

Reverse Mentoring an Innovation in Workforce Management

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INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and technological world, youths are playing a vital role in work place. Reverse mentoring is very new concept. People think about mentoring like introducing people to one another for mutual benefits from knowing each other. In the workplace or in crutches, the younger are training their older colleagues through the electronic technical landscape as well as on life issues. So in reverse mentoring there is nothing present like seniority, experience because many leaders think that knowledge is not one-way street. It is benefited to all involved to share expertise. So reverse mentoring is very interesting, invaluable and practical approach. Reverse mentoring is defined as, "The concept of a senior person learning new & latest concepts from a fairly young & junior person", While traditional mentoring focuses on passing knowledge from professional to up-and-coming stars.

Thus Reverse Mentoring, refers to "a younger or less experienced Executive helps a more senior manager gain insight into areas, such as computers and changing IT technology, changing mindsets & expectations of the younger generation, new business concepts, thinking out of the box etc.

EMERGENCE OF REVERSE MENTORING

Reverse mentoring is a mentoring program targeting older or less technologically inclined employees, managers, and executives. The purpose of reverse mentoring is to improve their skills with new technologies by spending time being mentored by a younger, more technologically savvy employee. Because of the exposure to technology that younger generations get in everyday life, this approach as a learning tool greatly lessens the technology gap between generations.

This allows the less technologically advanced employee to:

- Understand basic software systems used in the workplace
- Understand unfamiliar terms or concepts related to technology

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In this globalised and competitive world, reverse mentoring a very emerging topic on which through study gives us invaluable information which we can use in grabbing future business opportunities. It helps in understanding some key words like organization hierarchy, inflexibility, no direct communication does not have much space. Thus in today's era everybody's knowledge, wisdom is given equal importance whether it is of high rank or low rank. so, study on reverse mentoring helps in inferring its reasons of existence, its benefits, proper implementation, and the organizations who used this concept.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In terms of a literature review, some articles are chosen to understand the concept of reverse mentoring more clearly.

Moving forward with reverse mentoring

Workforce, March, 2002 by Samuel Greengard

This article try to explain the revolution that reverse mentoring has made in corporate sector. Hundreds of companies in an array of industries have established formal and informal programs designed to ratchet up their competitive firepower. Yet the technological revolution has presented the modern enterprise--and human resources--with an intriguing irony: it's not uncommon for young, entry-level workers to have a better understanding of technology than their managers. In response; many organizations are shifting into reverse. "Reverse mentoring can provide substantial benefits for an organization," says Matt Starcevich, CEO of the Center for Coaching and Mentoring in Bartlesville, Oklahoma.

Reverse Mentoring - A Vital Employee Engagement and a Great Employer Branding Tool

By Muralidharan Dhanapalan

This article depicts about the uniqueness of mentoring programe its application in organization in upgrading employee's knowledge. Here it is given that most of us in the human resources function will clearly be able to articulate the values of a good institutionalized mentoring process, as a component of organization development. With good leaders acting as mentors, the mentees - mostly team members, repartees or a colleague - get to learn new technology, a new process in the organization structure, a new and innovative way to handle customers or close a sale. An organization that fosters a good mentoring culture and environment attracts talent that prefers to learn by the day, innovate, contribute and grow in the rungs. With mentoring having been around for a while, and widely accepted at the personal and organizational level, the benefits are there to see for all. To make reverse mentoring work and add real value, senior line management, the HR function, the CEO/CXO level, and even the board must commit to integration of 'reverse mentoring' in the overall scheme of things. This is the most vital need, as without this commitment, the organization can never get the real benefits of the process. Implementing RM in isolation is something better not done.

Reverse Mentoring: How to Tap Into the Millennial Generation

February 2, 2010

This is a really interesting article in the Atlanta Business Chronicle. the author correctly observes, Millennial can "easily translate their social skills into the business environment – turning social media skills into customer communication skills." I have seen the need for these skills (and more importantly, the need for *access* to people with these skills) increase every day. Business owners are hungry for knowledge of how to generate online leads and gain more prospects through innovative techniques using social media. As I tell colleagues all the time (and to

whoever will listen), it's NOT about the technology, it's about the message. Social media, used correctly, is just another medium to use in which you can spread your business message.

So for discovering talent in reverse mentoring, It's important to determine two things: 1) What you have to offer that young people would want to know in return. and 2) Be specific and realistic about what you want to know. Spread the word out there about what you're looking for to see who might be a good, *mutually beneficial* match for your needs. Reverse Mentoring is economical, smart, and done correctly, is guaranteed to produce results.

Getting students fully involved - Reverse mentoring

Malaysian Business, Apr 1, 2008 by Nancy Knowlton

THE COMPARISON IS OFTEN MADE today between students as digital natives and teachers as digital immigrants. This comparison recognizes that teachers are often new to technology. Most in-service teachers did not learn to use technology when they were in their teacher-training programs or their student-teaching placements. In fact, many teachers have only recently learned how to use email and the Internet. For most, technology is not natural - it has to be learned from the ground up. Students, on the other hand, have grown up in a world that is rich with technology. They have never known a time without computers and the multiple computing devices that are in most homes (even if these devices aren't recognized as computers). They are as familiar with using new technology tools as they are riding a bicycle - possibly more so. They don't need to be trained to use most technology - they simply dive in, use it and see what happens. Tapping into the inherent strengths and interests of these digital natives can be good for both teachers and students as various technology products are introduced into everyday teaching and learning.

Reverse Mentoring in HOK's Chicago Office

Erik Andersen, 44, a design principal in HOK's Chicago office, relies on Yu Leung L, to use new technologies in presenting architectural designs to his clients. His mentor, a recent immigrant, hasn't mastered English yet. But Mr. Andersen says he does well to seek out Mr. Yu's advice.

"For a time, I was a specialist. But over time, the that level of comfort that we're communicating better with clients and meeting their expectations of the design," Mr. Andersen says.

As in any good mentorship, Mr. Yu says he's learning just as much from Mr. Andersen.

"I'm learning how to organize a project and the importance of presentation," he says, smiling. "And we share a spirit."

Those who study work relationships say "reverse mentoring" is likely to become more common as companies face increased pressure to please a youth-oriented market.

Human Resources Management - Mentoring

This article looks at a mentoring program with students from Berkeley High School and the impact it is having on mentee.

A conversation between an experienced teacher and a former student teacher about their mentor-mentee-relationship six years ago.

Choosing a mentor or mentee can be a powerful moment in your professional life. Making the mentoring relationship work is not always easy and requires time and dedication from both parties. This article will define and explore the mentoring relationship, listing key factors for such

This paper presents the findings of a qualitative research study into critical moments in the coaching relationship. The research highlighted that critical moments are unforeseen and characterized by intense emotions and anxiety

within the coaching relationship.

Once a top-down, senior-to-junior relationship, mentoring has evolved into a multifaceted, flexible process that builds employee retention and development. And in at least one major company, finance took the lead in program development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is defined as "the systematic study of methods that are, can be, or have been applied within a discipline. two types of data sources are used.

Secondary data: Secondary data is collected from internet which helped a lot in gaining insights into this topic.

Primary data: Primary data is collected from newspapers, magazines.

WHY PARTICIPATE IN REVERSE MENTORING/BENEFITS

- Improves decision making as it brings a lot of associated inputs in terms of feeling of employees, new development around the industry, best practices etc. and create more tightly knit relationship with juniors. So it serves as an element of Decision Support System.
- Reverse mentoring helps senior executives learn new areas as computers, technology, culture and other highly focused technical areas.
- Senior employees learn new skills and competencies that boost their job performance and motivate them to work better.
- It is a part of natural evolution of learning as business in the digital age requires more than a pulse and a briefcase.
- Subordinates or Mentors, "Having a direct line of communication with the senior executive is invaluable" which is the most important feature of this relationship.
- It opens a direct opportunity to gain a great deal of confidence.
- It helps in gaining insights and wisdom that could otherwise take years to obtain.
- It is a tool for opening the channels of communication and knowledge sharing.
- It helps junior employees face critical situations along with the seniors which otherwise would have not faced being young & junior. There is no substitute to experience. The young ones greatly benefit from the treasure of experience of seniors and their calm.
- Reverse mentoring is very beneficial for organizations whether it is done formally or informally. It attracts the many possible gains-
- Increased level of expertise and productivity by providing assistance, guidance & informal skill for the mentees.
- Reduced turnover and Increase in Loyalty.
- 1-to-1 relationship acquired helps foster a feeling of caring and support through testing times.
- Development of managerial talent. A young employee can provide skills and knowledge about new technologies which normally would not be provided to the mentee or if provided it would be very expensive and time consuming.
- Increase the mentor's skill of communication, problem solving and resource management which could be beneficial to the organization in the long run.
- Saves time and money spent on training activities.
- Helps seniors to understand the aspirations and feeling of young ones and culture fitness in the organization. It proves beneficial in many staffing decisions such as hiring, induction, training, placement etc.

- It also facilitates resourcing the energy and enthusiasm of the young ones in the organization and having perfect fusion of their individual goals with those of the organizations.

IMPLEMENTING REVERSE MENTORING

Setting up a successful Reverse Mentoring program requires a great deal of effort and planning. Without a solid foundation, it is likely to encounter more than a few problems and participants may be hurt. there are 5 Step for Reverse Mentoring program-

- 1 **Developing a structured program:** Either, assign mentoring pairs or, let participants find mentors/mentees they feel they will be comfortable with. What's important is to develop a set of goals, objectives and ground rules.
- 2 **Make the program a priority:** Participants must understand the importance of a reverse mentoring program and block time which mentors & mentees would spend with each other so that seniors do not miss those sessions due to their busy schedule.
- 3 **Screen the members:** Being young doesn't automatically make a person an authority on what's "COOL". Mentors must have patience and temperament to work with senior executives as the seniors may be reluctant to open up with someone so junior.
- 4 **Provide proper training:** Mentor must learn what's important and how to show patience and the mentee has to check his or her ego at the door, otherwise the whole reverse mentoring program may fall.
- 5 **Solicit feedback and make necessary changes:** Reverse mentoring can require CORRECTION. By surveying participants it's possible to identify strengths and weaknesses and make the adjustment necessary to achieve success.

MENTORING TECHNIQUES

A study of mentoring techniques most commonly used in business. five major techniques or "wisdom tactics" were found to be used most commonly by mentors. These are:

1. **Accompanying:** This means making a commitment in a caring way. Accompanying involves taking part in the learning process by taking the path with the learner.
2. **Sowing:** Mentors are often confronted with the difficulty of preparing the learner before he or she is ready to change. Sowing is necessary when you know that what you say may not be understood or even acceptable to learners at first but will make sense and have value to the mentee when the situation requires it.
3. **Catalyzing:** When change reaches a critical level of pressure, learning can jump. Here the mentor chooses to plunge the learner right into change, provoking a different way of thinking, a change in identity or a re-ordering of values.
4. **Showing:** this is making something understandable, or using your own example to demonstrate a skill or activity. You show what you are talking about, you show by your own behavior.
5. **Harvesting:** Here the mentor focuses on "picking the ripe fruit": it is usually learned to create awareness of what was learned by experience and to draw conclusions. The key questions here are: "What have you learned?" "How useful is it?"

Different techniques may be used by mentors according to the situation and the psychological mindset of the mentee.

LIMITATIONS

The idea of reverse mentoring is good, but should be used Judiciously as many problems may occur in this concept like:

- The challenging issue in reverse mentoring, however, is the ego factor. Senior executives may not like taking advice from executives who are juniors to them.
- It is not present formally, therefore, little Reverse Mentoring is found in organizations.
- Reverse mentoring programs may wither if they lack clear and adequate goals.
- If not handled properly it can ruin the work atmosphere and discipline in the organization.

SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF REVERSE MENTORING

Successful reverse mentoring requires some careful planning. Here are some key factors to making sure mentoring works in reverse:

• Hire future leaders

Young employees aren't often asked to pass on their knowledge to older, more experienced managers and supervisors — it's an intimidating prospect. To gain the most from your new employees, make sure you're hiring people who will be comfortable taking a leading role from time to time.

• Survey new employees after three months on the job.

Surveying new employees will glean(collect) insight about the workplace, the culture, communication, customers and other factors. The fresh perspective is invaluable, and the anonymous aspect of a survey encourages people to speak freely, eliminating the "ego" factor from the equation. Older employees can benefit from younger insights without one-on-one mentoring.

• Set up a regular "View from the Front Lines" meeting.

This can occur within departments or it can be company-wide. Allow new employees who interact the most with customers to brief their deskbound managers and supervisors on what's really happening.

• Set goals.

Be clear about the goals & expectations of how such an approach will make a difference. Send a memo detailing how the younger employees' expertise will be tapped to help the company.

• Training is essential.

Because of the reversed circumstances, the young mentors may also need help to build confidence and put into practice a role that contradicts the typical business hierarchy.

- Training the mentor to be patient and restricting his or her advice to relevant topics only.

- Privacy and confidentiality are also important for seniors who don't wish to be seen as depending on the TIPS from the employees with less experience.

With those factors in place, the experienced veterans in your organization can start learning new tricks from the talented recruits? and your whole company will benefit from it.

HOW COMPANIES HANDLING REVERSE MENTORING

There are examples of companies who have used and handling concept of reverse mentoring successfully

- **GE:** General Electric describes their senior management technology training program in terms of reverse mentoring. The process requires senior managers including Welch to spend time learning from Internet or technology experts from within the company. This learning includes basic Internet skills, discussing important trends management is not aware of, and other similar activities.

- **Proctor and Gamble:** is a corporation that has been showcased for its successful implementation of reverse mentoring in a variety of ways. For example, a staff scientist who holds a Ph.D. in toxicology mentored a Chief Information Officer (CIO) in the area of biotechnology to increase his awareness and knowledge of the relationships between business and science (Solomon, 2001; Greengard, 2002). Another Proctor and Gamble program that has been acknowledged by the public is the Mentor Up program which pairs mid-level female managers with upper-level male managers to improve cross-gender communication.

- **Lovely professional university:** also adopting the concept of reverse mentoring by taking suggestions of students who ranked top positions and from teachers about changes in current running programs and take into considerations about their innovative ideas of upgrading student's knowledge.

- **Nokia:** As the telecom giant transforms itself from a devices company to one that provides complete mobile solutions, its top management learns vital lessons through "reverse mentoring". Mr. Jasmeet Gandhi who is employee of Nokia company is acting as mentor and give very valuable ideas to company. He is part of a brand of "gurus", junior employees all, that decodes cutting edge technology, social organization, competition and roadmap. Each guru is a domain expert.

- Wharton School of Business requires older MBA candidates with long resumes to partner with younger, full-time students. The exchange of information goes both ways.

SUMMARY

So both, the mentor and the mentee must have certain qualities and attributes. Both the parties have their share of responsibilities which when fulfilled can make a reverse mentoring program successful. Top layer employees must realize that knowledge isn't a one-way street. It's in everyone's best interest to share expertise. It's the young people, the counter workers, and the servers, the desk clerks that really see and hear how the company, its policies, procedures and products, are perceived by the public. The fact that a vice president worked on the front lines 20 years ago doesn't make him or her expert in what's happening now.

FINDINGS

So, reverse mentoring improves decision making, upgrading knowledge of senior executives, learn new skills and competencies, revolution in learning, remove deadlock in communication, confidence, insights and wisdom. Many organizations are adopting it to gain more productivity and turnover by making its employees productive through reverse mentoring.

It also has some weaknesses like people may have ego factor, informal procedure, lack adequate goals, if not handled properly may ruin environment. Yet the technological revolution has presented the modern enterprise--and human resources--with an intriguing irony: it's not uncommon for young, entry-level workers to have a better understanding of technology than their managers. Often, a new employee is able to see things clearly without the filter of years of experience, which can sometimes cloud the truth.

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