

The Prospects of Corporate Mentoring in Enhancing Employability of Business Graduates in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: Employability of business graduates is now a hot topic. The various attributes of graduates that assist them in getting, retaining and developing in a job is employability. Business students believe that their course would help them in acquiring the required skills to engage in the challenging work environments. However, the utility of graduate programs in providing the required employability skill is a matter of debate. The present study focuses on the relationship between employability and corporate/industrial mentoring of undergraduate business students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Mentoring is a tool for social learning, wherein the efforts of a mentor are focused on inculcating in the protegee a particular set of values and practices. It is a win-win solution for both mentors and proteges. Modern organizations increasingly rely on mentoring to enhance aspects like socialization, training, career development and psychological contract. In academic settings mentoring increases self-efficacy and assist students in setting up and accomplishing their goals. Corporate mentoring, also termed as industrial mentoring is a mentorship program, designed to bring together students and professionals who share a common professional interest. Such programmes are being successfully implemented in developed countries. The present research examines the possibility of corporate mentoring in Saudi Arabia. It is concluded that there is ample scope of successful conduct of such programmes in Saudi Arabia.

Key words: Mentoring, corporate mentoring, employability, business graduates, Saudi Arabia

INTRODUCTION

The ambitious Vision 2030 declared by the Saudi government has presented a number of holistic proposals to surge Saudi Arabia into the future. Among the various proposals, there is one with respect to making the kingdom self-sufficient in human resources. The present article explores the possibility of enhancing the employability of management graduates through corporate mentoring. The world over, employability of students graduating out of universities are supposed to be problematic in nature. Harvey and Knight has defied employability as the attributes of graduates that will assist them in getting, retaining and developing in a job. How can the Saudi students graduating out of the universities in the field of management have the required employability skills? Though there are many ways in which employability can be enhanced, like providing quality education, case based teaching, hands on project and so on; the present work focuses solely on the aspect of corporate mentoring.

Literature review: The literature is presented under two different heads employability and corporate mentoring.

Employability: Employability, according to Yorke includes a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make fresh graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. Undergraduate business students perceive that doing a graduate course would help them in acquiring the required skills to engage in work environments that have more responsibilities, initiatives and challenges (Mihail and Eleftrie, 2006). However, the utility of graduate programs in providing such skill has been a matter of debate. Employability skills are not just the desired attributes required for prospective employees; they are the basic conditions that are required to be considered for any employment.

Substantial literature has presented the fact that employers and businessmen consider the graduates passing out of educational institutions to be lacking the required employability skills and competencies (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004). However, the available literature does not converge on a few skills. It presents a mixed picture, both in terms of theory and measurement of employability skills. Further, most employability skills discourses revolve around employer's views of skill requirements, their shortages and

inaccuracies (Taylor, 1998). Due to these shortcomings most employers rely solely on educational credentials, with less regard to the various skills developed during their educational programs (Holzer, 1996).

Yet another issue is the contradictory demands of most employers. Most of them, while demanding higher standards for a broad, general education; often criticize educational institutions as they fail to produce graduates having the required skill sets and ready to perform the specific job's (Crouch *et al.*, 1999; Kincheloe, 1999). However, there are certain others who criticize employers as they often shift the entire responsibility for developing graduates with appropriate job skills solely to the universities, often skirting their responsibility regarding employability (Taylor, 1998).

There is now a general consensus that there is a need for high standards of training prior to graduation. However, a general consensus regarding the appropriate curriculum that can achieve employability is still elusive (Bennett, 2006). This occurs due to the widening gap between the skills acquired from education and those required to be successfully in their jobs. Quite a few earlier studies (Ananda *et al.*, 1995; Herr and Johnson, 1989; Johnson, 1991) and more recent ones (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Mintzberg, 2004) have identified the existence of wide gap between the theoretical knowledge and skills acquired in business courses and the actual practice.

Though employers expect business schools to develop the requisite skills (Cassidy, 2006), they are at loss to explain the desired skills and capabilities required from the students. A thorough and clear understanding about the requirements of the employers is indispensable for making the required transformation to the education system and curriculum. Then only will those who graduate from the universities be equipped to meet the intricacies of the present workplace (Sulphey, 2015). Employers are concerned about the inadequate skill sets of business graduates as they fear that the deficiencies in them will affect their bottom lines.

Employers thus have a serious responsibility of developing the required employability skills among graduate students. Of the many methods through which this responsibility can be exercised, corporate/industrial mentoring is the most effective one.

Mentoring: Adequate literature has been accumulated in the field of mentoring and a number of social scientists have done pioneering research in the area. The researches by Allen *et al.* (2004), Eby and McManus (2004), Kram (1983, 1985) are a few examples. With a view to have a fair understanding about the concept of mentoring, the relevant literature is reviewed.

Mentoring as a concept is centuries old and is said to have existed even before Christ. Evidences of mentoring dates back to 12th century BC, wherein the concept is found mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* (Bartell, 2004; Dubois and Karcher, 2005; Smith, 2005). Mentor was an Ithacan noble in *Odyssey*. He was a wise counsellor to his friend Ulysses. Mentor was entrusted with the care, education and protection of Telemachus, Ulysses's son. In the middle ages, mentoring found its use when the concept was in vogue in craft guilds wherein it took the form of apprenticeships. Later, mentoring started receiving the due attention when it was developed into a strategy and found its usage in the industry for enhancing a protegee's career prospects (Schwiebert, 2000). Subsequent to industrial revolution and more precisely after the Human Relations movement, mentoring started receiving the due attention and importance. It usually ranged from areas like religious, vocation or profession, to military, political and so on. Mentoring has always been considered as a tool for social learning, wherein efforts were focused to inculcate in the mentored a particular set of values and practices (Dubois and Karcher, 2005).

However, till the turn of the century the question as to what constitutes mentoring still provided only vague answers. According to Gray (1988) 'since the mid-1970s, there has been much confusion about what mentoring is even to the point of confusing it with on the job coaching'. According to Young *et al.* (2000) mentoring as a construct is defined loosely. It is an elusive term and there are as many definitions of mentoring as the social scientists who have attempted to define it. According to Merriam (1993) mentoring is a powerful emotional interaction between an older and younger person in a relationship in which the older mentor is trusted, loving and experienced in the guidance of the younger.

Kram (1985) states that mentoring is 'the support provided by an experienced person (known as the mentor) to a fresher or a less experienced person'. The less experienced person is known as mentee or protegee. According to him a mentor 'supports, guides and counsels a young adult as he or she accomplishes mastery of the adult world or the world of work'. Most available literature presents a mentor as a teacher, adviser, sponsor, counsellor, role model and the like (Jacobi, 1991; Levinson, 1978).

Kram (1983, 1985) has done substantial work in the areas of mentoring and most mentoring studies are based on his categories of mentoring behaviour and outcomes (Young *et al.*, 2006). Young *et al.* (2006) are also of the opinion that within the context of mentoring relationships, it can be effective only if individuals work together, communicate with one another and interact on a more social level.

Now modern organizations see mentoring as an effective tool to enhance various aspects like socialization, instilling responsibility training, facilitating career development (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005; Wanberg *et al.*, 2003), relationship development (Noe *et al.*, 2002).

Forms of mentoring: Young *et al.* (2006) based on Kram (1985)'s qualitative research on mentoring dyads identified two forms of mentoring career support and psychological/ social support. The first one, career support includes mentoring that is related or associated to the career advancement of a mentee/protege. This could include advising, making the protege visible in front of influential persons and extending protection to the mentee/protege from various political and tough situations. The second form, psychosocial/social support deal with the emotional side of mentoring. This could vary from listening to the mentee/protege's concerns and extending counselling benefits to him.

Certain others, for instance Allen *et al.* (2006), Ragins and Cotton (1999) and Wanber *et al.* (2003) have classified mentoring in a more tradition manner formal and informal. While formal mentoring is one in which the organisation assigns the mentor and protege to work together for a certain period of time, informal mentoring is totally different. Informal mentoring often takes place spontaneously, without any formal assignment. The major variation of formal mentoring programs is with respect to the extent that all the participants are provide the required inputs with respect to the whole mentoring process. Formal mentoring programs are designed to meet the development needs of the protege (Allen *et al.*, 2006). Mentor commitment and programme understanding are two factors that have been identified as critical for a formal mentoring to be effective (Blake, 2001). Expressing reservations on mentor commitment in a formal mentoring process, Ragins and Cotton (1999) cautions that mentors should in no way be coerced or introduced into it if they are reluctant.

Mcmanus and Russell (1997) are of the opinion that informal mentoring can be clubbed together with social support and socialization. Further informal mentoring is voluntary in nature. Since, it is voluntary in nature, it has the major advantage of resulting in a more positive emotional relationship between the two and tangible and sustainable outcomes for the mentee/proteges. Scott (1992) opined that informal mentoring would facilitate the increased likelihood of mentors and protege's being compatible with each other and sharing interpersonal similarities. There are also many other social

psychologists who think in the same lines. For instance, Wanberg *et al.* (2003) suggests that if the mentee or protege is having some say in the selection of a mentoring partner, it may increase the likelihood of the individuals being linked in a special sort of relationship that would help in meeting their unique developmental needs. Strong advocating for informal mentoring, Allen and Eby opine that in a traditionally and spontaneously developed mentoring relationships the mentors are more likely to be committed to the relationship with their protege's as it has been initiated voluntarily.

The life of the relationship in mentoring varies but the form of this relationship evolves or devolves through four stages as identified by Kram (1983). They include initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research has adapted a qualitative, literature-based approach. A comprehensive literature review was conducted from articles pertaining to employability and mentoring and a nomological network of both the constructs were established. This is in line with the concept of nomological network proposed by Chronbach and Meehl (1955). They asserted that it is possible to establish the validity of a construct through the examination of its relationship to other constructs. According to Cronbach and Meehl (1955) nomological network would facilitate making clear 'what something i's through stating a variety of 'law's that can be related to different theoretical constructs. The review conducted here has succeeded in presenting substantial work conducted in the areas and examining the relationship between the constructs. It has also aided in effectively arriving at the desired conclusion.

The focus of the present research is to establish the relationship between employability and corporate/industrial mentoring of undergraduate business students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is hypothesized that effective corporate/industrial mentoring will positively aid in enhancing their employability. It is also attempted to provide appropriate suggestions with respect to corporate mentoring and employability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Uses of mentoring programme: Modern organizations, the world over are increasingly relying on mentoring as a tool to effectively enhance aspects like socialization, training, career development (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005; Kram, 1985; Wanberg *et al.*, 2003) and psychological

contract. Allen *et al.* (2004) are of the opinion that Mentoring can also help in yielding a host of important positive benefits like better placement, higher compensation and increased promotion opportunities.

Major corporations of developed countries have devised formal mentoring programme for their employees. These programmes are found to be highly effective in attracting, retaining and developing high performance employees. A few majors US companies who have successfully implemented formal mentoring programmes include Bank of America, Charles Schwab, General Electricals, Marriott International, Proctor and Gamble, etc.

Benefits of mentoring: Mentoring is found to provide a host of benefits to the organization, the mentors and proteges. A large number of career related benefits have been identified as a result of mentoring by a host of researchers (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Hezlett and Gibson, 2005). Some such benefits include mentoring as an effective tool for human resource development (Hezlett and Gibson, 2005), relationship development with co-workers (Hanover and Cellar, 1998; Noe *et al.*, 2002), work teams (Neuman *et al.*, 1989), etc. Mentoring has also been found to directly influence early career success (Aryee and Chay, 1994), satisfaction and advancement (Scandura and Ragins, 1993), much higher compensation (Allen *et al.*, 2004; Ragins and Cotton, 1999) and a variety of other related factors. It has also been found that when the proteges perceived themselves to be in line with their mentors in terms of perceptions and values, there is an increased possibility of a greater liking, affection and satisfaction with the mentors. This would propel them to have higher levels of contacts with their mentors (Ensher and Murphy, 1997). Similarly, Michinov and Monteil (2002) has also found that similarities with respect to demographics and attitudes play an important role in mentoring.

That mentoring offers a win-win situation for both mentors and proteges has been found by many (Hunt and Michael, 1983; Kram, 1985). For instance, Hunt and Michael (1983) are of the opinion that mentoring would provide mentors with renewed career interests, due and appropriate recognition from peers and superiors (Kram, 1985) as well as personal and career satisfaction (Scandura and Ragins, 1994). All these studies points to the usefulness of mentoring.

Points of caution in the mentoring process: If a mentoring process is to be successful all the participants (mentor and protege) should have a clear understanding

of the purpose of the program and their respective roles. Their expectations about the programme should be appropriate and should in no case be unrealistic. According to Eby *et al.* (2004) and Young and Perrewe (2000) any unrealistic expectations could pose major challenge to the success of any mentoring programme. Another important aspect is the mentor protege match (Allen *et al.*, 2006; Hall, 2003). Gray (1988) suggests that it would be ideal to make mentor-protege matches on the basis of similar attitudes. There are many scholars who have identified that mismatches with respect to values, personality and work styles are barriers to relationship effectiveness by protege's and mentors (Eby *et al.*, 2004).

As adequate discussion have now been done with respect to mentoring in organisation, the following section focuses on mentoring of the student community.

Mentoring in academics: Though mentoring in the business world is quite common, its use in academics is just gaining traction (Rohdes, 2008). There are a few inconclusive works with respect to mentoring of college students. A few studies have suggested that mentoring and other related support programmes for college students have succeeded in enhancing their academic performances (Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Kelly and Schweitzer 1999; Waldeck *et al.*, 1997). Rohdes (2008) conducted a study to determine if a formal mentoring programme would improve the academic performance in general; and cognitive and social development of undergraduate students. Mentoring is also found to increase self-efficacy and assist students in setting up and accomplishing their goals. It could also provide them with extrinsic and intrinsic rewards and motivate them to work harder, thereby resulting in improved performance (Rohdes, 2008).

But for a few specific studies there is dearth of literature regarding mentoring of undergraduate business students. According to Rohdes (2008) though a search of an academic database produced a large number of scholarly articles related to mentoring of many diverse groups, less than one per cent of the articles were related to mentoring of college students. If this be the case pertaining to mentoring of college students in general, then the case of business graduates would be of no exception. The focus of this study is on corporate/industrial mentoring of students who are doing business courses and its utility in churning out employment ready graduates in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Corporate/industrial mentoring: As mentioned earlier, though there are a few works regarding academic mentoring (Campbell and Campbell, 2000; Kelly and Schweitzer, 1999; Rohedes, 2008; Waldeck *et al.*, 1997), literature about corporate/industrial mentoring is scarce. It is thus a fertile ground for further examination empirical and otherwise. Corporate mentoring, also termed as industrial mentoring is a mentorship program that is designed to bring together students and professionals who share a common professional interest. In corporate/industrial mentoring students and recent graduates will be paired with experienced business professionals to enhance various employability and leadership skills. This sort of relationship will facilitate the business students to be better equipped as they involve themselves in their early years of professional life. Mentoring will assist the students with their smooth transition from the university to the workforce and helps them acquire all the required employability skills. It also will present them with opportunities to get involved in career development activities. They will be provided valuable inputs with respect to possible career paths as well as industry information. This will in turn inculcate in the students the required confidence and knowledge to be employable and to make informed professional decisions.

Now a lot of innovative methods have been devised in the field of corporate/industrial mentoring. With the help of Information Technology (IT) mentors and students/proteges based nationally and internationally can be brought into mentoring relationships. The mentors and their proteges would meet throughout the mentoring period and discuss all related aspects ranging from study habits to career choices and prospects.

Experiences in countries like Australia, Singapore, UK and USA, show that corporate/industrial mentoring brings in the mind of the proteges the need for a strong work ethic and inculcates in them a strong professional attitude and effective time management. Even developing countries like India has gone a long way in this sphere. Usually mentors encourage their student proteges to watch them in action and teach them the best way of getting the job done. This will enable them in the areas of professional planning, ethical responsibility and personal development. Mentors will also help their proteges in collecting information on various related professions and general work skills. They are also advised and supported in the areas of career direction, networking, etc.

Student proteges are also encouraged to be associated with the activities of appropriate professional organizations. Evidences point towards the fact that many hundreds of graduate and undergraduate students from the Faculties of Business and Economics have

successfully been so far paired with business professionals in a mutually beneficial mentoring partnership. This has helped in moulding them into responsible business professionals. Based on the above literature the relationship of various factors of mentoring are presented in Fig. 1.

Few notable international examples: A review of the literature by Evans *et al.* (2005) and Liabo *et al.* (2005) found that though mentoring programs have been identified to be implemented in around 20 countries, most empirical studies tend mostly to be restricted to a few geopolitical areas like America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. A few notable examples around the globe in the area of corporate mentoring are discussed in the following sections.

In the United States of America (USA) the organisation 'Management Mentor's based outside Boston provides corporate mentoring programs to youngsters so that they can 'develop future leaders and create a more diverse workforce by removing the barriers to equal opportunity'. They have achieved a massive success rate and are having major companies like FedEx, Quaker Oats, Sony Music Corporation, The New York Times Corporation, TJK Corporation, US Fish and Wildlife, etc., as their clients.

In the United Kingdom (UK) the Belfast Harbour and the member organisation of 'Business in the Community' (BITC) have joined together and initiated the 'Responsible Business Internship Programme' to help graduates by providing meaningful work placements. Towards this they will be placed in internships under a mentor. The mentor will provide the required assistance to the interns to become valuable to the company and take advantage of the available learning opportunities. The mentoring is aimed at helping them to meet the day-to-day challenges during the initial stages. The mentor acts as a source of information and guidance and makes the proteges feel comfortable as well as strive to increase their sense of value during the period. The period normally varies from 6 months to 1 year.

Another notable example in UK is that of Siemens (www.siemens.co.uk/careers). The company offers both summer internships and industrial placements. The industrial placements are for a period of one year and this is provided in various disciplines including Business studies. The programme is capable of complementing the in camps learning of students and developing in them the required 'real world' skills. All participants are assigned a mentor to make the most of the relationship. The programme also encourages peer mentoring. Top performers are considered by the company for graduate positions. An innovative extension to the programme is

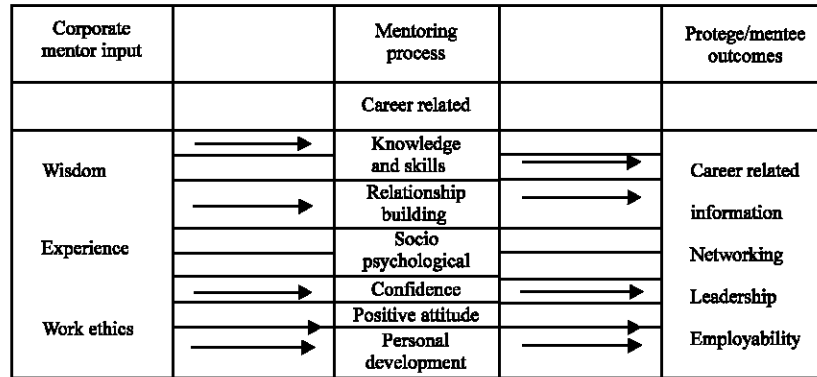


Fig. 1: Framework for corporate mentor input to protege outcomes

that the graduates are required to complete CSR work too. The activities range from university engagement and community volunteering to charity work. The programme envisages comprehensive training and development so that the participants can advance both personally and professionally in their chosen career.

In Singapore, the Singapore Business Federation (SBF) has tied up with National University of Singapore (NUS) and have jointly envisaged the SBF-NUS Global Internship and Mentorship (GIM) Programme. It is a 12 week programme for year 2 and 3 undergraduates (www.sbf.org.sg). The programme is designed to provide the students of NUS on-the-job training and mentoring by CEOs or senior management personnel. The programme aims to sharpen the instincts of students and to guide them on specific career competencies and make them employable.

Since, the economic context of KSA is changing rapidly, there is a need for intergenerational relationships between the experienced and the novices within the country. This can be done through mentoring programs and its need is increasing among KSA’s youth. All these programmes can definitely be replicated in KSA.

Implications for practice in KSA: KSA has a large number of industrial conglomerates who offer employment to massive numbers annually. Corporate/Industrial mentoring, if undertaken in right earnest by these companies, under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, it will go a long way in empowering the youth in general and graduate students in particular and inculcating in them employability skills. For instance the CSR of Saudi Aramco, the second largest employer in KSA, focuses to a large extent on education related affairs. The company has been providing mobile libraries throughout the kingdom and has been sponsoring many educational programmes to the Saudis. In addition to

several educational training programmes to employees, Saudi Aramco has been conducting training programs for non-employees too. These programmes have a twin objective of attracting promising Saudis and to develop a highly skilled Saudi workforce for the future. These programs usually take the form of apprenticeships, college degrees, summer and cooperative programs, etc.

Yet another programme of Aramco is the ‘College Degree Program for Non-Employee’s. Under this programme the company sponsors highly talented students on completion of their College Preparatory Programs. These programmes normally do not focus on the aspect of employability in its strict sense. Corporate mentoring, if adapted by Aramco as an ongoing programme will go a long way in enabling the company to develop a band of highly employable graduates in Saudi Arabia. This again will help in having the advantage of having highly skilled and employable freshers. Towards this the big industrial conglomerates should have tie-ups with the Universities in KSA that offers business education. Even the medium level companies which are large in number, can put in their efforts towards this noble cause. This will go a long way in having a band of industry ready and employable youngsters who will be capable of shouldering the responsibility of propelling KSA to greater heights in the near future.

A notable cross national example in KSA with respect to mentoring, though not in the strict sense is the ‘Saudi-Japanese High Automobile Institute’. Here the Japanese auto companies and the governments of Japan and KSA have collaborated together to develop well trained mechanics. There also exists enormous opportunities for similar initiatives in a host of other industries like travel and tourism, energy, retailing, electronics, etc (Thousand Oaks, California, 2004). Adding corporate mentoring to such initiatives is certain to empower and develop the youth.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it can be concluded that there is a direct positive relationship between corporate/industrial mentoring and employability skills, thereby accepting the proposed hypothesis. As a concluding remark, a portion from the Report of The First Leadership Dialogue in 2008 between Harvard Kennedy School CSR Initiative, Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority and King Khalid Foundation is quoted: firms traditionally work to develop human capital in two ways: by investing in individuals or through strengthening institutions. Successful human capital initiatives can offer businesses three types of benefits:

- They contribute to improving competitiveness (a firm's own and nationally)
- They can improve employee recruitment, retention and motivation
- They contributing to the long-term economic and human development for a stable society

This statement pinpoints the need for having a new look at developing human capital in KSA. There are innumerable large business conglomerates that have the resources and know how to take up corporate mentoring. Corporate/industrial mentoring, if implemented in a scientific and professional manner will go a long way in achieving the twin objective of enhancing employability and developing human capital. This is certain to be beneficial and will provide a bright future for the business students graduating out of universities, the corporate world and the nation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is expected that the present research will stimulate and encourage further development of theory and empirical works in the areas of employability and corporate/industrial mentoring. Constructing replicable model for corporate mentoring will go a long way in implementing it in the near future. It is also expected that future works will be directed toward this direction too.

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