A Framework for a Formal Mentoring Program

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Mentoring is an ancient concept that experienced a renaissance about a decade ago (Goodson 1992, 19). Mentorships are relationships which provide guidance, support, a role model, and a confidante (known as a mentor) for junior organizational members (known as protégés). An effective mentoring relationship is one in which both mentor and protégé develop a productive level of intimacy, enabling the protégé to learn the ropes and adapt to organizational expectations (Burke and McKeen 1989, 1).

> *Mentor* **(men'ter), in Greek legend, the loyal friend and wise advisor of Odysseus; a wise loyal advisor**

In recent years, both academic and business circles have focused a great deal of attention on the benefits of mentoring relationships for protégés, mentors, and organizations (Kram 1985a and 1985b). Dreher and Ash (1990) discovered that individuals experiencing extensive mentoring relationships were provided with more benefits in terms for promotions, higher incomes, and increased satisfaction with their pay and benefits as compared to their counterparts who were experiencing less extensive mentoring relationships.

Mentoring has been found to be so effective as a career development and training tool that many companies are investing in formal mentoring programs (Reeve 1989, 1). Burke and McKeen (1989) note that a formal mentoring program has the potential to:

- improve the job performance of both mentor and protégé,
- reduce turnover in early career stages,
- develop sufficient talented managers to replace those about to retire,
- maintain high levels of managerial contribution through middle age and beyond,
- prepare individuals for roles of organizational leadership.

Based on the existing research literature and the author's survey research (Laviolette 1994), a framework for a formal mentoring program is outlined here. The framework consists of three main stages—development, implementation, and evaluation. Each stage lists steps that should be followed in a sequential order. Each step is further divided to provide additional information on more specific issues. The objective of the development stage is to lay the groundwork for the implementation of the formal mentoring program. The implementation stage focuses on defining expectations, administrative issues, information sessions, and on-going training. During this stage

the mentors and the protégés must be made aware of the expectations of the program and set goals against which the program can be evaluated in the future. Finally, it is important to note that the purpose of the evaluation stage is to maintain continuous feedback so that problems can be identified and changes made accordingly.

Development

1. Form a centralized agency/committee to develop and oversee the mentoring program. Issues to be addressed by the agency may include:
   - selecting target groups for the mentoring program, both mentors and protégés,
   - assigning responsibilities and accountability to agency members,
   - tying mentoring to succession planning,
   - developing an on-going communication strategy, e.g. publications and speeches,
   - securing the commitment of top management to the program.
2. Use both an in-house and an external consultant for the best results. Use the in-house consultant for the ground work and bring in an external consultant for support with training, monitoring, and evaluation.
3. Determine, as an agency/committee, the barriers to mentoring in your organization that must be overcome. Two approaches may be to use focus groups to survey the target groups and to brainstorm with top management.
4. Develop commitment and accountability mechanisms in order to legitimize organizational work in the mentoring process (Burke and McKeen 1989). Issues that may affect commitment and accountability include:
   - the reward structure (how are mentors and protégés rewarded for participating?),
   - performance evaluation (are mentors and protégés evaluated within the formal performance appraisal system?),
   - work design (how will mentoring assignments be structured, e.g. work teams, committees?).
5. Design a selection and matching process. Issues to be addressed may include:
   - is this an agency/committee responsibility?
   - should selection be on a voluntary basis?
   - does the process identify protégés' needs, identify and select suitable mentors, match protégés with mentors on the basis of needs and personality traits (Murray-Hicks 1972 as cited in Murray 1991, 6872)?
   - does the process consider issues of direct supervision, prior relationships, and physical location?

Implementation

1. Develop and implement initial information sessions, where
   - mentors and protégés meet one another and socialize freely,
   - mentoring is defined,
   - expectations/objectives of the program are defined,
   - a time frame is set, with the option to continue informally at the conclusion of the formal program,
   - formal meetings are scheduled where such issues as work load, commitment and accountability can be addressed.
2. Develop and implement initial training. Ask the mentor and protégé to meet and develop an action plan for development.
3. Bring in outside speakers. 'Testimonials' from previous mentor-protégé pairs are appropriate at this stage.
4. Offer on-going training. This may involve
   - using an external consultant,
   - introducing new issues at each session,
   - bringing in representatives from other companies to discuss their formal mentoring programs and the advancement of their target groups.

Evaluation

1. Utilize tracking mechanisms. Important in this process are the following:
   - have the agency/committee and external consultant oversee the process,
   - use periodic evaluation with focus groups and telephone calls, guarantee confidentiality,
   - assess the usefulness of the program in the organization's succession planning (i.e. are protégés being considered for higher level positions?).
2. Develop qualitative and quantitative reports to ensure accountability Important in this process are the following:
   - use the external consultant and the agency/committee to prepare the reports,
   - tie the evaluation into the goals set out at the implementation stage and assess if the objectives of the program have been attained (i.e. create a continuous feedback loop),
   - submit the reports to top management to evaluate the program's success,
   - use the reports in executive evaluation and compensation.

Mentoring is one mechanism that offers support and guidance for groups who are interested in pursuing a higher level position within an organization. For a mentoring program to be successful it is important that proactive top management commitment and communication of this commitment exist within the mentoring environment.

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