

Chapter 32

Exploring Mentoring Program Efficacy Within the Context of EBOCD: Leveraging Naturally Occurring Circumstances to Deploy an Experiment

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ABSTRACT

This reflective case history outlines an EBOCD study conducted in a large US-based Fortune 500 health-care firm. A research team comprised of organizational leaders and university professors designed a naturally formed longitudinal experimental study that affirmed the positive impact of facilitated mentoring programs on employee attitudes, socialization, and performance. The study findings affirmed that it is not only the use of mentoring programs themselves that may yield more positive results but supports that differences in mentoring program design impacts employee outcomes, including retention. The team of company leaders and university professors worked effectively together to meaningfully inform extant and future mentoring and socialization research and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Many organizations have turned to mentoring as one of the approaches to supporting employee development and retention. Since the late 1970s (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979) and the early work of Kathy Kram (1985) in identifying the impactful role of organizational change and development (OCD) on career and on-the-job outcomes, researchers and organizations have been actively engaging employees in workplace mentoring programs—often referred to as *formal* or *facilitated mentoring*. Early mentoring

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-6155-2.ch032

research was welcomed in practice contexts whereby organizations across sectors (public, private and nonprofit) began to implement programs aimed at forming beneficial, developmental mentor-mentee pairs. Over time, organizations have come to understand the value of implementing mentoring programs. This reflective case history elaborates on a collaborative partnership between university professors and OCD practitioners to leverage their expertise in designing and implementing a within organization experiment. Study results directly impacted organizational decision-making and to the production of a publication in a well-regarded OCD related scholarly journal.

The purposes of this reflective case history description are to describe the naturally-formed experiment and elaborate on an impactful OCD practice (new employee mentoring) that addresses common organizational challenges (employee socialization and turnover). The original motivation for the study came from the sponsoring company's focus on improving retention and advancing employee socialization and development. The external university researchers were motivated to engage in research that both contributed to collective understanding of facilitated mentoring overall and to the evidence-base for facilitated mentoring programs. In the end, the research reported herein (1) served to inform OCD decision-making overall; (2) provided the company with an evidence base and a trustworthy narrative for program design aimed at desired outcomes; and (3) advanced our collective understanding of facilitated mentoring programs through scholarly published research (Egan & Song, 2008) thus integrating an evidence-based approach and also contributing to the body of evidence and reported experiences for facilitated mentoring programs.

RELEVANT MENTORING-RELATED “BEST EVIDENCE”

Mentoring Programs

Whereas Kram's (1985) early work focused on the benefits of naturally occurring mentoring relationships, or *informal mentoring*, organizations have since developed a variety of approaches for instigating new mentor-mentee relationships. Mentoring has most often been framed as a one-on-one exchange between a more experienced mentor and less experienced mentee (or protégé) with the aim of developing the mentee's career, learning, and development (Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1978). Mentoring is framed around two functions (1) psychosocial development—focuses on the mentee's professional growth, personal and professional identity, self-efficacy and self-worth and (2) career development—emphasizes helping *mentees* learn about the norms and paths to career and organizational success, increasing their positive exposure, affording challenging work assignments to them, and protecting them from difficult political circumstances within the organization or profession.

Two types of mentoring situations often highlighted in practice and research are: 1) informal (naturally occurring; mentor/mentee initiated); and 2) formal or facilitated (instigated by third-party/organization). Formal programs have varying components including the level of facilitation. Some have featured one or more organizational-sponsored gatherings in which more and less experienced managers and/or employees are paired with the intention of creating a possibility for a developmentally valuable relationship. Others provide mentoring within a training program for mentees or are standalone mentoring programs that may require a number of mentor-mentee meetings over a set timeframe. While there are varying features to such formal programs, the central aim of the programs is to catalyze psychosocial and career development exchanges toward betterment of the mentees and the sponsoring organization. Evidence regarding

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