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Analysis of mentors' psychological needs

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

The current study investigates the psychological needs of mentors within a corporate organisation. The findings are then used to make recommendations towards enhancing mentoring relationships.

1.2. Problem Statement

The Draft Skills Development Bill, 1997, proposed to reconstruct vocational education and training in South Africa through learnership programmes involving a levy-grant system as an intervention and incentive to improve the general level of workforce skills towards higher productivity and global competitiveness (Van Rooyen, 1998). The principle of life-long learning is beneficial to both the newly appointed learner in the organisation as well as for the training employees involved in the learnership programme.

Mentorship is a topic of increasing importance in most institutional settings, including the world of Human Resource Management. It is used by a variety of organisations to serve a wide variety of purposes from the career development of fast-tracking young managers to countering disadvantage on the bases of gender and ethnicity (Stead, 1997). The theme of mentors' personal and professional growth has been receiving increasing attention in recent years as more and more researchers seek to explore its characteristics and determinants (Hay, 1995; Hale, 2000; Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent, 2001). Zachary (2000) stipulates that effective mentoring relationships begin with preparing the mentor and then moving onto the preparation of the mentoring relationship. Given what Zachary (2000) believes, as well as the implementation of learnerships in organisations, mentors can assist in the facilitation and integration of new entrants, including learnership appointed entrants, into the organisation. Moreover, limited attention has been given

specifically on the psychological needs of mentors as well as literature used for mentor-education seems limited.

1.3. Learnership Programmes

According to Van Rooyen (1998), South Africa has been rated poorly on the human resources development in the annual competitiveness survey conducted by the Swiss International Institute of Management. Learnerships were introduced by government to explore new opportunities for education and training. Learnerships are based on the following key principles:

- *Co-ordination and partnerships*: Due to theory being out of sync with practice, it was proposed that co-operation between government departments to be vital in rectifying this problem.
- *Diversification*: The private sector has previously implemented learnerships to provide a wide spectrum of occupations to learners within the confines of legislation.
- *Increased participation*: Access to learnerships are open to adults, school-leaving youths, students in the further and higher education and training groups, as well as employed workers.
- *Demand-led learnerships*: Depending on socio-economic needs, learnerships would lead to employment or self-employment.
- *Variety of employment contexts*: Learnerships should enable learners to gain experience in many different ways and from different sites.
- *Efficiency and sustainability*: Learnerships are to be cost-effective.
- *Other principles*: Integration of Education and Training; Life-long Learning and Quality.

Vaida (2004) writes that Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) have envisioned 73000 learners will be recruited by May 2004, each learner requiring a mentor. A body of research exists on mentorship as a career training and development tool within the literature. The emphasis of these research efforts is largely on the process

and outcomes in spontaneous and informal mentoring relationships. There has been a recent growth of research on the effects of formal mentoring programmes on outcomes for mentors. However, according to Gray in Hunt (1994) the main reason for the failure of mentoring programmes was the lack of attention to training mentors. More so, even further inattention has been aimed at an analysis of psychological mentors' needs to facilitate the mentoring relationship within the organisation.

1.4. Rationale for the study and Research Problem

Successful economies like The United States, Japan and United Kingdom, have a manager-employee ratio of 1:6. However, Smit and Cronje (2002) recognise that in South Africa, that ratio is 1:50, which demonstrates the shortage of skills in the country and that the spans of control are too great. According to Walker in Samuels (1994), specific concerns which can be related to South Africa's aspirations of international competitive ability and advantage with an environment being reshaped by the removal of trade barriers, sanctions and the reduction in protection policies, include:

- Shortages of specialised technical talent needed to staff specific programmes for business expansion
- Shortages of broadly experienced and tested managers, both to manage new and expanding operations with large capital investment and to progress to senior management and executive responsibilities
- The substantial cost of relocating employees' great distances, and of recruiting talent at high salary levels (with associated search fees) due to the relatively small talent pool.

There can thus be no greater challenge in human resource and management development in South Africa, than of implementing effective ways of facilitating the development and career progress of skilled workers and managers (Samuels, 1994). In the midst of a dynamically changing environment, a mentoring programme can facilitate the integration of entrants into the job market and the need to reach job satisfaction.

1.5. Goal of the study

There seems to be a dominance of European and United States - based literature on mentoring and little has been reported from a South African perspective. Therefore the general aim of the study is to attempt to contribute to a comprehensive understanding specifically of the mentors' psychological needs in an existing corporate mentorship programme within a South African context. The second objective is to facilitate the development of mentor skills, and finally, the study aims to devise possible recommendations to be utilised for the enhancement of existing mentoring relationships, by identifying as a starting point, the psychological needs of mentors.

1.6. Value of the study

The value of this study lies primarily in the information that it has collected by making a system or an organisation aware of the mentor's psychological needs. Significance on the importance of mentoring relationships, roles of mentors and mentees have been examined by many researchers in the past. However, little has been done on focusing on the analysis of the psychological needs of mentors. This study proposes to identify these needs and will propose recommendations for the enhancement of the current mentoring relationship.

1.7. Summary

The main focus of the current study is the mentor's mental, social-emotional, physical and spiritual functioning as well as the identification of the mentor's psychological needs which are experienced in these four dimensions. The conceptual framework of the chapters that follow will include a review of the literature in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3 the organisational context will be discussed and Chapter 4 will include a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the current study. The research design and methodology will be described in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 will present the results and discussion of the study. Chapter 7 offers a summary of the current study as well as limitations noted and recommendations for further research.