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How Mentorship Is Perceived by Corporate Mentors and Student Protégés

Shaji Kurian and Sanjay Padode

Introduction

Mentoring is being recognized across the globe as a powerful tool for human resource development (Liu et al. 2009). The accepted definition of mentoring is that it is an intense reciprocal interpersonal exchange between a senior experienced individual (mentor) and a less experienced individual (mentee/protégé). Allen and Eby (2007) have defined that mentoring relationships are characterized by feedback, advice, guidance, counsel and support provided by the mentor for the protégé's personal and professional development.

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However, there still exists a striking dearth of knowledge about types of mentoring in different cultural contexts, given that most of the available literature stems from America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand (Evans et al. 2005). Literature on mentoring programmes in the context of local values and cultural traditions is also rare (Pryce et al. 2011), especially in the Indian context.

Researchers have argued that mentoring in different contexts serves different purposes. However, the general definition of mentoring is that it is an intense reciprocal interpersonal exchange between a senior experienced individual (mentor) and the less experienced individual (mentee/protégé). Allen and Eby (2007) have defined that mentoring relationships are characterized by feedback, advice, guidance, counsel and support provided by the mentor for the protégé's personal and professional development.

The cultural differences between India and the West may have different implications on the very foundation of mentoring (Baruch and Budhwar 2006). The characteristics that help to establish and sustain mentoring relationships in Asian countries suggest major differences in mentoring between Indians and low power distant or low collectivistic cultures (House et al. 2004). It is in this context that this chapter is showcasing a mentoring scheme as practised in an Indian business school, possibly the first of its kind.

In the context of fast-changing industries in the post-liberalization period in India, management education institutions are expected to keep pace with changes over time to produce more readily deployable, more industry-ready professionals. However, an ASSOCHAM (2016) study has highlighted that in India, the majority of 5000-plus management institutions do not produce readily deployable management graduates. Furthermore, the study has also brought out the fact that there is a clear disparity between student aspirations and their level of preparation to meet those aspirations as most of these management graduates are often unwilling to 'get their hands dirty'.

A recent study by Ernst & Young and NHRDN (2014) has identified that vision and perseverance along with adaptability and team work were essential skills for succeeding in the emerging competitive world.

The ability to take risks was rated as an equally important business skill for a future manager.

The Indian management education system faces several challenges. Students are not readily employable since many of them come from tier-2 and tier-3 colleges. They have been inculcated with a traditional system of learning and can only reproduce the concepts on paper without an adequate understanding and appreciation of concepts. There is a big gap between what graduates know and what industry requires of them.

Industry experts feel that many students lack certain important skills, like problem solving, decision making, leadership and team management. Therefore, industries waste their capital in training fresh recruits to make them industry ready. Lenin Kumar Kantasamy, SKF GTC, has observed that, 'You ask potential recruits about the technology involved in the making of an automobile, and they'll be ready with the details. If you ask them to design an automobile on their own, only a handful will be able to attempt it with success. Students who don't take up internship roles during their course, often struggle with placements after completion of the course. There is less value addition.'

Hence, in India there has been an attempt in recent years to pay more attention to bridging the gap between industry and campus and improving the quality of education, rather than increasing the number of institutions. The IFIM Business School, a new-age management institution established in India's post-liberalization period, has established a mentoring programme to ensure that its students are more industry ready and more attuned to facing the challenges of leadership.

Corporate Mentoring of Business School Students

The IFIM Business School, located in Bangalore city, was founded in 1995 and is now placed among the top 30 business schools in India. The IFIM is promoted by the Dalal Street Investment Journal Group and is an AICTE-approved institution with an ISO 9001:2008

certification. Currently pursuing accreditation from AACSB, IFIM is also a South Asian Quality Assurance System (SAQS) accredited management institution.

Most recently, researchers are focusing on institutional 'mission' as a key factor in a student learning experience (Pike et al. 2003). The recent interest in institutional mission and its relationship with learning experience was established in few studies (Kuh and Hu 2001). To achieve IFIM Business School's mission, which is to 'nurture, holistic, socially responsible and continuously employable professionals', the business school feels that they have adopted a non-traditional approach along with a regular curriculum to achieve the stated mission. With the changing global market, growing competition and the challenges of managing change over a period of time, the strategy of educational institutions had to change from just imparting technical and theoretical training to the next-generation leaders to inculcating the habit of responsibility and initiative, as well as more clarity on career paths.

The benefits of mentoring on both psychological and career development issues are well established (Kram and Isabella 1985). Mentoring is increasingly recognized as an essential tool for human resource development (Hegstad and Wentling 2005; Liu et al. 2009). The most important benefits to students through mentoring is that it helps give a constructive and relentlessly honest feedback on one's perceptions and actions and provides more clarity to the career (Legum and Hoare 2004). The positive sides of mentoring result in high satisfaction in what they do and greater involvement in activities which they consider important to their career (Green and Bauer 1995).

As an entrepreneur and one of the founding members of the IFIM Business School, author Sanjay Padode has observed that "targeting the real career should be a perfect blend of the aspirations of an individual in terms of what s/he wants **to do** along with what s/he wants **to be**. Generally, preference is given to what somebody wants 'to do' in life, like become a stock broker or an entrepreneur and so on. However, the real career target should also be to dream about what somebody wants 'to be' in life. These choices can be influenced by factors like financial security, social status, fulfilment, power, family, happiness, peace and so on. Therefore, to achieve a more holistic career fulfilment and to

prepare management graduates for the same, a new systematic mentoring approach has been introduced at IFIM.”

The aim of IFIM’s mentoring programme is to enable future managers to answer what one wants to do and what one wants to be—which is the secret to success—and to help students discover their answers to these questions.

The Mentoring Process at IFIM Business School

The IFIM Business School introduced student mentoring as a proof of concept in 2015. Each year students of IFIM Business School are matched with experienced professionals from the industry during their management course. Mentoring is a relationship between two people with the goal of professional and personal development (Kram 1988). Remarkable things happen when people pursue their passions. But passion alone is not enough to produce success. It must be combined with knowledge, guidance and encouragement to bring possibilities to life. Therefore, a more structured approach to mentoring has been introduced at IFIM in addition to the academic curriculum.

Figure 2.1 highlights the flow of various activities in addition to classroom teaching at IFIM to develop employability skills, career direction and focus. As highlighted in Fig. 2.1, objectives of mentoring have to be met in two terms as follows:

Term 1 (SOP Finalization)

- Help in building their statement of purpose (SOPs).
- Understanding and guiding them in choosing their career options.
- Identify the gap between their aspirations and the reality.
- Guiding them to bridge the gap.
- Finalize the students’ SOPs career choice.

Term 2 (Building the Career Path)

- Mentor the student to research careers to build a career path for achieving the outlined purpose.

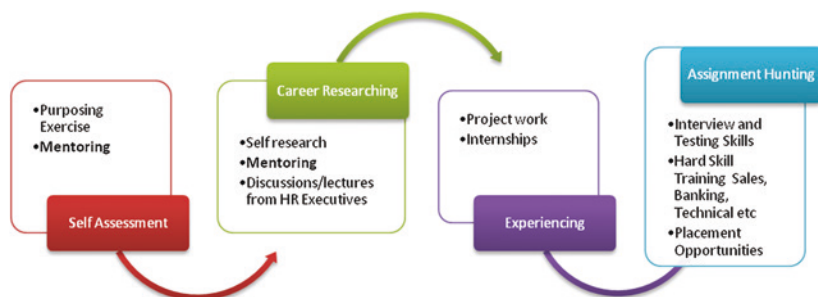


Fig. 2.1 A diagrammatic representation of career progression support across terms at IFIM. Source Reprinted with permission from ©IFIM Business School, Bangalore, Career Progression Path

- Align the career path with choice of specialization.
- Assist in identifying weaknesses and strengths of the student vis-à-vis their career choice.
- Finalizing the career path, specializations, choice of industry projects, readings and certifications, if any.

The detailed step-by-step approach to the mentoring is undertaken in the following stages.

Step 1: Allocation of Faculty Mentors

The first stage of mentoring is the allocation of approximately ten students under IFIM senior faculty mentors prior to allocation with industry mentors. These faculty mentors are to act as the internal mentors for these students throughout their academic tenure. This allocation happens before the commencement of the first term and during the Foundation course.

Step 2: Workshop on SOP

During the Foundation course (within the first month of a graduate joining the programme) experts are invited to conduct a half-day

Table 2.1 SOP template (to be prepared by students at the end of a SOP workshop)

SOP Template	
INSPIRATIONAL DREAM	
<i>What's your life's theme? A passionate, aspiring goal. The big picture.</i>	
BELIEFS	SPIRIT
<i>What you stand for?</i>	<i>What's your energizing principle?</i>
<i>Core beliefs that drive you</i>	<i>Your life force that defines you</i>
GIC (Greatest Imaginable Challenge)	FOCUS
<i>Where do you see yourself in the next 3 years?</i>	<i>What's the single most important thing that will drive your actions?</i>
<i>Stimulating, measurable stretch target/achievement</i>	<i>Towards fulfilling your inspirational</i>
	<i>Dream and achieving your GIC</i>
Name:	
Course:	

Template developed partially using peak performance organization (PPO) approach. Source Adapted from Gilson et al. (2000)

workshop on purposing in life. The purposing workshop aims to highlight the importance of 'to do' and 'to be' aspects in the career progression of the management graduates. The workshop ends with the creation of a one-page document called the SOP (statement of purpose) prepared by every student (see Table 2.1).

Step 3: SOP Presentation

After preparing SOP statements based on purposing workshops, students make a presentation to a faculty team on his/her SOP, which will be recorded for tracking corrections and to capture differing points of view.

Step 4: Prospecting for Corporate Mentors

Calling for application of interest for mentoring is notified well in advance through various online platforms, including LinkedIn, emails, networks like the National Human Resource Development Networks,

and other sources. A large pool of industry mentors from across the country has always evinced an interest in being mentors by filling in the interest form.

Step 5: Orientation to Corporate Mentors and Empanelment

Being a mentor comes with lots of responsibilities in terms of emotional commitment, similar to parental commitment, and in terms of spending quality time with the mentees. The situation is more complex when the mentee does not appreciate the value or necessity of mentoring. An orientation of the potential industry mentors is arranged before the commencement of the mentoring to map the mentors. After the half-day workshop on the expectations and challenges of mentoring, a select team with IFIM deans and Head CCE interact one-to-one with potential mentors and the final list is arrived upon.

The final empanelment of mentors based on the discussions considers the following:

- Fifteen plus years of experience in corporate/profession/entrepreneurship.
- Graduate with an MBA is preferred.
- Successful person with a 360-degree exposure to cross-functional activities during his/her tenure.
- With a passion for mentoring.
- With an inclination for a continuous approach in teaching.
- Able to dedicate and spare time.
- Preference is given to members in the IT city of Bangalore, where IFIM is located.

Final empanelment process is completed once the industry mentors sign the empanelment form or write the consent for being a mentor and agree to fulfil the requirements.

Step 6: Allocation of Industry Mentors

- Each industry mentor is given ten mentees under his/her guidance.
- Mentor and mentee are scheduled to meet/interact a minimum of once a month.
- Each mentor is also supported by a support mentor (faculty from the institution in order to facilitate and effectively coordinate and add value).
- Each one-to-one mentoring session is supposed to last 20–30 min in the presence of supporting faculty.
- The session between student, faculty and mentor could be held at IFIM, mentor's workplace or any other public location (library, coffee shop, etc.).
- In addition to monthly sessions, the mentor may have interactions with the student through emails/Skype/etc., as deemed fit.
- Mentors are given a report on the student in a specific format on a monthly basis or at the end of the term.
- Honorarium to mentors is monthly, offered as a token of appreciation for their contribution.

Defined Goals of IFIM Industry Mentoring

The mentors are expected to guide the mentees in the following areas:

- Help in building their SOPs, which are prepared after the purposing workshop.
- Career research around the mentee's SOP.
- Understanding and guiding them in choosing their career options.
- Identify the gap between their aspirations and the reality.
- Guiding them to bridge the gap.
- Help in choosing their specialization.
- Help in internship/final placements/profession.
- Mentors review the students' academic progress along with the faculty and advice the mentees on the corrective actions to be taken for improvisation.

Final Mentoring Report and Further Action Points

Data captured from the final mentor report (as indicated in Appendix 1) is utilized for various purposes and by different departments. The 'I will statement' of the mentees, which they prepare during the first phase of mentoring, is validated/modified, which in turn helps the student to provide clarity to both their career path and their learning path.

Data from Q1 has enabled the institution to target the right companies and profiles for career placements. Further, the Q2 data has helped in planning specific training interventions to be industry ready (for example: mock GDPI, mock interview, etc.).

Q3 and Q4 are meant to help students to select a specialization to choose industry internships, the area of their project and in final placement support. Since most of the students opting for management education in India are fresh from campus with little or no previous industry experience, it gives students more clarity on learning pathways. Further, Q5 works as a need assessment tool for effectively planning additional workshops and training.

Mentoring Outcomes

The real impact of mentoring programmes can be measured only a few years down the line when mentees really experience the challenges and complexities of corporate/professional life (Aryee and Chay 1994). Therefore, the entire impact of the programmes is yet to unravel as IFIM only introduced the mentoring activity in 2015. However, the outcome of such mentoring programmes can be evaluated at various levels such as:

Outcomes for Programme Process—Some measures of programme quality should be the reflection of a process outcome. These immediate measures can be: a pattern of regular contact; adherence to programme structure; level of satisfaction of various processes by both mentors and

mentees; and, most important, the level of mentors' and mentees' commitment towards the programme.

Outcomes for Participant Experiences and Perceptions—The perceptions of participants are also important measures of quality outcome (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Impact of perceived mentoring relationships on career outcomes, career satisfaction and career commitment has been established in previous research (Arora and Santosh 2016). Therefore, perceptions of mentors and mentees of the entire process and the outcome, of the value of the programme, career opportunities and so on, are also a few important indicators of the programme's effectiveness.

Insights into Participant Perceptions

To gauge student opinion of a new mentoring programme at IFIM Business School, open-ended, unstructured interviews were taken with five PGDM student protégés at IFIM. Based on Miles and Huberman (1994), interviews were conducted, followed by a within case analysis, leading to codes and thereafter relevant categories (see Table 2.2).

To capture the corporate mentor's views on mentoring, from the experience of the first cycle of mentoring, a questionnaire was administered among mentors (11 corporate members participated in this study) and the survey results were helpful in gaining more insights and learning, as reported in Table 2.3.

Conclusion

There are limited studies on mentoring in the Indian context, especially in the light of a different cultural context to the Western context. Ramaswami et al. (2010) found that there is no significant difference in mentoring based on cultural specifications. Both mentees' perceptions of the roles and the positive aspects of mentoring were similar to the views expressed in the Western context. Responses to 'an ideal mentor'

Table 2.2 Insights from a mentee's point of view

Benefits of mentoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real insight into company work • Solving real-life problems • Good networking opportunity • Got connected with mentor's boss who provided valuable insights into starting up e-commerce • Practical insight into theoretical problems (taught to us at college) • Given projects to get us thinking • Taught how to make a robust LinkedIn profile • We received psychosocial support, for example, advice on how to make new friends and expand our network • Possibility of future internship and jobs in mentor's company • Advice on different career opportunities in finance • Greater career clarity • Did practical work: project on balance sheet, coming up with a business plan • Were taught how to present ourselves in a meeting
Problem areas in the mentoring process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am unsure how to fully utilize the mentoring programme • We need more networking opportunities • My mentor is in Hyderabad. There is a disconnect ... he is not able to give that much time • As mentees, we fell behind in some assignments given to us by our mentors • Some mentors gave very little time • Busy schedules of both mentor and mentee is a sore point • The programme should be more systematic ... there is a bias towards protégés who are good at communicating • The mentor should also arrange for some field trips for us • For some protégés the mentor is boring, and advice is not relevant

(continued)

Table 2.2 (continued)

Ideal mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good guide • We had a young mentor, friendly and understanding who could empathize with us • An ideal mentor spends time with each student, does not have a rushed attitude • Our mentor is ideal as he doesn't spoon feed but rather directs us to come up with ideas and only then advises
Ideal protégé	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must have a questioning mind • A good protégé should be a good learner and a good follower • Unsatisfactory protégés are in fact inexperienced
Mentoring relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dissatisfactory relationships should be given more time • As mentor and protégé we shared life experiences • Pairing process: Perhaps protégés could choose their own mentor, so that pairing could be based on emotional connect rather than technical competency • I realize that mentoring is a very special, personal relationship • It is a life-long relationship. My mentor says he will be our life-long mentor; this is an important support system for us

in the Indian context were more or less similar to previous studies in the Western context (see Table 2.2). Eby et al. (2007) portrays the role of an ideal mentor as a developer, guide and coach, as well a good counsellor.

However, in the Indian context, mentees also felt that an ideal mentor should be someone who spends quality time with the mentees. In other words, the personal attention to each of the mentees is considered a valuable component of mentor–mentee relationships in India.

There seems to be a difference in the expected outcome of the mentoring process based on the interaction with mentors and mentees. Both mentors and protégés have differing views on the major benefits of mentoring. Mentors have expressed the view that learning professionalism followed by motivation and positive attitude are the most

Table 2.3 Insights from a mentor's point of view

Aspects to be focused on/covered in the business school student mentoring activity, which is not normally covered in curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How study/curricula are related to and help in career path • Build life skills that benefit the student in life and correspondingly in his career (for example, all round communication, confidence, corporate behaviour) • Experiential learning should be woven into the mentoring programme • Students can do projects under the active guidance of industry mentors • Specific agenda/goal (soft or functional) can be identified for mentee to drive this programme more effectively • Prioritization in life • Students' interests and strengths in line with their career aspirations • Soft skills • Helping one to understand their potential/strengths • Expose mentees to practical situations • A tiered approach based on capability (mentoring, coaching, training)
Suggestions to make the mentoring process more robust and systematic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informal interaction • No structured feedback, such as 'I will' statement • Informality in mentoring, for example, mentoring outside the campus is better • Reduce mentor–mentee ratio • Leave mentors to pull rather than push • Stick to the fundamentals—rigour and discipline • Number of mentor–mentee ratio matters • Segmenting students based on their current skills • Customized approach based on the student's outlook

(continued)

Table 2.3 (continued)

Benefits to students through mentoring (rank-wise)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning professionalism 1 • Motivation and positive attitude 2 • Solving real-life problems 3 • Psychosocial support 4 • Insights into company/department work 5 • Greater career clarity 6 • Networking opportunity 7^a
Mentoring should focus on—according to industry mentors (rank-wise)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposing in life 1 • Behavioural modifications 2 • Knowledge sharing 3 • Career clarifications 4 • Enhancing social commitment 5 • Self-awareness 6^a
Qualities mentors expect from mentees/protégé (rank-wise)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is willing to be mentored 1 • Listens, watches, learns and grows 2 • Asks questions 3 • Strives to give his/her best at all times 4 • Is open and honest 4 • Accepts criticism graciously 5 • Accepts responsibilities 6 • Has courage to try new things 7 • Learns from mistakes 8 • Is respectful and grateful 8^a

^aThese numbers indicate the ranking order of the responses

important aspects of such mentoring activities. This view on mentoring was also validated in Western contexts (Lasley 1996). However, networking opportunities as well as practical insights into solving real-life problems were expected priorities of protégés, whereas career clarity and networking opportunities, according to mentors, were the last priorities of an expected mentoring outcome.

Mentors in the current case felt that psychosocial support was one of the important aspects of mentoring. This may be explained from the specific cultural fabric of Indian society. In high power distant and high collectivistic cultures like Asia, psychosocial support is considered an essential part of the development of an individual. This is also supported by Baruch and Budhwar (2006) who found fundamental

differences in mentoring between Indian and low power distant or low collectivistic cultures in the West.

An attempt was also made to explore what the characteristics of ideal mentoring in a business school are. The mentors in the present case felt that ideal mentoring should focus on helping mentees to identify their purpose in life, followed by support in behavioural modification and knowledge sharing. Mentors also felt that creating self-awareness was the last priority in this context. Findings were not entirely different from the Western context. Lasley (1996) also found that the crucial characteristic of mentors is the ability to communicate their belief that a person is capable of transcending present challenges and of accomplishing great things in the future, which was also validated from the point of view of mentors.

It is interesting to note that in this mentoring programme, although there were some initial differences in approaches of mentors and mentees to the mentoring process, over time a personal relationship was established which grew beyond the boundaries of formal interactions. Said one protégé, 'My mentor says I will be your life-long mentor, as if he's setting our expectations. He said he will take a keen interest in what we are doing in life. I know can fall back on him as a support system. It's been a great experience.'

Appendix 1

Final Mentor Report Format

Name of the student:

• I Will statement. (A statement of what I will do/become in the future.)	
S. No.	Questions
Q1	Where do you rate the student on job winning skills, on a scale of 1 to 5? (1 stand the least)
Q2	Any suggested areas of improvement to be more employable?

• I Will statement. (A statement of what I will do/become in the future.)	
S. No.	Questions
Q3	Which sector will be more appropriate for the student?
Q4	Which specialization will be best suited for the student? Mkt/Fin/Ops/HR
Q5	Does he/she require any special training to succeed in area of specialization? (Kindly mention the specifications.)
Q6	Any other suggestion?

Area of interest	Sector	Special coaching

Name of Support Faculty:

Signature:

Name of the Industry Mentor:

Signature:

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Sanjay Padode is Secretary of the Center for Developmental Education, a not-for-profit society which runs the Institute of Finance and International Management (IFIM). A 1989 graduate from Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, with Honors in M.Sc. (Math) and B.E. (Electrical and Electronics Engineering), he has been a successful entrepreneur from the day he completed his graduation. Passionate about blending technology and innovation in management education, Sanjay is also a member of the Academic Advisory Committee of NIELIT (a scientific society associated with the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, Government of India).



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