

Creating A New Mindset: Reverse Mentoring

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ABSTRACT: In today's knowledge-based economy, information sharing has become need of the hour. The main objective for any organization has to be utilization of the available knowledge base to the best of its advantage. Mentoring has proven again and again to be an effective workforce development tool. While traditional perception about mentoring involves a senior executive sharing knowledge and experience with a junior executive but reverse mentoring focuses on the junior personnel teaching the experienced personnel about some new tricks. Reverse mentoring is an innovative way to encourage learning and facilitate cross-generational relationships. It involves the pairing of a younger, junior employee acting as mentor to share expertise with an older, senior colleague as mentee. The only purpose is knowledge sharing, with the mentee focused on learning from the mentor's updated subject or technological expertise and generational perspective. The current study focuses on how the concept of reverse mentoring has brought a paradigm shift in the area of mentoring in the organizations and how it can be used as a technique for performance enhancement of a multigenerational workforce. It also discusses the key pillars of modern mentoring in the organization. Further the study shows that reverse mentoring is beneficial for the organization but the reversal role of the juniors and seniors should be clear to both the parties.

KEYWORDS: Mentoring, Reverse Mentoring, Boomers, Millennial.

1. INTRODUCTION

“Executives are beginning to realize that knowledge isn't a one-way street. It's in everyone's best interest to share expertise”.
(Greengard, 2002)

Mentoring is about guiding, developing the workers and the transfer of knowledge. A traditional mentoring program is based on the hierarchical relationship in an organization, where a senior manager or professional undertakes the role of the mentor for a junior person (mentee). A mentor is an expert who can help in the development of an individual's career. Mentoring has been identified as an important influence in professional development in both the public and private sector. Today's companies need to change the way they think about mentoring and view it as a

holistic practice that extends beyond traditional limited populations and formal programs. Companies need to modernize their approach to mentoring in order to create a culture that's centred on a habitual attitude toward it, where it becomes less of a special one-time opportunity and more of a commonplace everyday occurrence. Furthermore, companies today must embrace a new form of mentoring and knowledge sharing that allows workers to find and connect with their colleagues so they can learn while on the job, share best practices throughout all areas of the business, and collaborate with people no matter where they are located. The reality today is that people want to learn from their peers, regardless of what department they may be in or where they may physically work. Technological advancements make it much easier to break down barriers and bring people together.

FIGURE 1.1: TYPES OF MENTORING

TYPE	DESCRIPTION
One-to-One Mentoring	One mentor meets with one mentee at a time, this is the traditionally accepted model. The individualized attention that the mentor pays to the mentee allows for greater rapport building. These relationships often last a number of years but can be a lifelong partnership. These relationships are highly structured with multiple outcomes, often for both the mentor and the mentee.
Group Mentoring	One mentor meets with multiple mentees at a time. Mentees typically have a common or similar goal. This method is especially effective in situations where time and mentoring resources are at a premium. Once a level of trust and openness has been achieved, this model is also effective for tapping into collective knowledge, where shared knowledge and ideas can trigger larger possibilities.
Team Mentoring	Multiple mentors work with single mentee. The relationship lasts for a limited time, until the goal is achieved or the project is completed. The focus of the mentoring relationship is the function of the group, rather than any psychosocial bonding. The mentors are assembled to act as guides and resources, providing feedback on the work, but it is the responsibility of the mentee to bear the burden of learning and to move the project forward.
Peer Mentoring	Another junior faculty member or members provide guidance and/or feedback to a junior faculty member. These relationships can be one-to-one or as a group, and are an informally structured relationship. This type of mentoring can be effective for sharing job related knowledge or to share insight on some of the challenges and experiences the others may encounter.
E-Mentoring	One mentor works with a single mentee at a time via the Internet. Some programs implemented in an initial meeting or periodic face-to-face meetings, if distance is not too much as a barrier, but in most cases e-mentoring required because the participants are in vastly separate locales. This type of mentoring is extremely helpful for schools or organizations that have multiple branches around the world. It is also a great way for participants in different locations but common fields to establish mentoring relationships.
Informal Mentoring	The mentee self-selects their mentor, usually initiated as part of a conversation or because the mentor is someone the mentee has identified as a role model. These relationships develop naturally, may not include any formal agreement, and may not have any formalized structure to them.

Source: Wake Forest University

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the basic concept of Reverse Mentoring.
- To study how the reverse mentoring process can be beneficial for the organizations.
- To analyze the Key Pillars of Modern Mentoring.

3. REVERSE MENTORING A TECHNIQUE OF SHARING KNOWLEDGE AND THOUGHTS

Reverse mentoring is a powerful tool for attracting and retaining the talent pool, providing job satisfaction, enhancing the levels of employee engagement and also for advocating workplace diversity. The concept of reverse mentoring was introduced by Jack Welch in 1999, former chief executive of the General Electric Company. It is a formal mentoring program in which a young, junior employee with something to teach is partnered with a senior manager who has something to learn. Jack Welch undertook pairing of employees in

their 20s and 30s who were knowledgeable about the Internet and interested in new technology with executives, who were beginners in that realm. Reverse mentoring is a mutual learning experience. As the concept is a deviation from the traditional approach, it is essential to seek support from top management and line managers in order to implement it. With the technological advancement at such a fast pace and the growth of social media, the youngsters in the organization are the best people who can be the mentors of the boomers. In order to grow and sustain in a today's organization, it is essential to have a strong technological know-how. The concept of reverse mentoring provides a platform wherein the younger employee provides insights on the technological know-how to the industry experts and pioneers. They also guide them in the use of various social media applications, such as, facebook, twitter, LinkedIn etc., as they have become important means of communication not only for the purpose of inside

flow of information, but also with the outside world. The scope of reverse mentoring however, is not limited to imparting of technological know-how. For the boomers, it also facilitates the understanding of changing work- culture, increasing diversity, growing need for maintaining work-life balance, changes in global scenario etc. This helps them to keep pace with the changing world and thus, may enhance the level of employee engagement in the organization.

3.1 WHY ORGANIZATIONS IMPLEMENT MENTORING PROGRAMS

More and more organizations are creating formal mentoring programs for various reasons. From increased morale to increased organizational productivity and career development, the benefits of an organization that actively supports mentoring are numerous. However, successful mentoring programs do not just happen. Organizations must first make a strong business case to demonstrate The reasons why agencies choose to establish mentoring programs are as follows:-

1. **As part of the onboarding process-** Mentoring helps new recruits, trainees or graduates settle into the organization.
2. **Skills Enhancement** - Mentoring enables experienced, highly competent staff to pass their expertise on to others who need to acquire specified skills.
3. **Professional Identity-**When younger employees are early in their careers, they need help understanding what it means to be a professional in their working environment. Professionals embody the values of the profession and are self-initiating and self-regulating. Mentors play a key role in defining professional behaviour for new employees. This is most important when employees first enter the federal workforce.
4. **Career Development** -Mentoring helps employees plan, develop, and manage their careers. It also helps them become more resilient in times of change, more self-reliant in their careers and more responsible as self-directed learners.
5. **Leadership and Management Development** - Mentoring encourages the development of leadership

competencies. These competencies are often more easily gained through example, guided practice or experience than by education and training.

6. **Education Support-** Mentoring helps in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Formal education and training is complemented by the knowledge and hands-on experience of a competent practitioner.
7. **Organizational Development and Culture Change** - Mentoring can help in communicating the values, vision and mission of the organization, a one-to-one relationship can help employees to understand the organizational culture and make any necessary changes.
8. **Customer Service-** Mentoring assists in modelling desired behaviours, encouraging the development of competencies in support of customer service, and above all cultivating the right attitudes.
9. **Recruitment-**Mentoring can enhance recruitment goals by offering additional incentives to prospective employees.
10. **Knowledge Management/Knowledge Transfer** - Mentoring provides for the interchange/exchange of information/knowledge between members of different organizations.

3.2 REVERSE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP MODEL

The model presented here is parsimonious in its inclusion of key variables for human resource managers to consider for formal reverse mentoring relationships and programs. It is noteworthy that the general relationships among antecedents, mediators, and outcomes follow the model suggested by Wanberg et al. (2003) for formal traditional mentoring relationships. However, there are several differences, specifically, a majority of the outcomes are different, as the goals of the relationship are distinct and the inclusion of generational differences, role reversal, and trust as relationship antecedents is new. Importantly, although the broad mentoring functions of reverse mentoring are similar to traditional mentoring but the particular sub functions and exchange process are quite different.

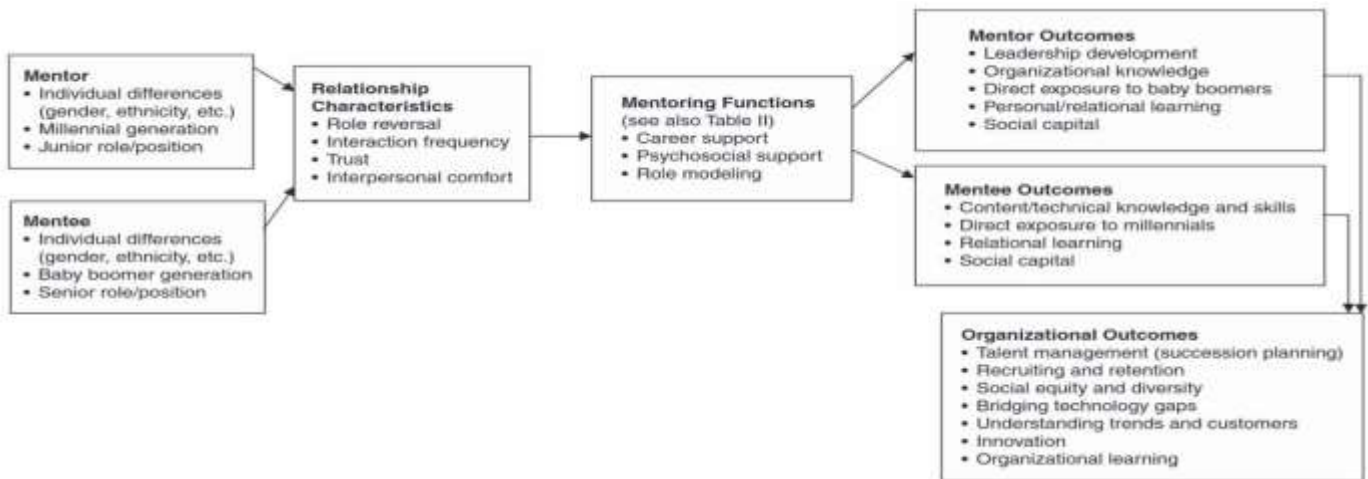


FIGURE 1. Key Variables in the Reverse Mentoring Relationship Model

4. KEY PILLARS OF MODERN MENTORING

Open and Egalitarian-For uninhibited and meaningful learning to take place, you must allow modern mentoring to occur in an open environment where people have equal access to one another. Modern mentoring is a great equalizer, because it is built on the idea that everyone has something to learn and something to teach. To let knowledge flow freely and unimpeded to the points where it's needed, this type of unrestricted, open, and egalitarian environment is essential.

- **Diverse-** Diversity in modern mentoring program is essential, because different perspectives within mentoring communities and relationships help novel ideas and approaches arise in answer to organizational problems or issues people are facing. Individuals in a different functional area, geographical area, or even from a different department or age group, will likely view situations and issues through a distinctive lens and be able to offer a unique perspective that can lead to innovative solutions.
- **Safe and Judgment-Free-** You should also ensure that mentoring takes place in an environment that is considered "safe" with regard to employee sharing and learning. In other words, people don't want to show perceived weaknesses by asking for a mentor, if they think they are going to be judged by their managers or by their organization. Keeping mentoring programs separate from performance-related systems is more beneficial.

- **Independent and Autonomous-** Modern mentoring will organically address the knowledge needs of the organization by connecting appropriate mentors to mentees around whatever the individual learning need is at that time. As such, there is no need to try to control the amount of time people spend engaged in mentoring, the topics they connect around, or the people with whom they connect. Too much rigid control will only create unwanted barriers to knowledge flowing from those who possess it to those who seek it.
- **Asynchronous-**With the increasingly global nature of organizations and the increased complexity in the organization's knowledge economy, the person who may be able to answer your question or help facilitate your development may work half-way across the world from you. For this reason, the communication and collaboration present in mentoring relationships has become increasingly asynchronous.
- **Self-Directed and Personal-** Adults want to drive their own learning. Through participation in modern mentoring, you are enabling your employees to address their own personal real-time learning needs by connecting with and gathering insights from colleagues anywhere in your organization. In this way, modern mentoring is a process that empowers individuals to be in control of their learning. Self-directed learning also allows individuals to learn what is applicable to them right now, gain skills that can help them with their unique work context, and make them more productive.
- **Technology-Centric-** Technology plays a large role in enabling modern mentoring because it allows organizations to view mentoring as "for the masses"

and a scalable practice that harnesses the collective knowledge, skills, abilities, and passions of an organization's entire workforce. Due to Millennial learning habits and increasingly diverse and global workforces, technology should be the main supporting mechanism for modern mentoring program. Whether you have email and an intranet, a small social business network, or a large-scale software program built to facilitate mentoring relationships, it is important to leverage these technologies for modern mentoring.

- **Flexible-** Modern mentoring is also flexible. People should be allowed and encouraged to shift in and out of your mentoring program and of the mentee-mentor roles themselves, as learning needs and knowledge strengths evolve,
- which will help you create a diverse, fluid, and dynamic mentoring network.

5. CONCLUSION

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