

Research Question

What are best practices to designing a formal, enterprise-wide mentoring program which also addresses diversity and inclusion opportunities?

Introduction

Corporate mentorship, in most academic literature, is regarded as a developmental partnership between a mentor and a mentee (or protégé) that can engage and fulfill the psychosocial and career support needs of both the mentor and the mentee.¹ Recent Gartner findings suggest that over a 5-year time horizon, mentees and mentors alike are able to experience significant benefits in salary, promotion, and engagement when compared with non-participants.²

Recent findings suggest that mentorship and sponsorship can also play a significant role in fostering inclusive workplaces and advancing DE&I objectives. Though formal mentoring programs have led to increases in representation of minorities by up to 24% in senior leadership roles, they alone are insufficient in advancing equity of opportunities among the workforce.¹⁹

Mentorship Best Practices

No two mentorship programs are the same. Key considerations in designing the mentorship programs are indicated in Appendix 1. In an effort to offer best practices around the industry, research offers four vital steps to setting up your formal mentorship program for success.

Defining Goals and Roles: Formal mentorship is commonly a part of a portfolio of other initiatives, such as increasing DE&I across an employee population.⁴ So, it is important to begin with clarifying the overall problem and understanding how corporate mentorship will address the problem, as program objectives will be built around these questions.⁴ Defining roles and expectations of mentors and mentees, communicating the level of commitment required to meet these goals, and articulating the benefits of the program goes a long way to ensure mentor-mentee engagement with the program.¹⁸

Best practices also include providing guidelines to mentors and mentees that suggest topics for discussion and provide checklists for what to prepare for meetings.⁶ Formal structures and processes in mentoring have also been shown to best serve the underrepresented talent.³

Mentor-Mentee Matching: Matching mentors with mentees on the basis of goals and chemistry is common and encouraged.⁶ Because mentor-mentee input in the matching process is considered “vital to programs’ success”, it’s highly encouraged that mentees’ personal preferences, such as being matched with a POC, parent immigrant, etc., as well as developmental preferences, like learning SQL or learning about a new team, match mentors’ abilities to provide the appropriate support.⁸ Some organizations use questionnaires to discern these preferences.⁹ Mastercard leverages their talent marketplace to generate mentor pairing based on capabilities and developmental interests.¹⁰ Furthermore, if advancing DE&I is a primary goal, successful outcomes require that effective cross-race and cross-gender mentoring relationships are formed, which may necessitate mentor training focused on reducing stereotypes and promoting effective communication.³

Training & Development: Ongoing support, training, and development is the hallmark of a successful mentorship program. IBM leads the effort in maintaining a repository of mentoring resources that include podcasts, success stories, and best practices on optimal mentor-mentee relationships.¹¹ On the mentor side, T&D can create value by offering coaching trainings or external supervision to mentors looking to improve leadership skills (Appendix 3). On the other hand, mentees must learn the basics of mentorship and how to drive these relationships. A common practice includes holding a brief training where mentees learn formalities like sending follow up thank-you notes, scheduling meetings, and creating agendas, which will hold mentors accountable to doing their part in return.⁷

Measuring Outcomes: Two common methods for evaluating the impact of a mentorship program include feedback surveys and individual interviews. This data traditionally informs changes that need to be made to the program design for succeeding cohorts and also provides a channel for collecting success stories, which may be shared and celebrated at company all-hands meetings or mentorship cohort luncheons.⁷ Other best practices include tracking participants' progress towards individual and firm goals at multiple intervals during a program, which can inform necessary design modifications.⁵ Hilton, for its mentorship program, not only monitors participant outcomes continuously but also incorporates mentee feedback into mentors' performance evaluations.³ Programs centered around diversity are increasingly leveraging HRIS support to track metrics around retention, performance, and development of program mentors and mentees compared with non-participating, non URM employees over 2-5 year time horizons is paramount.⁴

Special Considerations and Limitations

Some special considerations exist in driving effective mentoring programs: investment up front in the matching process is vital, as there is a wealth of research suggesting the most common mentorship problems stem from mismatches in mentor-mentee pairings due to personality or values;¹ training and support must be offered continuously to both mentors and mentees throughout the program lifecycle; mentorship of the millennial population could include anonymous mentoring, like IBM's online chat room called "Dear Mentor," group mentoring, and even reverse mentoring.¹² In the case of cross-cultural or cross-gender pairings, reverse mentoring may uncover insights into organizational barriers that the mentor may have the power to remove.⁶ Finally, future research is needed on the accompaniment of ERG data as it pertains to advancing DE&I initiatives through mentorship. Furthermore, the primary focus of this summary was to research formal, hierarchical mentorship practices rather than alternative methods, such as student, peer-to-peer, or group mentoring.

Conclusion

Effectively designed mentoring programs benefit not only the mentor and mentee but also the organization in many ways (Appendix 2 Figure 4).⁶ Cascading effects offer not only increased leadership capabilities of mentors as line managers, but they help foster a culture of inclusion, development, and communication across hierarchies. As mentees observe the resources poured into them during a mentorship cycle, it will soon be their turn to give back to new hires in the organization, which creates a virtuous cycle that pays dividends at the individual and organizational levels.

Appendix-1

Table 1. Workplace Mentoring Program Considerations.

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- Does your organization have a formal or informal mentoring program?
 - If your organization has implemented a formal mentoring program, is this the best practice given the proposed advantages of informal mentoring?
 - How are your mentors selected?
 - Are mentors in your organization committed to devoting time to develop their protégé(s)?
 - What qualifies mentors in your organization to be a mentor?
 - How are protégés in your organization selected?
 - Is mentor allocation conducted fairly and transparently?
 - Is the mentor allocation process perceived to be fair by all employees?
 - Has your organization considered or assessed the effects of your mentoring program on unmentored employees and employees without access to protégés?
 - Does your organization have a mechanism in place to monitor the quality of mentoring relationships, intervene in dysfunctional or abusive mentoring relationships, and support affected employees?
 - Does your organization have a mechanism in place to objectively assess the benefits of your mentoring program beyond other predictors of success (e.g., education, tenure, core self-evaluations, personality)?
 - Are mentors effectively developing high-performing protégés or are they selecting high potential employees as protégés who might otherwise be successful notwithstanding their mentor?
 - Given all of the above, do the benefits of your organization's mentoring program outweigh the concrete costs (financial, time, and effort) and the risk of adverse effects?
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Ivey, G. W., & Dupré, K. E. (2022). Workplace Mentorship: A Critical Review. *Journal of Career Development, 49*(3), 714–729.

Appendix-2

Figure 2: Formalisation of mentor relationships

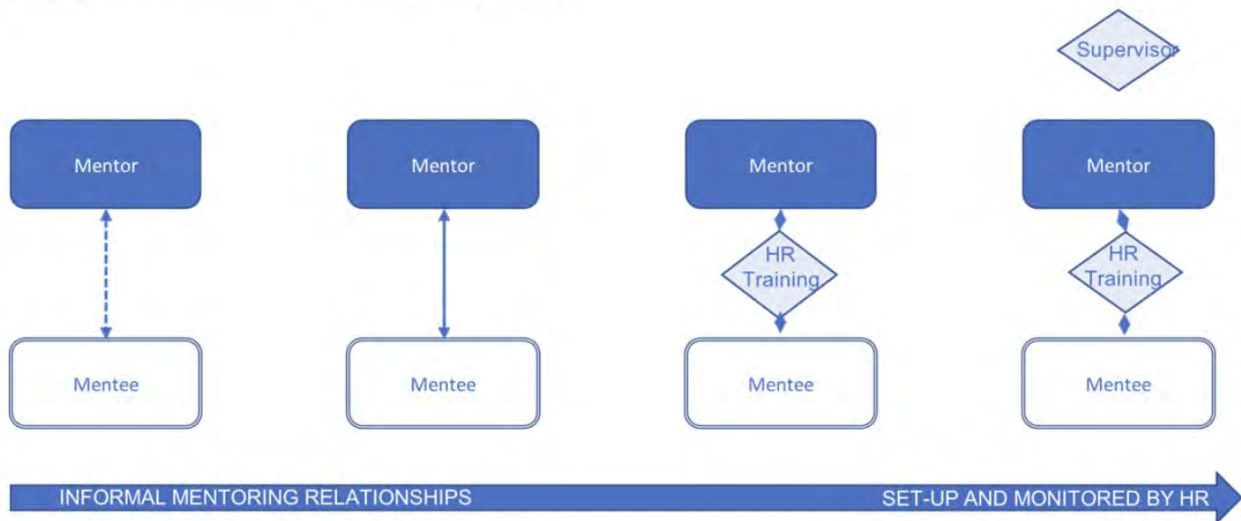


Figure 3: Example of best practice mentor supervision

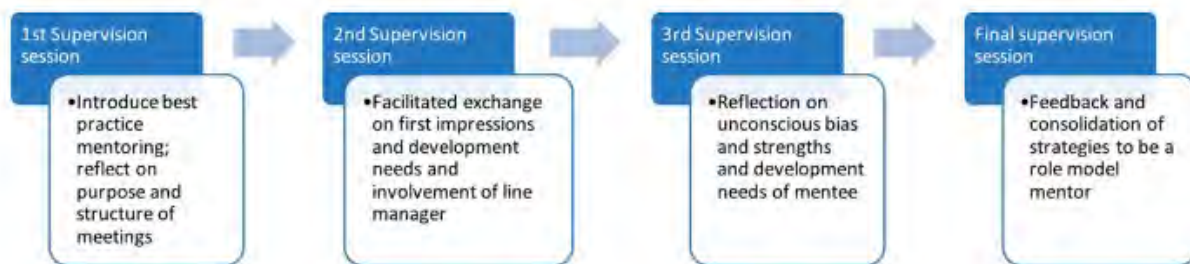
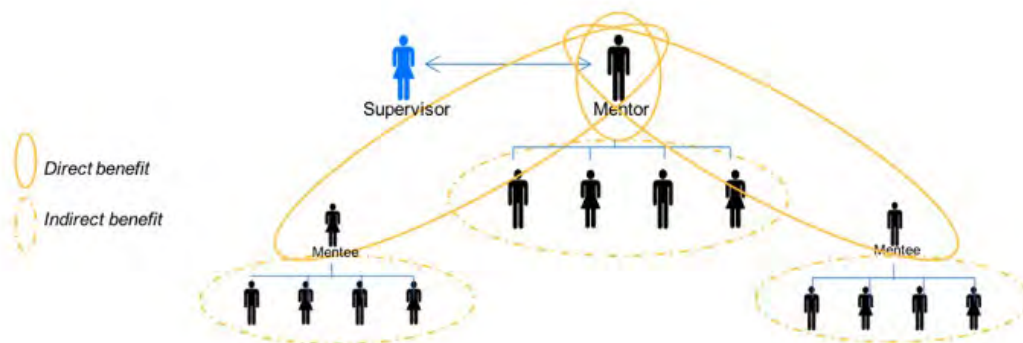


Figure 4: The cascade benefit of mentoring



Source: Hieker, C., & Rushby, M. (2020). Key Success Factors in Implementing Sustainable Mentor Programmes in Large Organisations. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 18(2), 197–208.

Appendix-3

What Makes a Mentor

To gauge your mentoring skills, jot down some of the characteristics of your own best mentor. Our interviews with successful professionals have made clear that a good mentoring relationship is not just about career advancement. Again and again, our interviewees said that a good mentor...

- is someone absolutely credible whose integrity transcends the message, be it positive or negative
- tells you things you may not want to hear but leaves you feeling you have been heard
- interacts with you in a way that makes you want to become better
- makes you feel secure enough to take risks
- gives you the confidence to rise above your inner doubts and fears
- supports your attempts to set stretch goals for yourself
- presents opportunities and highlights challenges you might not have seen on your own

Source: Meister, J. C., & Willyerd, K. (2010). Mentoring Millennials. (cover story). *Harvard Business Review*, 88(5), 68–72.

Citations

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- 2- [Workplace loyalties change, but the value of mentoring doesn't.](#) (n.d.). *Knowledge at Wharton*.
- 3- [To build diverse leadership, formalize mentorship and sponsorship programs.](#) (2021, August 11). *Bain*.
- 4- Hieker, C., & Rushby, M. (2020). Key Success Factors in Implementing Sustainable Mentor Programmes in Large Organisations. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 18(2), 197–208.
- 5- Thomas, D. (2018). Why Do Most Mentoring Programs Fail to Deliver on Their Promise? *Profiles in Diversity Journal*, 20(1), 131–134.
- 6- Mercer, N. (2022). What's the Difference between Sponsorship and Mentorship? Clarity on two key techniques for advancing diversity, equity and inclusion. *ABA Banking Journal*, 114(4), 26–29.
- 7- [How to build a Mentorship Program that actually works.](#) *Inc.com*.
- 8- Allen, Tammy D., et al. "Mentorship Behaviors and Mentorship Quality Associated with Formal Mentoring Programs: Closing the Gap between Research and Practice." *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2006, pp. 567–78
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- 10- [3 companies showcasing successful mentorship programs.](#) *Gloat.com*.
- 11- [Guide and Improve Your Mentoring Programs.](#) *SHRM.org*.
- 12- Meister, J. C., & Willyerd, K. (2010). Mentoring Millennials. (cover story). *Harvard Business Review*, 88(5), 68–72.

Further Suggested Readings

- 1- Tu, M., & Li, M. (2021, May 12). What great mentorship looks like in a hybrid workplace. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/05/what-great-mentorship-looks-like-in-a-hybrid-workplace>
- 2- DeLong, T. J., Gabarro, J. J., & Lees, R. J. (2008, January 1). Why mentoring matters in a hypercompetitive world. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2008/01/why-mentoring-matters-in-a-hypercompetitive-world>
- 3- Browne, I. (2021). Exploring Reverse Mentoring; "Win-Win" Relationships in The Multi-Generational Workplace. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 15, 246–259.
- 4- Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2016, July 1). Why diversity programs fail. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>
- 5- Chao, G. T. (2009). Formal mentoring: Lessons learned from past practice. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 40(3), 314–320