CHARACTERISTICS OF MENTORING PRACTICE BASED ON THE OPINION OF HUNGARIAN EMPLOYEES (BASED ON EMPIRICAL STUDY)

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Abstract

Nowadays there are different forms of knowledge-transfer and mentoring – as one of them – appears among the knowledge management tools in more and more organisations. This method of knowledge transfer is applied at several Hungarian companies. The authors carried out a 2-year study between 2014 and 2015 in order to get to know the possible advantages, disadvantages mentoring practice has. Both qualitative and quantitative researches have been made on one hand with the representatives of the employees and on the other hand with the employers about their experiences regarding mentoring practice. The present study presents some results of the quantative research based on questionnaire – made with employees -, supported by the consequences of the authors gained by the qualitative research.

Key words: mentoring, mentor, mentee

JEL Code: M53, M59

Introduction

Knowledge transfer is one of the most important parts of knowledge transfer. Knowledge sharing can have a lot of forms, such as mentoring, which has quite a long history dating back to ancient times when there were famous mentors and mentees (Alexander the Great – Aristotle). Nowadays this practice is rather widespread in corporate practice. The authors have carried out a 2-year research, where both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to map mentoring in Hungarian practice and its characteristic features from the side of the employees and employers. The present paper shows some results carried out with employees.

Different organisations, institutions and companies are made up of individuals who try to do their best to operate in the most effective and most reasonable way. Those institutions,

which split the big problems into smaller problems and manage them as smaller ones, will become severe and rigorous, especially when the organisation is in the process of undergoing a quick change.

The term 'knowledge management' means corporate policy, practice and tools, which make it possible for the individuals to understand and to get a clear view about how their job contributes to the whole of the company, what benefits they might have and how they can contribute to the more effective and more successful operation of their companies. The most important value and product of a given company is the knowledge itself. The employees have to be encouraged to acquire, to keep and to transfer knowledge (Nemirowsky and Solomon, 2000, Mura and Horvath, 2015). The employees have to learn and apply different techniques in order to be able to convert their know-how systematically into an important knowledge-source for the organisation (Choo, 1996).

Mentoring has become in the centre of attention in the last decade again. Mentoring can be characterized as a very strong and effective tool in the business environment and processes with the purpose of long-term personality-development.

Mentoring is a relationship between two individuals, where the common aim of the participants is to reach their career-goals. Therefore, the long-term personality-development affects all the participants of the process. This relationship does not substitute any corporate protocol. Moreover, it supplements them with on-the-job training and coaching or any other workplace training/education.

Rhodes' (2002) definition about mentoring entrants is one of the most well-known definitions in professional literature. According to Rhodes caring relationship may develop among youth and experienced family friends, teachers, where the older party continuously gives advice, provides guidance to the younger one for the sake of the development of the mentored with regard to his personality and competency. During the time the two parties spend together, a relationship is developed, which is based on mutual respect, loyalty and trust and can later help the younger one to get to adulthood.

David L. DuBois (2005) conceived that mentoring is a rather structured and trustworthy relationship, which connect young people with supporters/mentors who encourage them, give them support and guidance, consequently the competency and personality of the mentored will develop. Mentoring is a vigorously emotional relationship between an elder and a younger person, in which the elder one is a responsible, reliable and loveable participant and he is more experienced in guiding the young ones.

Ehigie-Koang-Ibode (2011) stated that mentoring is an informal relationship, of which primary output is the development of the mentored. However, the main aim of mentoring is educating. The authors at the same time emphasized that this process affects several features of the organisation, for example among others it affects leadership, corporate culture and work capacity.

Bell (2002) phrased that a mentor is a teacher, a leader, with the help of who the mentored could widen and develop his skills and his knowledge. It is also a fact that in the process of a successful mentoring both participants will win from the other's knowledge and interactions (Goodbar- Lewis 2015).

After examining the definitions in professional literature, the following consensus can be drawn: (1) the mentor is an experienced counsellor and teacher; (2) the mentor guides the mentored and supports his development; (3) the mentor and the mentored develop a relationship, which is based on mutual trust.

1   Introduction of the research

As it was previously mentioned, the authors carried out a 2-year research, where they examined this method of knowledge transfer related to Hungarian organisations. The research had two parts. On one hand, in-depth interviews were made with employees from Hungarian organisations, who already participated at mentoring program. This part of the research was useful for the authors to get acquainted with the Hungarian situation and at the same time to get a picture about mentoring practices. It was then followed by the questionnaires, where the employees and the employers had to fill in a research questionnaire on the internet anonymously. Participation in the research was voluntary. The present paper summarizes the results of the researches carried out especially with the employees

Both the in-depth interviews and the quantitative research contained similar questions in its thematic, which could be divided according to the following:
The first group of questions contained questions about corporate features, such as the size of the company, its profile, the role of knowledge in the operation of the corporate and tools of knowledge development.

The second group of questions was about mentoring practice, the practice of mentoring was defined, the skills of the participants were discussed and the factors of the successful protocol was analysed.

The final group of questions revealed the relations and the synergic cooperation in a mentoring practice in the corporate's knowledge management process from the mentees' point of view.

The present paper briefly summarizes the results of the qualitative research. The authors interviewed 30 employees who participated in successful mentoring practice. The companies employing the interviewed employees were from different sectors of the industry, such as IT, security technology, finance, car industry, etc. Almost half of the interviewed were employed at large companies. Based on the interviews, the authors noted the following statements:

- Almost all the employees felt that knowledge plays an important role at their workplaces, and their employers expect the knowledge from them, and they also appreciate it.

- Mentoring protocol was explained according to the classical interpretation in the professional literature, which says that an experienced fellow-worker shares his knowledge with a younger one. Other forms of mentoring, such as reciprocal mentoring was not consciously built in the corporate practice despite the fact that the participants themselves did not even notice that they were using other forms as well.

- The mentoring process can be implemented in several fields of the corporate; one key to its success is volunteership. Programs, which are controlled from above and are compulsory, cannot be that successful. One further reason for successful mentoring can be attributed to the characteristic features of the processes' participants. The presence of corporate culture encouraging trust and the devotion of management towards mentoring processes are also influential.

- The respondents answered that good mentoring practice can have an active role in the value-and knowledge creation processes of the corporate, although at the same time the negative examples can have harmful effects on any other methods of knowledge transfer and especially on the confidential system of the corporate.

The basic aim of the research was to get acquainted with the situation, and then on the basis of these statements did the researchers carry out the quantitative researches. Similar to the previous studies, both of the two parties were asked. Some results of the quantitative research -carried out with employees- will be presented in the followings.

279 people were asked in the questionnaire. The questionnaire for the employers was similar in its structure with the questions of the in-depth interviews; the aim of the first part of the questions was to specify the respondents, then the mentoring programs were characterized,

and finally the connection between this form of knowledge transfer and knowledge management was analysed. In order to evaluate the results, the authors used a one-and more-variable statistical method, such as average, deviation, correlation, factor-and cluster analyses. Although the sample cannot be considered representative, the results provide a picture about the mentoring protocol of Hungarian organisations from the aspect of the employees.

According to the location of the respondents, 48% was from Western-Transdanubia, 16% from North-Hungary, 12% from Central-Transdanubia, while the others were from South part of the Great-Plain, Central Hungary and from South-Hungary. 141 people worked at large companies, 21 people worked at micro companies and the other worked at medium or small-sized companies. As regards the profile of the organisations, they represented different sectors of industry, such as agriculture, trade, construction industry, processing industry, education, finance, transportation and economics, etc.

The first part of the questionnaire asked about the importance of knowledge at workplaces. The respondents had to evaluate on a 5-point Likert-scale to what extent the given statement is characteristic for their organisation. 1 means it was not characteristic at all, while 5 means it was characteristic very much. Table 1 shows the averages and deviations.

Tab. 1 Statements with regard to work (N, Average, Deviation)

	N		Average	Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
My work requires high level of human knowledge.	279	0	3.78	.989
During my work I use several special knowledge elements.	279	0	3.72	1.069
Experience is important in my work.	279	0	4.02	1.023
My work requires continuous learning.	279	0	3.92	1.030
The company provides several trainings to develop my knowledge.	279	0	3.28	1.163
I acquire several knowledge elements from my colleagues during my work.	279	0	3.64	1.043
I could use the knowledge, which I use at my workplace at other companies.	279	0	3.89	.988
If I left the company, I could hardly be substituted.	279	0	3.01	1.078

Source: own table

The results show that the employers expect high-level of knowledge and experience from the employees, and their knowledge is more or less developed on the employers' costs. However it is interesting to see that employees judge their being substituted average, which

involves the risk that the knowledge of employees who left the company will be a loss for the organisation.

One form of knowledge transfer is mentoring, which was analysed by the authors. The respondents had to answer what types of mentoring process they participated in and what were the characteristic of the processes. The evaluation happened similarly, where the 5-point Likert scale was used. 1 means it was not characteristic at all, while 5 means it was characteristic very much. Table 2 shows the averages and deviations.

Tab. 2 Mentoring processes (N, Average, Deviation)

	N		Average	Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
I participated in formal mentoring process.	279	0	3.14	1.145
I participated in informal mentoring process.	279	0	2.95	1.129
I participated voluntarily in the mentoring processes.	279	0	3.46	1.254
Both the mentor and the mentee learned from each other in the mentoring processes.	279	0	3.39	1.142
I used the mentoring process to acquire new knowledge.	279	0	3.95	1.006
I used the mentoring process to fit into the company.	279	0	3.49	1.172
I used the mentoring process for training future leaders.	279	0	2.11	1.151
Mentoring processes were during working hours.	279	0	4.14	1.074

Source: own table

The results of the table support the fact that formal mentoring processes were more frequent in the sample than the informal ones. Knowledge transfer mainly happened in working hours and the aim basically was to acquire new knowledge. It sometimes happened that mentoring was used in order to ease conformity and mentoring programs with the aim to train the future leaders were less characteristic. However, the high deviation figures show that the sample was not on homogenous opinion regarding the given questions.

The authors examined whether there was any correlation between the variables regarding the characteristics of the work (1. table) and the variables of mentoring practice (2. table). The correlation between the variables was analysed by correlation analysis. If there was significant correlation between the statements, then they showed correlation, which was weaker than the average. For example there was positive correlation identified when the more characteristic it was to use special knowledge by the employees at workplaces, the more probable it was to use formal mentoring (Pearson's type of correlation: .215 sign.: .000). The more their work requires continuous learning, the more it was characteristic that the mentor

and the mentee can learn from each other (Pearson's type of correlation: .266 sign.: .000). The more often the employee gains knowledge elements from his colleague during work, the more characteristic it was that the mentoring processes were used for acquiring new knowledge (Pearson's types of correlation: .285 sign.: .000).

Another group of questions revealed the reasons why the respondents used mentoring practices. The authors enumerated several reasons and the respondents had to evaluate them on a 5-point Likert-scale. The evaluation happened similarly, where the 5-point Likert scale was used. 1 means it was not characteristic at all, while 5 means it was characteristic very much. Table 3 shows the averages and deviations:

Tab. 3 Reasons for using mentoring processes (N, Average, Deviation)

	N		Average	Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
In order to develop professional knowledge	279	0	4.32	.890
In order to improve corporate-specific knowledge	279	0	3.96	1.065
Because of career plans	279	0	3.47	1.205
In order to develop communication skills	279	0	3.52	1.249
In order to develop managerial skills	279	0	3.67	1.181
Because of multi-sided problem solving opportunities	279	0	3.85	.976
In order to develop self-confidence	279	0	3.23	1.291
In order to develop professional relations	279	0	3.97	1.035
In order to gain professional experience	279	0	4.18	.957
In order to gain life experience	279	0	3.21	1.261
In order to develop negotiation skills	279	0	3.74	1.056
In order to develop corporate conformity	279	0	3.63	1.065
In order to develop own work structure and system	279	0	3.57	1.080
In order to develop emotional intelligence	279	0	3.06	1.310

Source: own table

From the results of the table it can be seen that developing professional knowledge and gaining professional experience is the most frequent reason for participating in a mentoring process, while the less frequent reason is emotional intelligence and gaining life experience. In order to analyse it further, the authors put the variables into factors. Only one variable was not suitable for making factors, it was the 'Development of conformity', which was excluded by the authors. The other variables were suitable for making factors: KMO and Bartlett-test: .892. Chi-square: 1662.786, df: 78 sign.: .000. In case of three factors the explained fraction

was 63.983 %. The rotation of the factors was implemented by varimax method. The denomination of the three factors was the following:

1. Developing managerial competence
2. Developing experience
3. Developing professional experience and chances

The authors made homogenous groups from the sample based on the above three factors with K-centre cluster-process. The received cluster centres are represented in table 4:

Tab. 4 Cluster centres

	Cluster		
	1	2	3
REGR factor score 1 for analysis 7	-.22732	.33382	-.34079
REGR factor score 2 for analysis 7	-.42045	.76482	-.87101
REGR factor score 3 for analysis 7	-1.22683	.20579	.76656

Source: own table

The following clusters were developed based on the cluster centres:

1. All the three factors represented rather low values with this cluster. 71 respondents belong to this group.
2. In this cluster all the factors showed high values. 129 people belong here.
3. Finally, in the last cluster, professional intelligence and chances were rather characteristic, but the other two factors were negligible. 79 people belong to this group.

The respondents had to define what advantages and disadvantages the mentoring processes can have. As regards the advantages, the most frequent answers were the multi-sided knowledge-sharing and more effective work. The respondents had to define the disadvantages as well. The respondents of the research emphasized constant work control over the mentee and the increasing costs. Finally the authors asked the respondents whether it is important to build relation between corporate knowledge management system and mentoring practices. Some answers of the respondents are represented in table 5:

Tab 5 Relation of importance between mentoring process and knowledge management system

'Logical relation is necessary; mentoring program has to be part of knowledge management.'
'Two tightly connected fields.'
'Yes, because the human capital of the corporate can increase with the help of mentoring programs.'
' Very important, because the mentoring system makes it possible for the mentor to share his professional and other knowledge, therefore knowledge will not be lost, as it transferred to his mentee.'
'It is indispensable not only for the individual's role in the corporate, but also for life its.'
'Without it, it is not possible to step further.'
'Important, because the mentor shares knowledge.'
'Profession-specific knowledge could be easier to acquire with the introductory exercises built on knowledge management system.'

Source: own table

Conclusion

The present paper represents some results of a 2-year research, especially the opinion of employees about Hungarian mentoring systems. From the answers of the questionnaire it could be seen that the respondents participated mainly in formal mentoring processes. The previous qualitative researches of the authors also justify the practice of formal mentoring, thus the results of the two researches correspond with each other. However, it is a fact that at several places the participants themselves did not know that information flow can happen during mentoring between the participants and they can learn from each other as well.

The majority of respondents belong to a cluster, where they judged that managerial competencies, developing experience, professional intelligence and increasing chances are the reasons for mentoring program. These results correspond with the previously mentioned literature as well (Bell, 2002, Ehigie-Koang-Ibode, 2011). Finally, several respondents defined mentoring process as a compatible element of knowledge-management system and not a separate unit.

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