



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT

CONTENTS

Sr. No.	TITLE & NAME OF THE AUTHOR (S)	Page No.
1.	A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF ACCEPTANCE OF MENTORING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GULF COUNTRIES <i>DR. IMRAN HAMEED & DR. NAZIA RASOOL QAZI</i>	1
2.	ROLE OF USER FEES IN ETHIOPIA: A CASE STUDY OF JIMMA UNIVERSITY SPECIALIZED HOSPITAL, SOUTH WEST ETHIOPIA <i>DR. DEVI NAIR & KORA TUSHUNE</i>	6
3.	EXPORT GROWTH OF NON – OIL SECTOR IN OMAN: THE ERA OF LIBERALIZATION <i>DR. THRESIAMMA VARGHESE</i>	13
4.	CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT IN THEORY & PRACTISE <i>DR. QADAR BAKHSH BALOCH, IMRAN ULLANH KHAN & SHAHED JAN</i>	17
5.	CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND PERFORMANCE OF PAKISTANI LISTED COMPANIES - A CASE STUDY OF SUGAR SECTOR <i>KAISER RAFIQUE YASSER</i>	23
6.	STATE OF FLEXIBLE CAREERS FOR THE WOMAN PROFESSIONAL IN INDIA <i>SAUNDARYA RAJESH</i>	31
7.	WHAT DRIVES THE PERFORMANCE OF COMMERCIAL BANKS IN ETHIOPIA? <i>DR. DEEPAK KAPUR & ABEBAW KASSIE GUALU</i>	38
8.	NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN BUSINESS EDUCATION <i>KRISHNA PRIYA & DR. K. S. CHANDRASEKAR</i>	43
9.	CREDIT MANAGEMENT OF INDIAN COMMERCIAL VEHICLE INDUSTRY <i>N. VELMATHI & DR. R. GANESAN</i>	48
10.	EVALUATION OF PASSENGER SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY IN INDIAN RAILWAYS - A CASE STUDY OF SOUTH CENTRAL RAILWAY USING RAILQUAL <i>M. DEVI PRASAD & DR. B. RAJA SHEKHAR</i>	53
11.	A STUDY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION AND SHIFTS IN GLOBALLY MOBILE STUDENTS <i>DR. Y. V. REDDY & D. M. DESHPANDE</i>	58
12.	DIMENSION OF FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE OF CEMENT UNITS IN SOUTH INDIA - AN EMPIRICAL STUDY (Z SCORE ANALYSIS) <i>DR. R. SRINIVASAN & C. U. TIRIPURA SUNDARI</i>	64
13.	AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS OF FINANCIAL LEVERAGE, EARNINGS AND DIVIDEND: A CASE STUDY OF MARUTI SUZUKI INDIA LTD. <i>DR. SANJAY J. BHAYANI & DR. BUTALAL AJMERA</i>	69
14.	SERVICES MARKETING DYNAMICS – AN EXAMINATION OF SPORTS SPONSORSHIP STRATEGIES OF U. K. MARKET <i>DR. S. P. RATH, DR. BISWAJIT DAS & CHEF. ANANT BHAMKAR</i>	73
15.	NPA'S SIDE EFFECT AND IT'S CURATIVE MANTRA <i>DR. B. CHANDRA MOHAN PATNAIK, DR. IPSEETA SATPATHY & AROOP KUMAR MOHAPATRA</i>	77
16.	THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN SELF DEVELOPMENT OF DOCTORS AN EMPIRICAL STUDY <i>M. N. R. MANOHAR & A. V. SATYANARAYANA RAO</i>	81
17.	RISK MINIMIZATION IN SPOT AND DERIVATIVE MARKET <i>DR. SUBRATA MUKHERJEE & DR. SAMIR GHOSH</i>	87
18.	IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS (IPA) TO EXPLORE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE – EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE <i>SUBASHINI R & SAMUEL S</i>	93
19.	GOA TOURISM: MYTHS AND REALITIES <i>DR. HIRANMOY ROY</i>	98
20.	SPIRITUALITY AND MANAGEMENT <i>V. NITHYANANTHAN & DR. B. KALPANA</i>	103
21.	ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH: EXAMINING WORKPLACE PRACTICES AND WELL-BEING <i>DR. R. PRABHAKARA RAYA & P. SIVAPRAGASAM</i>	107
22.	EMPLOYEE SIXTH PAY COMMISSION: ESTIMATION OF JOB SATISFACTION AMONG CENTRAL GOVERNMENT <i>DR. RAJESH KUMAR SHASTRI & MALAVIKA SINHA</i>	111
23.	PRODUCTIVITY CHANGE IN THE INDIAN HEALTH INSURANCE BUSINESS: A MALMQUIST TOTAL FACTOR PRODUCTIVITY ANALYSIS <i>DR. SUMNINDER KAUR BAWA & RUCHITA</i>	115
24.	THE IMPACT OF CAPITAL ADEQUACY REQUIREMENTS ON PROFITABILITY OF PRIVATE BANKS IN INDIA - A CASE STUDY OF J&K, ICICI, HDFC AND YES BANK <i>DR. KHALID ASHRAF CHISHTY</i>	122
25.	AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON EFFECT OF WELFARE MEASURES ON EMPLOYEES' SATISFACTION IN INDIAN RAILWAYS <i>DR. ASIYA CHAUDHAY & ROOHI IQBAL</i>	130
	REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK	138

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A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF ACCEPTANCE OF MENTORING FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN GULF COUNTRIES

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ABSTRACT

Human Resource Development is a necessity in this competitive global economy. Educational institutions are hit by financial constraints and different priorities. A cheap and feasible method for Human Resource Development is through Mentoring. However, faculty is reluctant to accept this tool for personal development. This paper explores the perception, acceptance and willingness of academic staff to participate in mentoring activities. A cross sectional study was conducted in a College of Higher Education, in Oman to assess the perceptions and acceptance of mentoring by the faculty. Ninety three staff members were included in the study, using self administered questionnaires. The results of this study show that majority of the staff have clear perception and display willingness to accept and participate in the programme. However, majority are reluctant to become mentors, while are happy to be mentees. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help all institutions of higher education to plan their staff developmental programs accordingly.

KEYWORDS

Mentoring, Human Resource Development, Higher Educational Institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Quality awareness is predominant in all organizations, and in this competitive market all educational institutions are working overtime to achieve the standards set for accreditation and acceptance. All educational institutions rely heavily on 'quality' human resource to provide good education to the students. The outputs of the students in international examinations, acceptance in the job market and prestige of the institution are factors that attract more students to these institutions. However, the educational institutions often pay little attention to the need for human resource development, which is essential in this recession hit global economy. Many institutions with vision and well set strategies are now turning towards continued professional development or human resource development, to survive in this competitive era.

This paper deals with the concept of using mentoring to enhance the human resource potential in the institutions of higher education in Oman. The cultural diversity in teachers in Oman makes continued professional development quite challenging. Adding mentoring to it is like adding fodder to a fire. However, it is an excellent method of human resource development.

Learning organizations are characterized by their commitment to the development of their human capital. Service industry, especially the education sector, relies heavily on their human resource. Unfortunately, due to financial constraints, the focus is more on the service delivery rather than the growth and development of its manpower. Funds are usually not allocated to staff development, resulting in neglect of this vital component.

However, certain measures that can be adopted to upgrade human resource skills base, without much financial support from the management. Mentoring is one such tool that can be used effectively in developing human resource, indigenously. Especially in the education sector, where teachers are dedicated to impart instruction to students, can also be used to contribute effectively to their self learning. This study explores the perceptions and acceptance of this tool among academic faculty of educational institutions in the Gulf.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Human resource development is critical in all kinds of organizations. However, in service industries like, health and education, where human resource is the backbone of its working environment, HRD takes a new meaning altogether. Historically the skills and competencies of teachers have played a key role in the quality of teaching and learning (Kirkpatrick, 1998). Modern research shows that professional development of the teachers' skills and methodologies have a strong influence on the learning environment and consequently on the achievements of students (Borko, 2004).

In this global village, quality is the catch phrase in all spheres of life. Best practices and quality go hand in hand. For an individual to keep up with the best and be on top of his work, he has to strive for continuous professional development (CPD). Although CPD is for the benefit of the individual, it does not absolve the organization from its responsibility of providing suitable opportunities for development to its employees. The concept of professional development in the educational institutions still needs to be streamlined and focused, as it is in its nascent stages (Scribner, 1999).

Most organizations are quickly adopting the concept of HRD for their employees. The HRD concept has three main objectives. Firstly the organization benefits from the skills added to the repertoire of its employees, as their performance improves. Secondly the employees have the advantage of acquiring specialized skills for their job and their performance is enhanced. Thirdly the employees add value to their skills base and hence their marketability increases (Werner & DeSimone, 2005).

However, most employees are unaware or in some cases apprehensive of the CPD concept. Many see accepting CPD interventions as acknowledgment of their professional weakness (Russell, 2009). That is not the case. No one knows everything, nor can anybody be perfect in all spheres of their chosen specialization. Moreover, there are many attributes and aspects of one's working environment.

HRD can include different means both formal as well as informal, to help teachers develop their professional skills and competencies (Grant, 1994). These include the acquisition of new skills, adopting better approaches in pedagogy, upgrading knowledge in new developments in the subject content and resources. This is all the more important in the modern era, as there is a paradigm shift towards learning outcomes of the students, which require a focused and structured approach to staff development (Frye, 2008).

One of the many interventions that can be used for CPD is mentoring. Mentoring is perceived by different people in many varied forms. For this study, mentoring is defined as; "a developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else." (DOT Handbook, 2010)

A mentor is a person who facilitates personal and professional growth in an individual by sharing the knowledge and insights that have been learned through the years. He is a teacher, problem solver, motivator, coach and a guide all rolled into one. He provides the mentee, who is an achiever, groomed for advancement opportunities to excel beyond the limits of his or her position. To achieve this, the mentee has to be a good learner, decision maker, initiator, risk taker and goal setter. It is the desire of the mentee that can make him excel and achieve excellence through mentoring (DOT Handbook, 2010).

A talented professional may be accomplished in his/her professional domain, but may have lesser developed interpersonal or administrative skills. The lesser secondary skills do not take away the importance or significance of the professional competence of a worker. However, acceptance of one's gaps in different soft skills, provide an individual opportunities to develop these areas and become a holistically more accomplished person (Russell, 2009).

Mentoring in the workplace has the potential of providing benefit for both the employee as well as the organization. It is beneficial for every level of employees and staff. For new recruits, it provides opportunities to learn the organizational culture and the 'ropes' in an effort to be amalgamated into the system. For people in their midcareer or at higher levels, mentoring provides opportunities to stay informed about new technological trends and to convey experiences and wisdom for continuation and posterity (Dalton, Thompson, & Price, 1977; Hall & Kram, 1981; Levinson, 1978).

In case of the organization, mentoring helps in reducing the shock of entry for newcomers, helps prepare for advancement and provides a socializing mechanism for its employees (Levinson, 1976). Staff who have undergone this process usually are less confused, frustrated and alienated with the organization. In return the organization can develop and nurture talent in its employees (Digman, 1978), pass on core values and practices and reduce undesirable turnover (Dalton et al., 1977; Levinson, 1976; Missirian, 1982).

Mentoring can be used in special circumstances as well, in addition to the predictable dilemmas of newcomers and mid career professionals. When those employees who have reached a plateau are required to mentor newcomers, it often stimulates personal growth and development in them as well (Hall, 1980; Hall & Kram, 1981). Mentoring can also play a positive role in fostering acceptance and gelling in marginalized and polarized groups within an organization (Missirian, 1982; Phillips-Jones, 1982).

Although the role of mentoring is quite well established, however, the organization also needs to adapt this vital technique for CPD of its employees. For this certain conditions must exist within the organization before mentoring can be applied. Firstly, a proactive and open environment is needed where all members of the organization can freely interact and cultivate relationships between all hierarchical levels to be able to achieve their developmental goals. Secondly the organizational members must have interpersonal skills to build the supportive relationships as well as have a willingness and interest in doing so. Thirdly, there must exist a reward system within the organization's culture and norms to value and encourage relationship building within the employees (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Tichy, 1983).

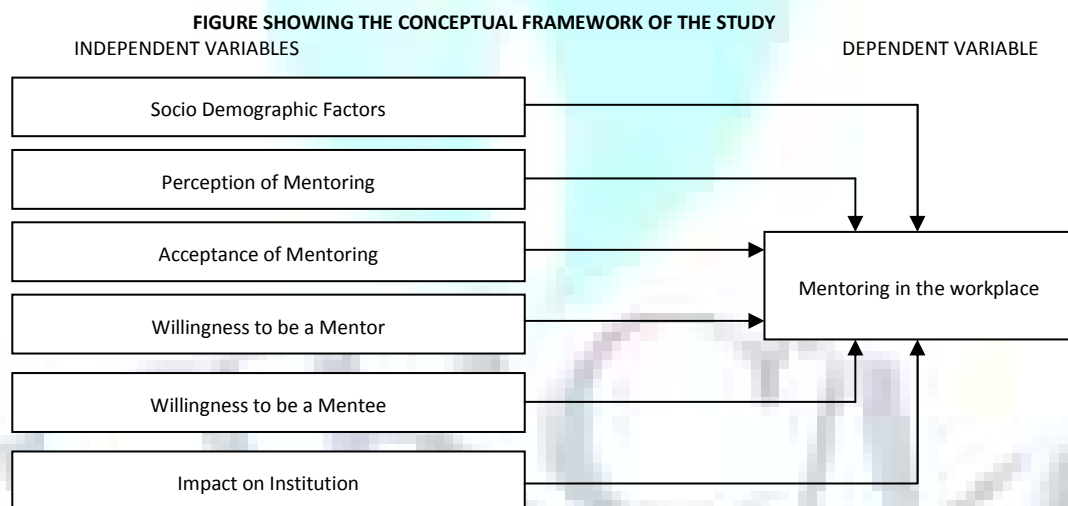
RESEARCH QUESTION

This study intended to tease out the apprehensions, many employees feel about the concept of CPD through mentoring which is one of the many interventions available for personnel development. The specific questions this study addressed are:

1. How do employees feel about mentoring in the workplace?
2. What is the acceptance of peers as mentors by the employees?
3. Are employees willing to become mentees?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework used in the study is depicted in the figure below, showing the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.



MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

This was a cross sectional study carried out in an educational institution of higher learning in Dakhliya region in the Sultanate of Oman. Using a self administered questionnaire distributed to 96 number of respondents, during January 2010.

The questionnaire addressed the acceptance of the concept of mentoring in the teaching institution by the employees. The perception of the staff about the concept and how it could be used for CPD purposes. For the sake of detailed analysis, variables were added to the questionnaire to cross tabulate the perceptions of the employees based on their socio demographic and cultural backgrounds.

The data were compiled using standard software package to compute the measures of central tendencies. Further analysis was performed on the data to see correlations if any, between the results and the socio, cultural demographics of the respondents.

FINDINGS

The self administered questionnaire was distributed to 96 participants, in an institution of higher learning in Oman, during January 2010. Out of the 96 participants 83 responded by returning the completed questionnaires. Thus the response rate was 86.5 %. The description of the characteristics of the respondents is displayed in the following table.

TABLE SHOWING SOCIO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC OF RESPONDENTS

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	20	25.3
Male	59	74.7
Age		
< 30	9	11.8
31 to 40	41	53.9
41 to 50	20	26.3
> 50	6	7.2
Range 25 to 62, mean 38.7 SD 7.57		
Discipline		
Business studies	17	20.5
Engineering	21	25.3
Information Technology	14	16.9
English Language	25	30.1
Admin and support services	4	7.2
Nationality		
Indian	51	61.4
Omani	7	8.4
Pakistani	5	6.0
Philippines	3	3.6
European and Westerners	15	18.1
Others	1	1.2
Qualifications		
Doctorate	16	19.3
Masters	56	72.3
Graduates	6	7.2
Undergraduates	1	1.2

Out of the total respondents, the distribution by gender showed a quarter (25.3%) were females and three quarters (74.7%) were males. The age wise distribution showed that the minimum age was 25 years and the maximum was 62 years. The mean age of the respondents was calculated as 38.7 years with a standard deviation of 7.57. The department wise distribution showed that 20.5 % belonged to the Business Studies, a quarter (25.3 %) were from Engineering disciplines, 16.9 % from Information Technologies groups, 30.1 % from the English Language centre and 7.2% from administrative departments.

The qualifications of the respondents reveal that 19.3 % possessed doctorates, a little less than three quarters (72.3 %) had masters degrees, 7.2 % had bachelors and 1.2% possessed undergraduate degrees. The group showed a wide diversity of ethnic backgrounds. A little less than two thirds (61.4 %) belonged to India, 8.4 % were Omani, 6.0 % were from Pakistan, 3.6 % from Philippines, 1.2% from Tunisia and remaining 18.1% had a European or Western descent.

TABLE SHOWING THE RESPONSES TO RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Statement	Low	High
Perception of mentoring as a tool for human resource development	12 (14.5%)	71 (84.5%)
Acceptance of mentoring in the workplace	15 (18.3%)	67 (81.7%)
Willingness to participate in the mentoring program	19 (21.7%)	64 (78.3%)
Willingness to become mentors	28 (34.1%)	44 (65.9%)
Willingness to be mentees	26 (31.7%)	56 (68.3%)
Benefits of the program for your organization	14 (17.3%)	67 (82.7%)

In response to the questions regarding the acceptance and perception about mentoring as an intervention to be used in CPD activities, the respondents gave the following answers. The rating was based upon a ten point Likert Scale. This ten point scale was used to give more depth to the responses, and also an effort was made to push the respondents to give a positive or negative response and not ride the fence, as is often done in odd numbered scales.

In response to the questions about how the respondents felt about the concept of mentoring, the mean was a 7.81 with a SD of 1.91. This showed that most of the respondents felt good about the concept of mentoring. Detailed analysis showed that 12 respondents or 14.5% did not feel good about the concept being introduced in the college. The remaining 71 respondents or 84.5% were comfortable with the idea.

As for the acceptance of the idea of introducing mentoring as a CPD intervention, the mean response of 82 participants was 7.39 with SD of 2.27 on a ten point Likert Scale. The data showed that the respondents were very open in accepting the Mentoring concept in the college. Detailed analysis showed that 15 respondents (18.3%) did not accept the idea of mentoring to be introduced in the college. Whereas 67 or (81.7%) of the respondents were quite happy to accept the concept being implemented in the college.

In response to the query that would the participant like to be part of the mentor – mentee relationship, the mean response out of ten score was 7.28 with SD of 2.34. Detailed analysis showed that 19 respondents or less than a quarter (21.7%) did not wish to be involved, while 64 or (78.3%) were happy to be part of the program.

When asked if the participants would like to be mentors if needed, 82 responded with one abstaining. The mean response was 6.35 with SD of 2.64 on a ten point scale. Thus the overall rating was in the affirmative. However the detailed analysis showed that 28 respondents (34.1%) did not wish to be part of the mentoring team, while 44 or (65.9%) were willing to mentor others if required.

Similarly in reply to whether the participants would like to be mentees, 82 responded while one abstained. The mean response was 6.74 with SD 2.59, on a ten point scale. Out of the 82 respondents, 26 or less than a third (31.7%) declined to be mentees, while 56 or more than two thirds (68.3%) were willing to become mentees.

When asked if the mentoring program would be of benefit to the staff, 81 responded while 2 abstained. The mean score was 7.4 with SD 2.14 on a ten point scale. A very small number of 14 respondents corresponding to 17.3% felt that there would be no or little benefit to the college staff. However 67 or 82.7% of the respondents felt that the program would benefit the staff of the college.

TABLE SHOWING CROSS TABULATION BETWEEN RESEARCH ITEM AND GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

Research item	p-value
Perception of mentoring	0.002*
Acceptance of mentoring program	0.177
Willingness to participate in the program	0.371
Willingness to be a mentor	0.199
Willingness to be a mentee	0.647
Beneficial for the College	0.048*

* Significant at 95% Confidence Interval

When correlation was studied between the gender of the respondents and the benefit of the mentoring program, a statistically significant relationship was determined to exist with a Chi Square value of 12.497 df 2, and p value of 0.002. No statistically significant association was established to exist between gender and acceptance of the mentoring program in the college with a Chi Square at 3.462 df 2 and p value of 0.177. No statistically significant association was found between gender and the desire to participate in the mentoring program with a Chi Square of 1.985 df 2 and p value of 0.371. There was no statistically significant association found between gender and desire to be a mentor Chi Square of 3.225 df 2 and p value 0.199. Similarly no significant association was determined between gender and the desire to be mentees in the program p value 0.647.

TABLE SHOWING CROSS TABULATION BETWEEN RESEARCH ITEM AND NATIONALITY OF RESPONDENTS

Research item	p-value
Perception of mentoring	0.111
Acceptance of mentoring program	0.203
Willingness to participate in the program	0.077
Willingness to be a mentor	0.318
Willingness to be a mentee	0.201
Beneficial for the College	0.065

Regarding the nationality and the mentoring program following were the correlations seen. No statistically significant association was seen between the nationality of the respondents and the acceptance of the mentoring program in the college with a p value of 0.203. A very vague association could be seen between the nationality and participating in the program at the college with a p value of 0.077. No statistically significant association was established between the nationality of the respondents and the desire to be a mentor with a p value of 0.318. Similarly there was no statistically significant association found between nationality and the willingness to be mentees with a p value of 0.201. No statistically significant association was established between nationality of the respondents and the perception of the program being beneficial for them at the college, with a p value of 0.111.

TABLE SHOWING CROSS TABULATION BETWEEN RESEARCH ITEM AND AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Research item	p-value
Perception of mentoring	0.426
Acceptance of mentoring program	0.658
Willingness to participate in the program	0.232
Willingness to be a mentor	0.130
Willingness to be a mentee	0.082
Beneficial for the College	0.838

When correlation was studied between age and perception of benefits of the mentoring program, no statistically significant association was established between the age of the respondents and the perception of mentoring with a p value of 0.426. Similarly no statistically significant association as found between age and the acceptance of the mentoring program at the college (p value 0.658). No significant association was established between age and the desire to participate in the mentoring activities (p value 0.232). No statistically significant association was seen between age and the desire to be a mentor (p value 0.130). Similarly no significant association was seen between age and being a mentee (p value 0.082). There was no association seen between age and the beneficial effects of the program for the college (p value 0.838).

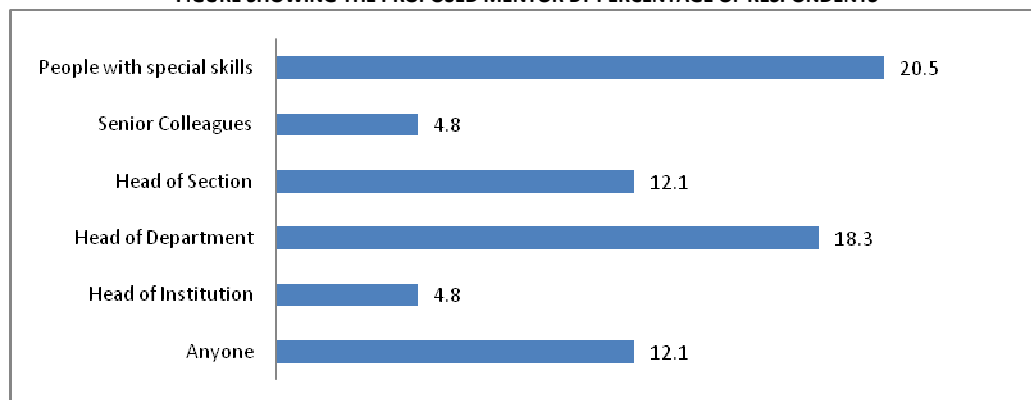
TABLE SHOWING CROSS TABULATION BETWEEN RESEARCH ITEM AND DEPARTMENT OF RESPONDENTS

Research item	p-value
Perception of mentoring	0.332
Acceptance of mentoring program	0.239
Willingness to participate in the program	0.694
Willingness to be a mentor	0.424
Willingness to be a mentee	0.011*
Beneficial for the College	0.047*

* Significant at 95% Confidence Interval

Correlation studies between the departments and the mentoring program showed the following trends. No statistically significant association was established between the discipline of the respondents and the perception of the mentoring program (p value 0.332). Similarly no significant association could be seen between the discipline of the respondents and the acceptance of the program (p value 0.239), or between the discipline and the desire to participate in the program (p value 0.694). No significant association could be demonstrated between the discipline of the respondents and the desire to be mentors (p value 0.424). However a statistically significant association was established between the discipline of the respondent and the desire to become mentees (p value 0.011). Similarly a statistically significant association was also demonstrated between the discipline of the respondent and their long term perception of the program being beneficial to the college with a p value of 0.047.

FIGURE SHOWING THE PROPOSED MENTOR BY PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS



In response to the question as to who should be a mentor, the respondents came up with a variety of suggestions. Out of the 83 respondents 51 or 71% proposed one mentor or more. Of those who had suggested mentors, 10 (12.1%) respondents felt that anyone could be a mentor. Contrary to these 4 respondents or 4.8% nominated the head of the institution as the most appropriate candidate to be a mentor. Sixteen respondents or 18.3% proposed the head of the department as a suitable mentor. Ten participants or 12.1% suggested that the line manager or in this case the head of section would make a good mentor. Four respondents or 4.8% felt that only senior members of the faculty could be entrusted with the responsibility of mentoring. Seventeen respondents or 20.5% nominated mentors having specific attributes like experience, knowledge, willingness to share, commitment, and empathy among other social values.

CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the responses of the actual beneficiaries from the mentoring program, it can be concluded that the vast majority of teachers are very positive about the suggested program. The acceptance of the proposed program is high among the respondents. Most of the respondents displayed their desire to be a part of the mentoring program. As for being mentors, most of the respondents were willing to accept others to be their mentors, but were a bit hesitant to become mentors themselves probably being uncertain if they possessed the qualities needed to be mentors. Whereas most of the teachers were desirous of being mentees to self improve and enhance their skills. Regarding the beneficial effects of the mentoring program, most of the respondents felt that the program would have a strong beneficial effect on the teachers and participants.

The choice of mentors varied among the respondents of this study. The largest segment of respondents felt that it was important for mentors to have specific attributes and values to be successful as mentors. A sizeable number of respondents felt that people who were senior, and in line management would make good mentors.

Mentoring seems to have a significant place in the professional development programs in institutions of higher education in Oman. The willingness of the teachers to accept mentors augurs well for their continued professional development.

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