in, and (4) acting as assessors. This is a cross sectional study conducted from protégé perspective. Interestingly, these findings only show a similarity with Hale and Hezlett in relation to socialization (connected with sharing information) and role modeling (connected with observation).

In the mentoring process, observation by the protégé inspires them to learn from their mentor (Kahle-Piasecki 2011) and as a result they can develop their own future path (Bandura 1976). 'This vicarious reinforcement helps accelerate learning because individuals do not have to engage in their own trial and error learning' (Hezlett 2005 p. 513). This helps them to make a framework for their learning and development so they can avoid their own trial and error method.

Hezlett (2005) suggested that mentoring relationship results in the development of cognitive, affective and skill based outcomes of learning. Zachary (2000) explains mentoring as a relationship that at its core is about learning. So it is an educational approach to inculcate knowledge, skills attitudes and competencies.

Learning is considered to be the primary aim of mentoring, which includes passing on knowledge (Bozeman & Feney 2007; Zachary 2000). Earlier studies suggested that the main functions of mentoring includes (1) learning technical skills and knowledge; (2) learning about the current job; (3) learning about organizational culture; (4) learning organizational policies and (5) preparation for a future job (Caruso 1992). According to Johnson and Ridley (2008) mentor is described as as a teacher and coach who provides encouragement and support, molds character using reinforcement, enhances growth with challenging assignments, stimulates growth and development, inculcates creativity and acts as a role model.

The various approaches and techniques used by mentor in enhancing learning include coaching, guiding, counseling, supporting and the use of reflective dialogue on experiences (Zachary 2000). This inspires them to learn experientially from the lessons of mentor.

According to Bandura's social cognitive and social learning theories the protégé expects that the mentor should be a trustworthy and respectable person (Stebbins 2006, p. 5). Coaching is included in mentoring to promote learning of the protégé and the mentor should coach the protégé to learn independently (Somers 2008).

Objectives of the Study

- i. To study the relationship between mentoring and job relational learning among the employees of select commercial banks in Kerala
- ii. To study the relationship between mentoring and personal skill development among the employees of select commercial banks in Kerala

Hypotheses

Even though mentoring literature has a strong history of more than 2 years, few articles has given special focus to learning. Kram and Hall (1989) studied among managers and engineers of a company being downsized and Scandura and Siegel (1995) conducted a study about the developmental relationships in two accounting firms that is being merged. These studies suggested that mentoring could help employees learn new skills so that they can adjust to the organizational changes. Kram (1996) suggest that mentoring have the capacity to produce personal learning (enhanced sense of identity and new competencies). Higgins and Kram (2001) propose developmental networks affect personal learning. Several researchers recommended future studies in mentoring and learning since there is a black box gap in this area. In this study we examine the relationship of mentoring with job related learning and personal skill development.

H₁: Mentoring is positively related to job related learning of select commercial bank employees in Kerala

H₂: Mentoring is positively related to personal skill development of select commercial bank employees in Kerala

H₃: Mentoring is a significant and strong predictor of job related learning of select commercial bank employees in Kerala

H₄: Mentoring is a significant and strong predictor of personal skill development of select commercial bank employees in Kerala

Research Methodology

The sample for hypothesis testing consisted of 110 employees working in select commercial banks in Kottayam district. Convenience sampling was adopted. Data were collected from the employees working in Axis bank, ICICI bank, Canara bank, Federal bank and HDFC bank, who has a work experience of 0 – 5 years. All survey items came from previously validated and reliable scales, and were tested for reliability. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Mentoring received was assessed with Dreher and Ash's (1990) scale with required alterations. Personal learning is measured using Lankau and Scandura (2002) scale which include questions on job relational learning and personal skill development and it constitute questions like "I have gained insight into how another department functions", "I have increased my knowledge about the organization as a whole", "I better understand how my job or department affect others". The data of this study is analyzed using SPSS (Version 21.0).

Reliability Analysis

The overall alpha quotient for mentoring questionnaire is 0.935. The Cronbach's alpha quotient for 12 item personal learning instrument is .765.

Data Analysis

The mean scores of variable measured indicate that mentoring is above average (3.28), job relational learning is above average (3.79) and personal skill development is above average (3.83).

The correlation analysis for the primary data is given in Table 01.

Table 01: Correlation Matrix

| | Mean | 1 | 2 | 3 |
|-------------------------------|------|--------|-------|--------|
| 1. Mentoring | 3.28 | 1 | -.050 | .710** |
| 2. Job relational learning | 3.79 | -.050 | 1 | .324 |
| 3. Personal skill development | 3.83 | .710** | .324 | 1 |

Table 01 presents the findings of two tailed Pearson product moment correlation test conducted by SPSS. From the analysis, it is clear that there is no significant relationship between mentoring and job relational learning. So the hypothesis H₁ is not supported. The finding shows that there is a strong positive correlation between mentoring and personal skill

development. The Pearson correlation coefficient is .710 thus closer to 1 which is a perfect positive correlation. Correlation between mentoring and personal skill development of employees of select commercial banks in Kerala is significant at 0.01 significant levels. Since there is no significant relationship between mentoring and job related learning, no need to test H_3 .

The fourth hypothesis of the study is that mentoring is a significant predictor of personal skill development of select commercial bank employees in Kerala. Simple regression analysis was conducted to test the fourth hypothesis aimed at finding whether mentoring is a significant predictor of personal skill development (refer Table 2 and 3). The regression equation used to test the hypothesis can be summarized as:

$$PSD = 2.478 + .413M$$

Where, PSD is personal skill development and M is mentoring.

Table 02: Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .710 ^a | .503 | .487 | .33219 |
| Predictors: (Constant), mentoring | | | | |

Table 03: Coefficients^a

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|-------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 2.478 | .253 | | 9.802 | .000 |
| | mentoring | .413 | .075 | .710 | 5.515 | .000 |

Dependent Variable: personal skill development

Coefficient table further shows that at 95% level of confidence, p value of the regression model is 0.000, which is potentially less than 0.05 and thus significant. This implies that, there is a big possibility that the population slope is significantly different from zero therefore the regression model is capable to predict variations of dependent variable.

Determination for the regression model was found to be .50 implying that mentoring can predict 50% of the variations in personal skill development of the employees of select commercial banks in Kerala. Mentoring is a significant predictor of personal skill development (beta value = .413), hence H_4 is supported.

Discussion and Conclusion

Researches on the concepts mentoring and learning are in the budding stage in the Indian context. The relationship between these variables were already tested and proved only in limited studies. This study examined the relationship between mentoring and learning in the banking sector because most of the new generation banks are investing the organizational resources in mentoring programmes in order to reap the proposed benefits like job satisfaction, career satisfaction and role clarity. The result showed that mentoring is positively and significantly correlated with personal skill development. In the study by Lankau and Scandura (2002), they found that positive correlation with career mentoring and job relational learning. But in contrast, in this study there is a strong positive correlation with

mentoring and personal skill development. This study also supports the findings of Hale (2010) that formal mentoring programme helps mentees to acquire knowledge, skills and behaviors. Also this study is in accordance with Kram and Hall (1989), Scandura and Siegel (1995) and Kram (1996). This may be because today's employees are striving hard to develop their skills since organizations are demanding high performing talents. So employees utilize mentoring as career development tool as in order to sustain in a competing organizational climate. The employees are forced to depend on others to learn new skills and meet the requirements of their job. Today's human capital is aware that acquisition of new skills and competencies will help their career path to go on without hindrances.

The present study suffered from some limitations like small sample size and limited area of investigation, which might not be true sample of the whole population of new generation private sector banks. So before generalization, there is a need to conduct an in depth study covering larger sample broader areas of investigation. Future researchers can envisage the relationship between mentoring and several outcomes like job satisfaction, career satisfaction, role clarity etc, where learning acts as a mediator.

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