

# Outcome Linkage in Formal & Supervisory Mentoring in a Business Organization

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*This study investigates into what mentees and mentors consider are factors that significantly influence the mentoring outcomes, within formal and supervisory mentoring relationships. Based on a qualitative case study approach the paper examines the goals, content and nature of interaction by mentors with mentees in formal and supervisory mentoring programs within a large manufacturing organization in India. The results are presented within two categories: Path goal clarity and Values goal clarity. These findings have significant practical implications for the development and design of formal and supervisory mentoring programs in business organizations in India, argue the authors.*

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## Introduction

The impact of mentoring on protégé career was found to be stronger when comparing “mentored versus non-mentored” individuals, as opposed to the mentoring functions provided to protégés alone (Allen et.al, 2004). Therefore, mentoring functions may be stated to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for establishing the existence of a mentoring relationship. As mentoring functions/roles focus on what a mentor does rather than what a mentee feels there are little distinction across studies with regard to the implications of being in a mentoring relationship (relational mentoring) versus receiving mentoring function (traditional mentoring functions). The mentoring literature is yet to examine the relational processes that drive the formation of high-quality mentoring relationships that are potentially more impactful and are fundamentally different from average relationships (Ragins & Fletcher, 2007). This makes the study relevant in business organizations. The study examines mentoring – outcome linkage in respect of a large manufacturing organization, particularly with respect to the factors in the mentoring process,

linked to the goals, content and nature of the relationship, that may impact mentoring outcomes.

In this study, the mentoring process has been examined both in formal and supervisory mentoring programs. We felt it important to examine the process of supervisory mentoring in order to investigate, if they are likely to impact outcomes other than the psychosocial support e.g., friendship found in earlier studies, and also clarify the fundamental debate that supervisors cannot be mentors. This study tries to derive process explanations as to why mentoring would lead to its outcomes. Despite the amount of mentoring research, few studies have examined processes through which supervisors direct their subordinate mentoring relationships. Based on prior mentoring research, one could extrapolate that a mentor-protégé relationship between a supervisor and subordinate may result in positive outcomes, but the same needs to be tested.

Whether the mentoring process has contributed to the protégé 'significant transition', could be best ascertained by examining the factors in the mentor-protégé relationship process that may have caused such outcomes. Further a 'relationship-rich' environment necessitates examining interdependent work and non-work relationships that contribute to one's growth (Ramaswami & Dreher, 2010).

The study is therefore designed to answer two research questions

1. What are the factors in the process of mentoring in both formal and supervisory mentoring that may influence the quality of relationship?
2. Why are the underlying processes in mentor-mentee interactions different for different types of developmental relationships such as formal and supervisory mentoring?

We expect our study to theoretically integrate mentoring theory with theory on superior subordinate relationships. This investigation is important to academicians and practitioners for three reasons. First, this investigation extends prior mentoring research through examination of the underlying factors that influence the mentoring process – outcome linkages. Second, little research to date has examined the dynamics of supervisor to subordinate mentoring relationship. Thirdly, there are no comparisons of the dynamics of the supervisory with formal mentoring relationship.

### **Literature Review**

Mentorship traditionally refers to collaboration between two individuals (not necessarily in a hierarchical relationship), where one facilitates the professional development of the other, with the intent of optimizing work performance and enhancing career progress (Scandura, 1992; Allen & Poteet, 1999). Mentoring is a process of transferring specific knowledge from the mentor to the protégé (Hendrikse, 2003).

While several definitions of mentoring have been provided, in the past research,

mentoring definitions mostly emphasized career functions, “helped you by supporting your career” (Aryee, Lo & Kang, 1999: 568) or “looks out for you, or gives you advice”(Wallace, 2001: 374) the phrase “is committed to providing upward mobility and support” to the protégé’s career (e.g., Ragins & Cotton, 1991: 942) therefore career outcomes of mentoring became the most significant benefit of mentoring. Psychosocial functions and role modeling were referenced less frequently (Haggard et al, 2011) in the definitions provided on mentoring.

The operational definition of mentoring we have used in this research is as an “off line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking” (Clutterbuck, 2001). The focus in our definition is on relational mentoring, developmental mentoring or diversity mentoring that enables significant transition in knowledge, skill and thinking through a process of open dialogue characterized by suspension of judgments.

The mentoring process has been defined as a working relationship that significantly affected protégé career mobility in their firm (Scandura & Ragins, 1993: 256). This description has the advantage of being broad and inclusive and does not indicate which actions were taken or who took them on behalf of the protégé, hence the mentoring process has not been defined in clear terms, based on the goals, content and nature of the relationship.

While the mentoring process in informal mentoring programs has been

studied stating the distinct phases: initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition (Kram, 1983), there has not been the same degree of attention given to the evolution of formal mentoring relationships (Collins, 1983; Ragins & Scandura, 1997). We know there is an initiation phase when the mentor and protégé are first matched and that there is a separation when the formal program ends. There are no study that offers an empirical investigation of how the formal relationship evolves between those two phases (Blake-Beard, 2001). Similarly, while the leader member exchange construct has been widely studied, the process of mentoring in superior-subordinate relationship has been less so. Also while there have been work related and career related outcomes of mentoring through over 90 or more studies, as per meta-analytic studies, there are fewer studies on the process –oriented predictors of protégé outcomes (Haggard et al, 2011)

### **Formal Mentoring**

Formal mentoring is defined as a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies (Murray, 1991: 14). The purpose of formal mentoring is to support and challenge the mentees to recognize their career potential and to work towards their personal and professional goals (Connor & Pokora, 2007). Formal mentoring can be seen as a strategy, a formalized scheme, ranging from relationships that provide advice and sponsorship to those that are

highly intense, career focused and developmental (Kram, 1985; Gibson, 2004).

Despite the increasing popularity of formal mentoring programs, this area is currently under researched (Wanberg, Welsh & Heslett, 2003; Eby & Lockwood, 2005; Allen, Eby & Lentz, 2006; Baugh & Fagenson-Eland, 2007; Parise & Forret, 2008). Wanberg et al. (2003) state that there are “black box gaps in terms of exactly what and how learning is achieved for both mentors and mentees and what factors contribute (or not) to this.

### Supervisory Mentoring

“Supervisory mentoring is defined as a transformational activity involving a mutual commitment by mentor and protégé to the latter’s long-term development, as a personal, extra organizational investment in the protégé by the mentor, and as the changing of the protégé by the mentor, accomplished by the sharing of values, knowledge, experience, and so forth” (Scandura & Schriesheim, 1994:1589). Supervisory mentors differ from formal mentors in that they have regular opportunities to observe their protégés and are in an organizationally sanctioned position to protect and provide exposure to them. However, supervisors with multiple subordinate protégés must allocate their time, and their mentoring motivations may explain the manner in which they do so. Specifically, mentors are more likely to provide career support to protégés whose characteristics enable them to fulfill their motivations for mentoring.

**Mentors are more likely to provide career support to protégés whose characteristics enable them to fulfill their motivations for mentoring.**

Several theories have been described to understand the basis of mentor-protégé relationships. The premise of these theories is that they are based on mutual learning and development orientations. The theories are on mentoring functions (Kram, 1985), social support or helping (McManus & Russell, 1997), leader-member exchange (Thibodeaux & Lowe, 1996), Transformational leadership (Sosik & Godshalk, 2000), personal learning (Lankau & Scandura, 2002), and human development (Levinson et al, 1978). However, our qualitative model is based on the conceptual framework of the social cognitive model of development.

### Social Cognitive Model

This theory posits that goals influence behaviors of the individuals to outcomes (Lent et al., 1994). The model mentions that individuals develop expectations of performance success through social support systems like mentoring. Expectations are categorized into three dimensions i.e. achievement (e.g., reputation, learning from role), development (e.g., promotion, growth opportunities), and balance, e.g., work-family balance and well-being (Stephens, Szajna & Broome, 1998). The learning support offered influences the individual’s expectation of performance success which in turn in-

fluences his/her beliefs about own ability and finally the outcomes of career decision making and goal attainment (Sosik et al, 2004).

This theory posits that the ability to learn and be focused on the goals encourage developmental relationships including mentoring. The ability to be goal oriented is a stable trait (Button, Mathieu & Zajac, 1996) and the individual seeks to develop himself by striving to learn and focus his efforts on developing his abilities (VandeWalle et al, 2000) by being optimistic, hopeful and persistent, (Dweck, 1999).

### Method

Scholars are of the view that mentoring is in dire need for qualitative research that would provide richer and deeper insights and fuller contextual information of the phenomena being studied. This study adopts the thematic analysis procedure of Braun, Clarke and Wilkinson (2003) as a qualitative analysis tool to explain why and how mentoring leads to its outcomes. Thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyzing qualitative data.

The data used in this study was collected from multiple samples and sources, both from mentors and mentees in formal mentoring programs as well as supervisory mentoring using combination of telephonic and face to face mode. We used purposive sampling to select respondents of the study. We invited mentors and mentees who were

part of the formal mentoring program in the organization in the recent past and were known as effective mentors. We also selected heads of large departments with sufficient managerial experience, to understand the mentoring process in supervisory situations and were known as effective supervisors. Initially 15 mentor-mentee and 15 supervisor-subordinate pairs were contacted for interview. As the coding pattern appeared well developed from the 5<sup>th</sup> pair, 10 pairs under each type of mentoring were included for the study. The profile of the respondents appear in Tables 1 and 2. As all respondents were drawn from a single organization, we were able to control for industry context.

To control for bias and inherent subjectivity, two interviewers were engaged in conducting the interviews. The second interviewer would compare and contrast the information with the first interviewer and we achieved 80-90% agreement on the codification of the data.

### Results & Findings

The two paths that seemed to emerge as overarching themes in the thematic analysis were:

*Path Goal Clarity:* The route to career benefits that deals with the processes of clarifying how a protégé can achieve his career goals and building the protégé self - efficacy and motivation in achieving those goals is termed as path goal clarity

**Table 1 Mentee/Subordinate (Formal/Supervisory Mentoring)**

Respondent code	Dept	Job Title	Total experience
FResp_1(Mentee)	SP	Manager	2 years
F Resp_ 2( Mentee)	CRM	Manager	2 years
MResp_3 (Mentee)	LD1	Manager	5 years
MResp_4 ( Mentee)	GW	Manager	2 years
MResp_5 ( Mentee)	GW	Manager	2 years
MResp_6 ( Mentee)	ETD	Head	10 years
MResp_7 ( Mentee)	RMH	Head	10 years
MResp_8 ( Mentee)	RMH	Manager	2 years
MResp_9 ( Mentee)	LD2	Manager	2 years

**Table 2 Mentor/Superior (Formal/ Supervisory Mentoring)**

Respondent code	Dept	Job Title	Total experience
MResp_1(Mentor)	M M	Chief	15
MResp_2 ( Mentor)	GW	Chief	20
MResp_3( Mentor)	ETD	Chief	30
MResp_4(Mentor)	RMH	Chief	20
FResp_5(Mentor)	Lgl	Chief	20
MResp_ 6 (Mentor)	CGL	Chief	15
F Resp_ 7 ( Mentor)	MDs office	Chief	15
MResp_ 8( Mentor)	Safety	Chief	15
MResp_ 9( Mentor)	SP	Chief	24
MResp_10 ( Mentor)	CEP	Chief	30

**Fig. 1 Initial Thematic Map, Shows Five Main Themes (as per final analysis by Braun & Wilkinson, 2003)**

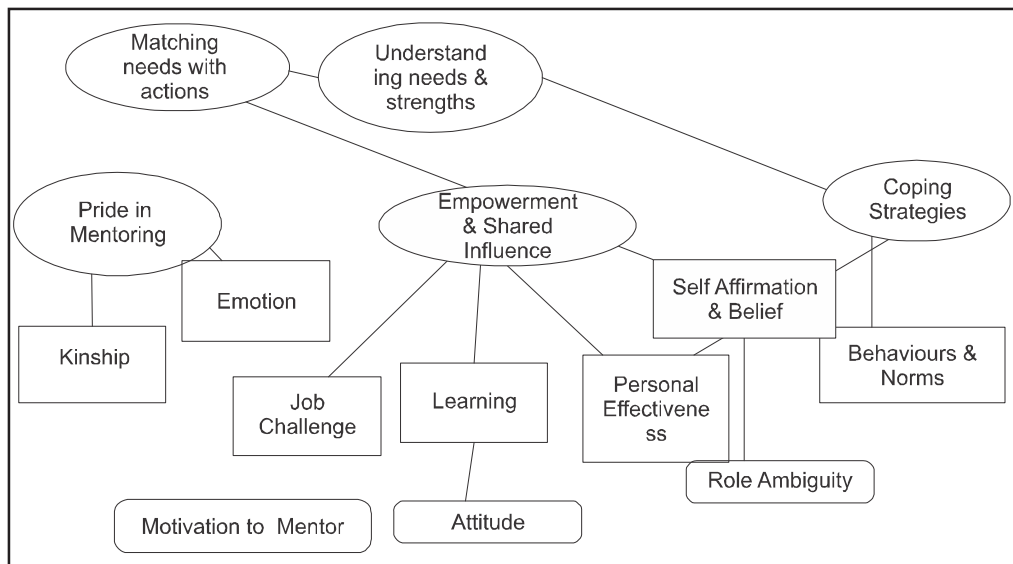
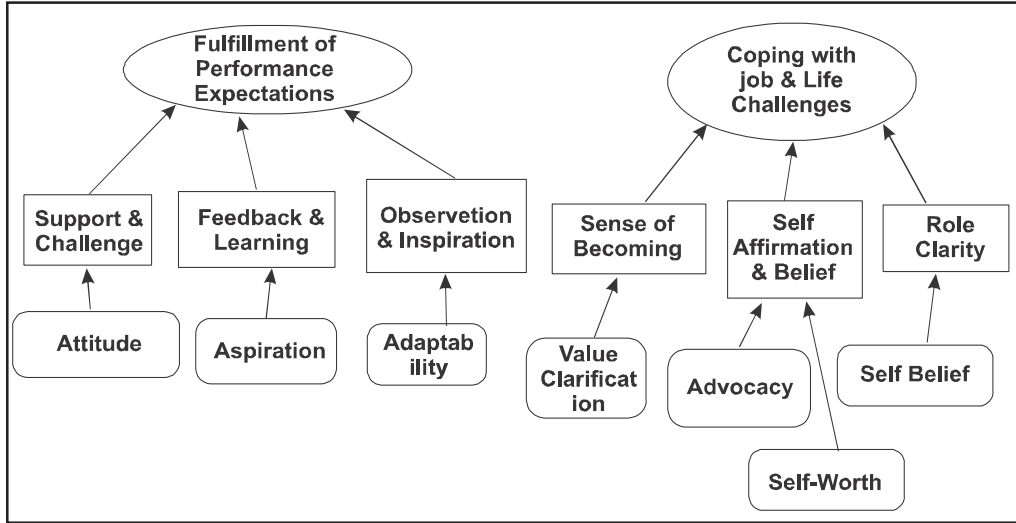


Fig. 2 Developed thematic map, showing two main themes (as per final analysis Braun and wilkinson, 2003)



*Values Goal Clarity:* The path that deals with the process of clarifying the status of the protégé current work life situations, the appropriateness of chosen career and life decisions and whether

they satisfy ones needs and preferences is termed as Values goal clarity.

The mentoring process functions highlight the pre-requisite conditions or

	Fulfillment of Performance Expectations Path Goal Clarity	Coping with Life and Job Challenge Values Goal Clarity
1	Support and Challenge	Self- Affirmation and Belief
2	Feedback and Learning	Role Clarity
3	Observation and Inspiration	Sense of Becoming

**Exhibit 1 Mentoring Process Functions: Path Goal & Value Goal Clarity.**

predictors of mentoring outcomes for transforming the efforts of mentoring others into mentoring outcomes.

The mentoring process-outcome linkage highlights the missing link in the mentoring value chain that merits consideration towards improving mentoring outcomes.

**Theme1: Fulfillment of Performance Expectations – Path Goal Clarity**

Fulfillment of performance expectations is defined here as high quality performance going beyond the job that it is backed by results, (support and challenge) actions (feedback and learning) and behaviors (observation and inspiration), wherein the mentor removes the hurdles and obstacles on the path of the mentee to enable performance success. This is done by first understanding the developmental needs of the protégé and then proposing actions that would fulfill

Process – Global Theme	Definition ( incorporating the organizing themes)	Basic Themes
1. Fulfillment of Performance Expectations- PATH GOAL CLARITY	Fulfillment of performance expectations is about high quality performance going beyond the job, it is backed by results,( support and challenge) actions ( Feedback and Learning) and behaviors ( observation and Inspiration), wherein the mentor removes the hurdles and obstacles on the path of the mentee to enable performance success.	An Attitude is an expression of favor or disfavor toward a person, place, thing, or event (the attitude object). Aspiration is defined as the act of having motivation. Adaptability is the ability to change something or oneself to fit to occurring changes. A daptability has been described as the ability to cope with unexpected dis turbances in the environ ment.
2. Coping with Life and Job Challenge VALUES GOAL CLARITY	Coping is “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person”. Subjective well-being (SWB) refers to how people experience the quality of their lives and includes both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments The ultimate goal of the self is to protect an image of its self-integrity, morality and adequacy Role clarity describes a new employee’s understanding of his or her job responsibilities and organizational role	Self belief: Teops self is to protect an image of its self-integrity, morality and adequacy. Self worth: The self-concept is what we think about the self Value clarification: Values can be defined as broad preferences concerning appropriate courses of action or outcomes. As such, values reflect a person’s sense of right and wrong or what “ought” to be. Advocacy is a political process by an individual or group which aims to influence public-policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions

Exhibit 2 Mentoring Process – Outcome Linkage

the protégé's aspirations/goals in life. The process is governed by the attitude, aspirations and adaptability of the mentor and mentee.

"There was this chartered accountant, who was doing some task at the Tarapur plant, which was not good enough for his ability. I told him: can you think of moving around the finance function. He is now at Bombay House (the headquarters of the Tata Group) and extremely happy", formal mentee. "My mentor was able to remove several confusions in my mind with respect to the job related processes being followed, which helped me understand the importance of my work. Due to him, I will be able to choose the right kind of assignments", formal mentee.

**In the mentoring process there are opportunities for the mentor to help bridge the gap between expectations of a new comer (mentee), and the existing work place reality.**

The above coded data support the fact (category) that in the mentoring process there are opportunities for the mentor to help bridge the gap between expectations of a new comer (mentee), and the existing work place reality and therefore the process is about marrying the mentors capability/competence to reach out to the mentee, based on his attitude, aspirations and adaptability - with the protégé needs.

Most formal mentors in the interviews confirmed that as mentors they

"were observing their mentees from a distance", which helped them provide "appropriate and objective feedback". Some other mentors said that "I keep asking my colleague, the mentee superior, whether he is delivering or not delivering at the work-place, whether he has provided sufficient job responsibility for the mentee to learn and grow. I keep on asking questions. Many superiors are not aware that I am the mentor for some of their subordinates".

"As a result, his mentee who was not at all confident, when he joined the department is now the de-facto plant manager". The supervisory mentor would provide job challenge based on the protégé's individual capability. "The younger subordinates know things that we do not know...simply because it was not in our course, so we let them do...the older ones are diploma holders, so they tell me that if you do this the union will say this, if you say this, they will say that."

The supervisory mentor developed and empowered his subordinates, through involvement in the decision making process and his own attitude of flexibility to change his decisions, based on inputs of the protégé, acknowledging their individual strengths and the likelihood of self to go wrong. The mentee was found to feel always inspired by observing his mentors admirable qualities and harbored a desire to be like him some day. The mentee felt that his mentor was able to remove several confusion in his mind with respect to the job related processes being followed in the organization, which

helped him understand the value of his work. Due to the mentor the protégé felt that he was able to choose the right kind of assignments, which would have implications on his individual performance.

*Analysis & Findings:* There are a few differences between understanding of the process of mentoring by the formal mentor and the supervisory mentor. In supervisory mentoring, mentoring process is conceptualized as the process of reaching out to the mentee through institutionalizing empowering processes e.g involvement in decision – making processes, providing responsibility and challenging assignments, recognition of the strength of individual contribution. In formal mentoring, it is more of matching mentors action with mentee needs and aspirations. There were also differences found in the understanding of the process of mentoring by the formal mentee and the subordinate. While the formal mentee emphasized learning and display of socially accepted behaviors and norms learnt from observing the mentor, the subordinates are in awe of their superiors (whom they look upon as mentors, role-models) and want to acquire their skills and competencies.

The similarity in the process in both the situations of formal and supervisory mentoring was familial/kinship brother, family member and emotional connections.

### **Theme 2: Coping with Life & Job Challenges –Values Goal Clarity**

Coping is defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts

to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or “exceeding the resources of the person”. One of the key mentor attributes that emerged during analysis of the qualitative data that led to the mentee coping with job and life challenges was the mentors’ attribute of pride in mentoring and advocacy. This factor explains why the mentor helps the protégé at a more personal than at the professional level. The mentors took pride in being selected as a mentor and although the time frame was suggested in the formal mentoring program to be year-long, they assumed it to be a life-long responsibility. This would reflect in the attitude towards the mentee, helping him to feel self – assured and enhanced their image of self-integrity, morality and adequacy and enhanced their subjective well-being (SWB) that refers to how people experience the quality of their lives and includes both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments. “My mentees were putting up a cultural show (Parichay) and they wanted me to attend. I was in Mumbai and told them that I will not come. I changed my program and reached Jamshedpur. Just at 5.30 PM, that day when their program was about to start. They saw me and it gave them lot of satisfaction. Chote-chote cheez can make a huge difference.” (small things can make a big difference) – formal mentor.

“When my mentee was confused which department to choose- TQM or Sinter Plant, I gave her both sides of the picture. Frustration is natural in any organization. People would want to leave. I used to give them different formula

many angles. Don't look at K(money)..." (laughs...)-formal mentor.

"When I came to the department I found that this chap was actually a genius and he has a very unique way of working and then I tried to understand what is the reason for his insubordination, absenteeism ...so it started from there and now he became one of the best officers in the company" - supervisory mentor.

"She taught me certain basic details.....I used to tell her for whatever reasons I used to tell her...that I don't want to work here. I want to resign ...she used to tell me Ms X people are the same everywhere... so that was a very big lesson for me ...human beings are same everywhere" - supervisory mentor.

The underlying theme of the above quotes was that the mentor through helping the protégé cope with job and life challenges and was able to help the protégé understand their professional identities, and what they can become in their role and work context. The protégé identifies with the mentor, his relationship with the organization and other spheres of life (Kram, 1985), resulting in satisfaction with life and career satisfaction.

Through the aforesaid actions of the mentor, the protégé was able to clarify the appropriateness of the chosen career and life decisions and whether it satisfies his own needs and preferences for career growth. Thus, the process vari-

able that influences the path of value clarity leading to life and career satisfaction is the ability of the mentor in helping the protégé cope with job and life challenges.

**The process variable that influences the path of value clarity leading to life and career satisfaction is the ability of the mentor in helping the protégé cope with job and life challenges.**

While coping with job and life challenges would initially lead to subjective outcomes, it may eventually lead to objective outcomes as well. Also through coping with life and job challenges protégé is impacted first at the personal level but it was found to eventually impact at the professional levels also. This could set new future directions of research, where mentoring process may be studied longitudinally to understand the "tipping point" when the relationship can move from subjective outcomes to objective outcomes or from more personal to a professional level.

*Analysis & Findings:* We found that both in formal and supervisory mentoring, the mentor helped the protégé cope with life and job challenges that required pride and advocacy. The mentor's ability to advocate the cause of the protégé seemed to affect both formal and supervisory mentoring and helped the protégé grow both personally and professionally. The protégé in the mentoring process was always inspired through observing his mentor. However this element of the process led to differing outcomes, depend-

ing upon the protégé needs, capability of the mentor to understand the protégé needs and the priorities and context of the mentorship program in the organization.

### **Summary & Findings**

The significant finding of our study is that the mentoring process reflected that psycho-social mentoring which acted as the underlying factor between both the dominant overarching themes, arrived at during the study, i.e. path goal clarity and value goal clarity that served as the explanatory mechanism between mentoring and its outcomes. This finding is a significant departure from the Western literature on mentoring, where career support functions of sponsorship and protection also seem to play a role in the mentoring process. Our findings indicate that socio-cultural context may also influence mentoring dynamics and hence must be taken into consideration in designing formal mentoring programs.

**Socio-cultural context may also influence mentoring dynamics and hence must be taken into consideration in designing formal mentoring programs.**

While both supervisory and formal mentoring processes were geared towards fulfillment of performance expectations, the way of looking at it is quite different. While the formal mentor would try to remove obstacles and hurdles, to accelerate the learning, the supervisory mentor will focus on creating processes,

sensitizing the subordinate to the need to involve others.

While the path undertaken by the mentor would be different in formal and supervisory mentoring, there were no significant differences in their perception of the factors that influence this relationship. However our data shows that there may be differences in the perception of the protégé depending upon the career context. The new comers may seek ways to cope with job and life challenges, although the mentor is motivated towards fulfilling performance expectations. The subordinate on the other hand would evaluate the mentoring relationship towards fulfillment of performance expectations, whereas the superior as a mentor may focus on providing coping skills.

### **Implications**

This is the first known study that examines through qualitative research, the relationship between protégé perception of mentorship quality and protégé outcomes. Through the study of the dynamics of the mentoring process by examining the goals, contents and nature of the relationships, an attempt was made to unfold the reasons for the mentees success both work and career related. Most business organizations would like to design mentoring processes that are both efficient and effective, in order to provide the organization the needed competitive advantage. The mentees and subordinates in the study were able to implement the suggestions and advice of their mentors due to fulfillment of their performance expectations, which played the pivotal role

in their personal growth and development and that influenced the output of performance. Further research into mechanisms to strengthen fulfillment of performance expectations by the mentor- formal and supervisory may be a proactive step for long term organizational success. As there were no significant differences in the protégé perceptions on the processes involved in mentoring with respect to both formal and supervisory mentoring, organizations may create a universal mentoring process through focus on strengthening the process mechanisms.

#### Future Research & Directions

Our study guides future researchers to use coping skills and fulfillment of performance expectations as the mediating variables between psycho-social mentoring support and performance outcomes. Our qualitative study also indicated several other variables that may be taken up in future such as mentors advocacy and pride factor, role clarity of the protégé in the mentoring process, attitudinal orientations of the mentor, aspirations and goals of the mentor and protégé and the change orientation and adaptability of the protégé and mentor, their subjective wellbeing and its impact on the mentoring outcomes.

Our current study on the process-outcome linkage acts as pointer to the fact that the effect of mentoring process on performance may be toward not only task performance but also contextual performance, such as team, career, OCB, innovation and job performance (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997).

#### Limitations of the Study

Like other research studies, this study is not without limitations. The study did not include informal mentoring relationships or peer relationships, where the sense of mutuality and equality may influence the process dynamics differently. It may be possible that since in the organization studied, there was already in existence of healthy work relationships, the process factors may vary in other organisational contexts that must be studied.

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