

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

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This edition is about mentoring in the South African organisational context. Although extensive literature exists on the topic of mentoring, the current state of mentoring in the South African organisational context is under-researched and not yet well explored, particularly in the context of employment equity. This special edition on mentoring therefore aims to provide an overview of current research, practices and experiences regarding mentoring in the multi-cultural South African organisational context.

Studies have shown that mentoring relationships can benefit the mentee (or protégé) and the mentor, and that informal mentoring appears to be more effective than formal mentoring. The value of mentoring appears to be linked particularly to the nature of the developmental relationships created through the mentoring process. Developmental relationships at work are key learning resources which facilitate increased work effectiveness and employee fulfilment. They offer a way for people to continue to learn to build their own capacities. As a source of meaningful feedback and psychological safety for reflection, these relationships also contribute to the growth of the individual's self-knowledge and his or her ability to seek and use feedback in the future. It is through such reflection that organisations and their members are most likely to create the conditions that facilitate the growth of developmental relationships to sustain them at work and in their careers. Research indicates that employees engaged in some form of developmental relationship such as mentoring are more successful in their careers and have greater feelings of career satisfaction. In the context of employment equity, developmental relationships are especially useful for historically disadvantaged groups who probably at this stage of their career development are in a greater need for career support. Studies have also shown that the mentoring relationship offers the most powerful learning as it provides both task-related learning and socio-emotional learning that affect the individual's adaptability and identity over a long period of time.

The articles included in this special issue cover the following topics:

- the nature and concept of mentor and mentee competencies and a proposed framework of competencies based on an extensive qualitative survey conducted around the world by David Clutterbuck;
- the development of a normative instrument as a tool in identifying and developing mentors in the South African context (Karen Janse van Rensburg and Gert Roodt);
- a qualitative investigation of the expectations of and perceived challenges to white male and female mentors and white and black female mentees in a formal mentoring programme (Sonia Pinho, Melinde Coetzee and Dries Schreuder);
- a qualitative investigation of the factors that contribute to the quality of the mentoring relationship as experienced by white male mentors and mentees and African female mentees (Nelise Gilmore, Melinde Coetzee and Dries Schreuder);
- a qualitative investigation of the impediments to effective mentoring as experienced by black and white female mentees with a taxonomy of recommendations for reducing these barriers in the workplace (Kevin Stone and Melinde Coetzee);
- a qualitative investigation of the practices employed by three South African companies to implement and sustain their mentoring programmes (Marina Hattingh, Melinde Coetzee and Dries Schreuder);
- a quantitative analysis of how individuals' perceptions of employment equity (EE) and black economic empowerment (BEE) relate to organisation-related commitment and whether individuals' perceptions of the mentor's role mediate the relationship between EE, BEE and organisation-related commitment (Karen Janse van Rensburg and Gert Roodt); and
- a qualitative exploration of the possibility of utilising mentoring as a vehicle in institutionalising corporate ethical practices (X Goosen and LJ van Vuuren).

The research presented in this issue shows promise for future investigations. We trust that the findings of the studies will provide a starting point for continued and more rigorous research on the role and value of the mentoring relationship in addressing the unique challenges faced by the South African business community.