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PEER COACHING: A TOOL FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is aimed at analyzing the effectiveness of peer coaching in the organizations. Peer coaching can be defined as coaching and support given by colleagues working in the same hierarchy to expand explore and improve skill sets or behavioral aspects to solve the problems in the workplace. This paper reviews various research reports and their descriptive study. After studying various articles and papers related to this subject it can be inferred that peer coaching helps to improve collaborative ideas of the employees and there by delivering the highest quality products and services leading to increased customer satisfaction. Peer coaching also helps in building personal capabilities to match performance demands and reinforcing business practices and retaining talent in an organization more effectively. Peer coaching is directly linked with the job satisfaction and engagement of the employees hence improves the productivity of the organization. Peer coaching presently is seen as a narrow aspect and hence companies are failing to leverage its potential. This paper tries to explore the scope of peer coaching in organizations to encourage learning and development of employees.

KEYWORDS

peer coaching, learning, development.

INTRODUCTION

Today businesses are operating in a "VUCA" environment. In environment for businesses to thrive it is expected that the employees are flexible to learn and unlearn things at a fast pace. It has therefore resulted in change in employment patterns and also formed high levels of stress environment around job in the organizations (Ashkanasy&Holmes, 1995). Employees with a varied set of skills who can adapt themselves to these fast changes are desired. Therefore, the key to career growth lies in continuous learning. It's the individuals who have to assume responsibility for their career development. Learning nowadays has moved from one time learning to a continuous process. (Guindon & Richmond, 2005).

History always tells us that education and work have never been well coordinated. To cultivate an atmosphere of learning and ensure growth and development of the organization is herculean task for the managers in the industry (Burns, 1995). It has been widely acknowledged that developmental relationships at work like mentoring helps employees to strengthen their ability to work. (Kram & Hall,1989). In a typical setup of such a relationship a more experienced employee helps a junior colleague to grow by allotting assignments and by providing guidance and feedback on the same. Psychosocial support and positive career outcomes come forward in the process.

Mentoring process in its traditional way has always been a learning process (Mavrinac, 2005). Today however, the reality is that there is a severe resource constraint, and a behavioral gap between the mentor and the mentee, hence few senior managers ready to take up a mentoring role. (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs,1997). Today the most expected things from a mentor is an emotional support and informational guidance for the workers. Continuous learning is not possible if the organizational culture and the leadership don't encourage their employees to learn and grow continuously.

The concept of peer coaching evolved in the above mentioned situation. The concept initiated in teaching profession where teachers regularly observed each other and with feedbacks and suggestions partners improved their skills (Ackland, 1991; Joyce & Showers, 1980). Peer coaching is a high-impact low-cost powerful tool that can be easily implemented. It is a developmental interaction that helps partners to pick up the pace in their learning career. The fundamental principle of Peer coaching is to help each other, which will in-turn help to develop each other's abilities and improves the functioning in the organization.

Professional development of both the partners involved is the main agenda of peer coaching. In simple words it's a give and take policy. Peer coaching has capacity to accelerate career learning with mutuality and reciprocity as its inherent characteristics. Over the year's psychological studies have established that people learn more from social groups rather than individually.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study peer coaching as tool for the development of employees in the organization.
2. To recommend strategies for effective peer coaching in the organization.

DISCUSSION

Continuous professional development, growth and success require all employees to keep learning continuously. Learning support is essential for development of both micro and macro level skills such as adaptability for a specific job (Hall, 2002). Employees for their professional development need to have political and social skills (Siegel, 2000). Development of peer relationships helps learning career. Relationship interactions are essential for both individual development and organizational success (Eddy, 2003)

RELATIONAL APPROACH OF LEARNING

A relational approach to career is based on the fact that one of the important methods for learning is through interaction with others (Hall & Associates, 1996). Human beings have always stayed and developed around societies which have the centrality of relationships, acknowledge multiple viewpoints and learn from each other (Gallos, 1989). In learning with others, individuals attain a better sense of vision, purpose and self-understanding (Walsh, Bartunek, & Lacey, 1998).

Bringing colleagues together to learn and grow is the essence of peer coaching (Kram, 1996). Career growth starts with self - knowledge. It reinforces the identity and allows an individual to later collaborate with others. Learners have to be sensitive towards each others needs and interact effectively. Unlike traditional approaches that emphasize on autonomy and individual domain peer coaching encourages interdependence (Kram, 1996)

PEER COACHING IS DIFFERENT FROM TRADITIONAL COACHING

The contribution of mentors has been important in the development. Helping people with a wide range of personal and professional problems such as psychosocial support (feelings of self-esteem and acceptance), strengthening the individual capacity to be a leader in his profession and helping them to adapt to changes in the environment (Kram, 1985). Mentoring facilitates individual learning but is highly monitored. In VUCA times past experience and accumulated knowledge cannot guarantee success every time. The relevance of traditional role i.e. a senior directing a younger employee will be undermined in the future. The old models thus would be no longer be the guidelines for future situations. Hence, the learning from previous experiences could be a disadvantage.

Colleagues are more likely to associate themselves with the ambiguity and lack of certainty in day to day work. Peers can contribute to of psychosocial and vocational support and also help in sharing knowledge (Eby, 1997; Ensher, Thomas, & Murphy, 2001). One of the biggest drawbacks of traditional mentoring in organizations is that nomination of some employees precludes the opportunity for other motivated employees. This leads to dissatisfaction and eventually affects the performance of such employees. In a peer learning culture however numerically there can be a greater participation among the workforce. (Bryant, 2005). Thus such formal peer leaning models are becoming popular in organizations.

PEER COACHING AND PSYCHOLOGY

Partner training is a form of specialized development tool that facilitates mutual learning career. People have thrived in a give and take relationship. At the bottom of each of us lies a selfish attitude that questions the benefits of doing an activity. A mutual relationship which flourishes in a peer coaching satisfies this. Working with learning partners is a way to improve class-specific skills. In collaborative classrooms for example the natural environment of learning is optimized (Buzbee, Klein, 2005). In peer learning effective care by training partner's person is essential. Therefore, it requires a personal reflection on the actions of other. Through the process of reflection of cognitive and spiritual aspects the development of professional and personal dimensions takes place. This allows them to share emotions, social and political processes, knowledge of the body and spiritual awareness while solving problems. Thus co-training and learning process which is based on the self-awareness demands attention to self.

PEER COACHING AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF CAREER

Peer coaching capabilities keep evolving in an individual over different stages of his career.

In the beginning of career for example, it increases confidence and the ability to adapt to rapid changes in the organizational life. In later stages deeper levels of analysis and transformational learning are essential for professional development.

ESSENTIALS FOR PEER COACHING TO SUCCEED

Peer learning is a developmental activity where both the partners learn. Unlike the hierarchial traditional learning systems where it's the tutor who teaches the pupil here both the partners are benefitted. This is where peer coaching is different from mentoring as it doesn't focus on a single gainer. For such a peer developmental activity to take place positive regard, mutual understanding and trust are essential. (Ragin and Kram, 2007)

One of the characteristic features of the Peer coaching is equivalence of the colleagues (Siegel, 2000). It removes the important power dimension that otherwise is evident in a senior junior relationship. People who are peers at same level share critical communication (Siegel, 2000). Peers can work on learning opportunities with a common goal of mutual learning. Also there is sensitive consideration of professional and personal issues. Peer coaching helps in gaining alternate view of the problem. Professional and Personal development of each other is an essential attribute of this coaching. In the process they seek to gain a thorough understanding of subjective experience.

Learning in peer coaching is self-paced and requires colleagues to investigate and understand their own strengths, attitudes, assumptions, beliefs and mental attitudes. Each participant chooses subjects of personal interest for exploration and expression. In a successful relationship colleagues listen consistently, understand feelings and keep the each other in positive regard. (Rogers 1973)

Organizations today are willing to experiment with peer coaching. Firms act as sponsors and offer platforms to bring peers closer on a regular basis. Organizations today help employees to set specific goals to support each other's learning and development objectives. Emotional competencies are related to the goals. Companies today are investing in the construction of ethical framework down and identify elements that bind team and ensure personnel development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section attempts to recommend few strategies and ways which would make peer coaching more effective:

TNA: Training need analysis is necessary to get to know about the gaps in competencies which need to be improved in employee to get better productivity. Identify the gaps which can be filled. Then decide for which type of coaching has to be given. In some cases, peer coaching works better than any other technique but it doesn't always work. To have a good developmental impact peer coaching has to be planned and implemented well. Complete support of the coach should be involved in the whole process and integrity of the coach is a major factor which needs to be considered. Coachee should be interested in developing them self because a peer coach's role is more of giving advice and guidelines to coachee which will help him to find the answer them self. Organizational culture is another important factor which needs to be considered while recommending for peer coaching. Not all the organizations encourage peer coaching since its more into development of the employee but not much into result oriented in monetary terms.

Pairing of coach and coachee defines the success of protégé. This is the most important consideration, both coach and coachee should agree completely for the process. Prior notice has to be given regarding the purpose of the coaching program and both of them don't agree whole heartedly the whole purpose get ruined. There should be a precise plan for the coaching and peer coach should make sure that coachee feels free and independent to interact and as questions. Coachee should be taking coach's feedbacks positively and accept the challenges whole heartedly. This is possible only with a good relation and trust that coachee has on the peer coach.

Continuous feedback between coach and coachee: Peer coaching should be for mutual benefits of coachee and coach. Feedback need to be taken from both to ensure improvements is happening and process doesn't go too friendly or too formal which may kill the purpose of peer coaching. It is not advisable to measure the exact improvements or keep an assessment procedure after the coaching. Rather trust the coach and give him freedom to guide to transform the coachee in the way organization requires. But still supervision has to be there as a form of feedback to make sure the purpose is getting done.

CONCLUSION

Participants from the peer coaching circles are finding the experience more regarding their personal development and learning and the career growth. Learning's through peer coaching were sometimes so important for several employees that they decided to continue to meet even after the official commitment had completed (Parker, Douglas T. Hall and Kathy E. Kram, 2008). Their research also established that senior executives who led these peer groups reported that they learned as much about themselves as they did in their junior colleagues. There is evidence that suggests that mental support and trust that people gets from colleagues in organizations and especially peer coaching leads to continuous development. Organizations like Microsoft encourage peer coaching for increasing organizational effectiveness and personal productivity (Peters, 1996).

After analyzing and interpreting the research papers it can be concluded that peer coaching could be more effective in apt situations if both the employees getting engaged are comfortable with each other and the organizational culture supports it. Peer coaching is considered as helping hand for employees from a same status and so both parties will be actively participating in the process which results in better outcome. A peer coach takes up a role of a critical friend who gives ample support and enough challenge that pushes the partner beyond his limits.

In any hierarchical organization an employee is most likely to have to have more peers than mentors thus leaving employees with a choice of choosing their peer coaches. Since there is no hierarchy mentioned in peer coaching relationship it's easier to have good communication and support which may not be that easily attained in a formal relationship. From organizations point of view peer coaching is definitely a cost effective technique to improve competencies of employees.

It can also be established that peer coaching can accelerate both technical learning and leadership learning. Peers working in product development teams, for example, have access to unique resources and a platform for getting honest and direct feedback which motivates the employees and improves productivity. In short peer coaching, with no doubt, has a great potential to accelerate the learning process and developing requires competencies in employees.

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