
Formal mentoring: is there a strategic fit?

Earnest Friday

Florida International University, College of Business Administration,
Department of Management and International Business, Miami, Florida, USA

Shawnta S. Friday

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, School of Business and Industry,
Tallahassee, Florida, USA

Keywords

Mentoring, Corporate strategy,
Corporate culture

Abstract

Many organizations have implemented formal mentoring programs within the last few years. Some organizations have realized success with their formal mentoring programs, while others have not fared so well. A missing link with many formal mentoring programs is a corporate level mentoring strategy. The lack of a corporate level mentoring strategy inhibits the mentoring process from becoming an integral part of an organization's culture, therefore not allowing for the maximization of benefits that can be gained from effective formal mentoring processes and programs. Thus, this paper offers a framework for creating a corporate level mentoring strategy; a standardized mentoring process; and customized mentoring programs, all of which should align with the organization's strategic positioning to facilitate the achievement of maximum effectiveness from the implementation of formal mentoring programs.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, organizational researchers and practitioners have recognized mentoring as a career development tool that can facilitate an individual's career progression (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 2000; Veale and Wachtel, 1996). Mentoring is viewed as an important organizational phenomenon, in which a more seasoned employee supports and guides the navigation of a novice through an organization (Geiger-DuMond, 1997; Harvey, 1998). In addition to being considered a career development tool, formal mentoring programs have also been initiated in many organizations to augment diversity initiatives (Heery, 1994). Therefore, formal mentoring programs have been growing in popularity at a fairly rapid pace (Gray, 1995; Veale and Wachtel, 1996). Given the escalating "war for talent" in today's competitive business environment, the integration of effective mentoring strategies, processes, and programs into the corporate culture of an organization can contribute to its competitive advantage in many ways beyond its recent linkage to diversity initiatives.

Thus, it should be recognized that in addition to diversity initiatives, mentoring can complement various other strategic organizational initiatives. Although many organizations have implemented varied formal mentoring programs within recent years (Gray, 1995; Veale and Wachtel, 1996), most have not strategically aligned their mentoring programs with their long-term objectives and strategic positioning of their organizations. This lack of strategic alignment in most organizations today is likely to lead to many inefficiencies and inconsistencies across the various formal

mentoring programs that exist within a company. Therefore, ideally, a company that seeks to maximize the potential benefits of mentoring should create a corporate level mentoring strategy prior to implementing a formal mentoring program. The purpose of the corporate mentoring strategy is to align the organization's standardized mentoring process and tailored mentoring programs with the organization's long-term, strategic goals and objectives. Having a corporate level mentoring strategy will contribute immensely to the long-term effectiveness of the mentoring process and programs. Thus, a framework is presented for formulating: a corporate level mentoring strategy; a formal, standardized mentoring process; and a model to tailor mentoring programs that are aligned with the overall organizational strategy to enhance the effectiveness and longevity of formal mentoring programs.

Strategic positioning of a firm

Many firms employ the strategic management process to distinguish themselves competitively from their competitors (Bryson, 1995; David, 1999; Porter, 1985; Steiner, 1997). While there are many schools of thought in the field of strategic management, it is generally accepted that there are three primary components of the strategic management process: strategy formulation or planning; strategy implementation; and strategy evaluation as illustrated in Figure 1 (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998). Typically, strategy formulation or planning entails developing or reviewing the firm's mission, vision, and long-term objectives; conducting internal and external assessments to identify the firm's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT); setting selection criteria and selecting the strategies that will provide the firm with the best strategic positioning against its competitors (David, 1999; Marsden, 1998;



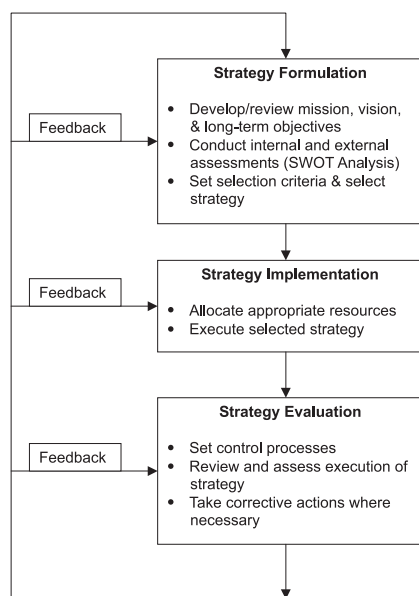
Management Decision
40/2 [2002] 152-157

© MCB UP Limited
[ISSN 0025-1747]
[DOI 10.1108/00251740210422820]

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0025-1747.htm>



Figure 1
The strategic management process

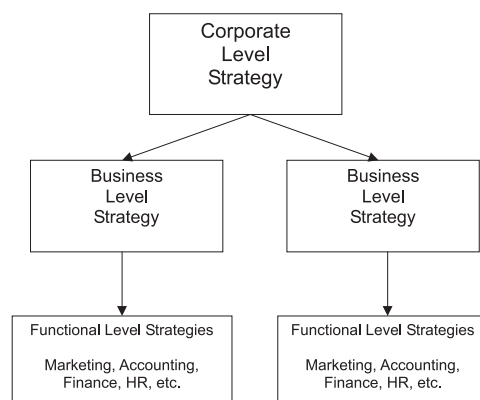


Steiner, 1997). Strategy implementation involves allocating the appropriate resources to ensure that the selected strategies are properly executed (David, 1999; Steiner, 1997). Strategy evaluation encompasses setting control processes in place to continuously review, evaluate, and provide feedback regarding the executed strategies to determine if desired results are being achieved, so that corrective measures can be taken if desired results are not being achieved (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998; Steiner, 1997).

There are three levels of strategy normally associated with large scale organizations as depicted in Figure 2:

- 1 corporate;
- 2 business; and

Figure 2
The three levels of organizational strategy



- 3 functional strategies (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998).

The corporate level strategy should define the organization's purpose and the lines of businesses in which it plans to operate, thus providing the overarching direction for the organization. When an organization operates in only one line of business, its corporate level strategy and business level strategy are effectively one in the same (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998). A business level strategy is the blueprint that should enable an organization to leverage its resources, so that it can differentiate itself from the competition within a particular line of business (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998). The strategic management process suggests that the functional-level strategies serve to support the organization's business-level strategy, and provide direction for the short-term activities (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998).

Consequently, the literature supports the position that properly aligned corporate, business, and functional level strategies facilitate an organization's efforts in achieving its objectives, and thus strategically positioning itself to successfully compete with its competition (David, 1999; Hills and Jones, 1998; Porter, 1985). In addition to having clearly delineated corporate, business, and functional level strategies, having highly differentiated and efficient human resources can also prove to be a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, 1997; Dolmat-Connell, 1999; Wright *et al.*, 1995). In trying to have differentiated and efficient human resources in today's competitive environment, an organization must view strategies for developing its employees as a part of its overarching corporate level strategy for gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage. Hence, the seminal argument of this paper is that any organization seeking to gain the maximum benefit from using formal mentoring programs as an employee development tool should have a corporate mentoring strategy that is strategically aligned with the organization's overall strategic positioning and direction.

Mentoring

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus entrusted the eponymous character, Mentor, with his son, Telemachus thousands of years ago. Therefore, mentor is not a new term. Although the term mentor dates back to ancient Greece, it has surged into the organizational literature over the last three

decades. A mentor is defined in Webster's dictionary as "a wise and trusted counselor or teacher," and a mentee is defined in Random House's dictionary as "a person who is guided by a mentor." Therefore, mentoring is the guidance process that takes place between a mentor and a mentee. Even in today's culture, mentoring is viewed as an important career development tool within most organizations (Collie, 1998).

In addition to being a career development tool, there are many other very positive organizational purposes mentoring can serve (Wanguri, 1996). Mentoring can:

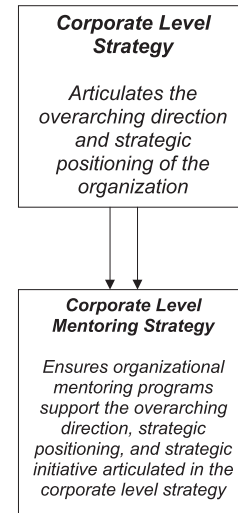
- support corporate diversity initiatives;
- communicate corporate values and behaviors;
- enhance corporate recruitment and retention efforts;
- provide employees with a sense of belonging – engagement;
- communicate and foster a more inclusive environment;
- provide opportunities for expanded networks and visibility for high potential employees;
- increase employees' sense of empowerment;
- increase one's sense of job satisfaction and personal effectiveness;
- optimize human resources;
- enhance decision making skills;
- augment training efforts; and
- improve communication and knowledge transfer (Geiger-DuMond and Boyle, 1996; Kram, 1985; Veale and Wachtel, 1996).

With such great potential pay-offs at stake, a corporate level mentoring strategy that is aligned with the corporate level strategy needs to be clearly articulated to effectively provide these types of additional organizational support (see Figure 3).

A corporate mentoring strategy provides a business case for formal mentoring, which justifies the need for and the beneficial uses of a mentoring process and mentoring programs within the organization (Lindenberger and Zachary, 1999). With a business case in place, upper management will have the justification for allocating the appropriate organizational resources to support the operation of formal mentoring programs within the organization (Lindenberger and Zachary, 1999). The alignment of the corporate level mentoring strategy with the overall corporate level strategy will ultimately drive the support for and effectiveness of formal mentoring throughout the organization.

Figure 3

Alignment between corporate level strategy and corporate level mentoring strategy

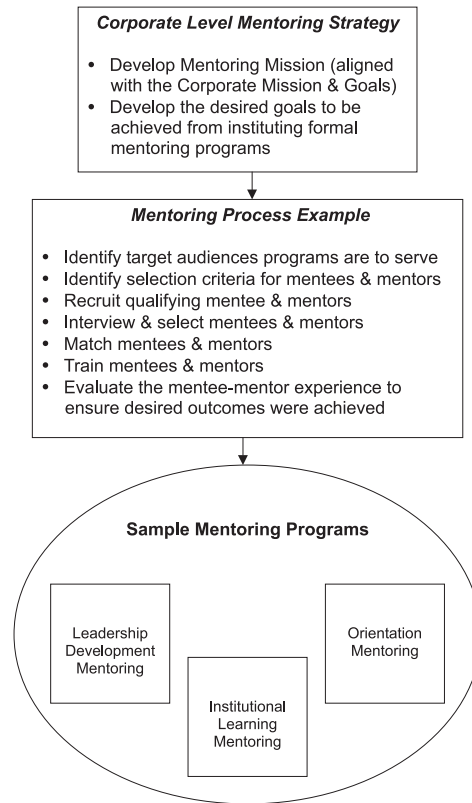


Developing a corporate mentoring strategy, process, and programs

An in-depth understanding of various organizational dynamics (i.e. culture, structure, strategic initiatives, financial position, etc.) is necessary to formulate a comprehensive corporate mentoring strategy, process, and programs. Theoretically, strategy should precede structure; thus, the corporate level mentoring strategy should be formulated before structuring the mentoring process and programs (see Figure 4). Although practically, and given the realities of many organizations, it may be necessary to superimpose an appropriate mentoring strategy over an existing mentoring process and programs. At the onset of such superimposition, a corporate mentoring mission statement and goals must be created to state the purpose formal mentoring will serve within the organization and the desired outcomes to be achieved from the mentoring programs. Internal and external assessments are the next essential steps before moving forward with such restructuring efforts. An internal assessment will allow the mentoring strategist to determine how to position formal mentoring within the existing corporate structure. In assessing the external environment, through the use of environmental scanning tools, the mentoring strategist should benchmark mentoring strategies, processes, and programs at other organizations to extract best practices (Lindenberger and Zachary, 1999).

Through the internal assessment, the mentoring strategist should become

Figure 4
Corporate mentoring strategy, process and
programs



intimately familiar with the organization's values, vision, mission, strategies, long-term objectives, and shorter-term initiatives, all of which constitutes a sound basis for understanding the organization's culture and overall strategic positioning. The strategist must become equally familiar with the benefits and drawbacks of formal organizational mentoring relationships. The mentoring strategist must conduct an analysis to determine the most appropriate linkages between the organization's overall strategic positioning and formal organizational mentoring. Before proceeding, the mentoring strategist must recognize and effectively articulate the clear strategic fit between the organization's overall strategic positioning and formal mentoring to strengthen the business case for obtaining and allocating resources for the formal mentoring programs within the organization.

In conducting an external assessment, the mentoring strategist must also become knowledgeable of the multitude of mentoring programs that exist (Lindenberger and Zachary, 1999). After canvassing the available information on the various mentoring programs, the mentoring

strategist should customize the best practices found in existing mentoring programs that have internal organizational applicability. Thus, there should also be a strategic fit between the external best practices and the organization's structure, culture, and resources.

Through the benchmarking of past successes and failures of various formal mentoring programs, it is apparent that most organizations do not have an overall corporate level mentoring strategy in place to articulate the strategic fit between their mentoring programs and their strategic positioning. The absence of a corporate mentoring strategy can lead to inconsistencies and inefficiencies across formal mentoring programs within an organization. This ineffectiveness can lead to formal mentoring programs being attacked, discredited, and ultimately discontinued. Therefore, it is essential to insulate formal mentoring programs by creating a corporate mentoring strategy to articulate the desired "strategic fit" between formal mentoring and the organization's corporate level strategic positioning. Once a corporate mentoring strategy is articulated, an appropriate corporate mentoring process and programs can then be clearly delineated.

While most of the literature focuses on mentoring only as a formal process, it is generally accepted that within an organizational setting, mentoring can be either a formal or informal relationship between a mentor and a mentee (Ragins, 1999). The development of an informal mentoring relationship tends to be more natural and spontaneous, thus happening more on an *ad hoc* basis (Ragins, 1999). On the other hand, formal mentoring relationships are structured, such that more novice individuals are paired with more seasoned individuals (Ragins, 1999). This formalized structure typically sets the parameters of the mentoring process and program. A mentoring process is continuous and identifies the series of necessary actions for achieving the desired outcomes, as opposed to a mentoring program, which has a specified beginning and ending time frame and specific objectives to be met; thus, the mentoring program simply identifies the targeted areas of guidance to take place between the mentor and the mentee (Bahniuk and Hill, 1998). An example of a typical mentoring process entails:

- identifying the various target audiences the programs are to serve;
- identifying the criteria for selecting mentees and mentors;

- recruiting qualifying mentees and mentors;
- interviewing and selecting mentees and mentors;
- matching mentee and mentors, training mentees and mentors; and
- evaluating the mentee-mentor experience (Veale and Wachtel, 1996).

Therefore, the mentoring process is the same, regardless of the type of mentoring program.

While the mentoring process is standard, mentoring programs, by nature, are varied and flexible, thus allowing for customization. The types of mentoring programs offered by an organization should allow the different divisions and/or departments to customize their formal mentoring programs to meet the needs of the division or department. Hence, the target audience of the formal mentoring program for a particular division or department, based on its particular need, will determine the contract signed between the mentee and the mentor (Bahniuk and Hill, 1998). The mentee/mentor contract clearly articulates the areas of focus between the mentee and mentor (Bahniuk and Hill, 1998). Some examples of mentoring programs include programs that focus on such things as:

- specific leadership skills;
- enhancing the career development needs of under-represented employees;
- indoctrination into corporate culture and politics; and
- knowledge transfer (Geiger-DuMond and Boyle, 1996; Kram, 1985; Veale and Wachtel, 1996).

Regardless of which type of formal mentoring program the mentee participates in, several overall outcomes should be expected as a result of the participation. These outcomes should include:

- enhanced organizational skills and capabilities;
- improved employee engagement, recruitment, and retention; and
- the cultivation of an inclusive, team-based corporate culture.

Conclusion

Any organization implementing a formal mentoring program should first formulate a corporate mentoring strategy that aligns formal mentoring with the organization's strategic positioning (Lindenberger and Zachary, 1999). If the organization has instituted formal mentoring programs without developing a corporate mentoring strategy, a corporate mentoring strategy

should be developed using the existing programs, and superimposed to strengthen the effectiveness of the existing programs. Once the long-term strategic fit is clearly articulated, a formal mentoring process can be designed to provide the guidelines for executing various formal mentoring programs created to meet the specific needs of each division or department within an organization (Bahniuk and Hill, 1998).

The use of this type of framework will enhance the longevity and effectiveness of formal mentoring programs, such that they do not become fads, and consequently phased out as a viable organizational tool when it is perceived that the fad is over. Additionally, other managerial implications of this framework are that mentoring programs can be run more cost effectively, and that there will be more consistency throughout the organization in terms of expected mentoring outcomes. Research has shown that when effectively implemented, participants of formal mentoring programs tend to experience greater career satisfaction, commitment, and mobility (Ragins, 2000). In conclusion, when employed properly and strategically positioned, formal mentoring programs can serve to augment various strategic organizational initiatives designed to assist organizations in gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage in today's highly competitive and dynamic business environment.

References

- Bahniuk, M.H. and Hill, S.K. (1998), "Promoting career success through mentoring", *Review of Business*, Vol. 19 No. 3, pp. 4-7.
- Barney, J. (1991), "Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage", *Journal of Management*, Vol. 17, pp. 99-120.
- Barney, J. (1997), *Gaining and Sustaining Competitive Advantage*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.
- Bryson, J.M. (1995), *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, CA.
- Collie, S. (1998), "Moving up through mentoring", *Workforce*, Vol. 77 No. 3, pp. 36-40.
- David, F. (1999), *Strategic Management*, Prentice-Hall Publishing, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.
- Dolmat-Connell, J. (1999), "Developing a reward strategy that delivers shareholder and employee value", *Compensation and Benefits Review*, Vol. 46 No. 3, pp. 46-56.
- Geiger-DuMond, A. (1997), "Mentoring: a practitioner's guide", *Training and Development*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 35-6.
- Geiger-DuMond, A.H. and Boyle, S.K. (1996), "Mentoring takes off at Douglas Aircraft Company (managing change in the

Earnest Friday and
Shawnta S. Friday
*Formal mentoring: is there a
strategic fit?*

Management Decision
40/2 [2002] 152–157

- workplace)", *Management Decision*, Vol. 34 No. 5, pp. 35-6.
- Gray, J. (1995), "Mentoring at the Bank of Montreal", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 44-8.
- Harvey, M. (1998), "Global dual-career couple mentoring", *Human Resource Planning*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 33-48.
- Heery, W. (1994), "Corporate mentoring can break the glass ceiling", *HR Focus*, Vol. 71 No. 5, pp. 17-18.
- Hills, C.W. and Jones, G.R. (1998), *Strategic Management: An Integrated Approach*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA.
- Hunt, D.M. and Michael, C. (1983), "Mentoring: a career training and development tool", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 8, pp. 475-85.
- Kram, K.E. (1985), *Mentoring at Work*, Scott, Foresman, Glenview, IL.
- Lindenberger, J.G. and Zachary, L.J. (1999), "Play '20 questions' to develop a successful mentoring program", *Training & Development*, Vol. 53 No. 2, pp. 12-14.
- Marsden, A. (1998), "Strategic management: which way to competitive advantage?", *Management Accounting*, Vol. 76 No. 1, pp. 32-7.
- Porter, M.E. (1985), *Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*, The Free Press, New York, NY.
- Ragins, B.R. (1999), "Mentor functions and outcomes: a comparison of men and women in formal and informal mentoring relationship", *Journal of Applied Psychological*, Vol. 84 No. 4, pp. 529-50.
- Ragins, B.R. (2000), "Marginal mentoring: the effects of type of mentor, quality of relationship, and program design on work and career attitudes", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43 No. 6, pp. 1177-94.
- Steiner, G. A. (1997), *Strategic Planning: What Every Manager Must Know*, Free Press Paperbacks, New York, NY.
- Veale, D.J. and Wachtel, J.M. (1996), "Mentoring and coaching as part of a human resource development strategy: an example at Coca-Cola Foods", *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 16-20.
- Wanguri, D.M. (1996), "Diversity, perceptions of equity, and communicative openness in the workplace", *The Journal of Business Communication*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 443-57.
- Wright, P., Ferris, S.P., Hiller, J.S. and Kroll, M. (1995), "Competitiveness through management of diversity: effects on stock price valuation", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 38 No. 1, pp. 272-87.

Further reading

- Burke, R.J. and McKeen, C.A. (1989), "Developing formal mentoring programs in organizations", *Business Quarterly*, Vol. 53 No. 3, pp. 69-76.
- Gibbs, S. and Megginson, D. (1993), "Inside corporate mentoring schemes: a new agenda of concerns", *Personnel Review*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 40-54.
- Kaye, B. and Jacobson, B. (1996), "Reframing mentoring", *Training and Development*, Vol. 50 No. 8, pp. 44-7.
- Ragins, B.R. (1995), "Diversity, power, and mentorship in organizations: a cultural, structural, and behavioral perspective", in Chemers, M.M., Oskamp, S. and Costanzo, M.A. (Eds), *Diversity in Organizations: New Perspectives For a Changing Workplace*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA, pp. 91-132.
- Tyler, K. (1998), "Mentoring programs link employees and experienced execs", *HR Magazine*, Vol. 43 No. 5, pp. 98-103.

Application questions

- 1 What key leaders in your organization would you have to gain support from to formulate, implement, and evaluate a corporate mentoring strategy? How would you elicit their support?
- 2 How could your organization benefit from having a standardized mentoring process and customized mentoring programs?