

MENTORING AS A TOOL TO SUPPORT INNOVATIVE WORK BEHAVIOR OF EMPLOYEES

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Introduction

The significance of innovation for effective organizational performance and productivity in today's digital work environment is widely acknowledged. Innovative employee behavior, focusing on generating workplace innovation, is seen as crucial for enhancing organizational competitiveness in complex, turbulent environments (Janssen, 2000; AlEsa, Durugbo, 2022; Montani et al., 2022). It is a sustainable competitive advantage for organizations, vital for long-term survival and success (Abstein, Spieth, 2014), requiring sustained effort and special management attention (Agarwal, 2014).

Employees' ability to generate and implement new, useful ideas is critical to organizational innovation (Scott, Bruce, 1994; Montani et al., 2017). Companies focusing on human resource development, including personal and professional development, enhance innovation (Patil, Chettarjee, 2014). Empirical research on employees' innovation perceptions and managerial traits shows that innovative work behavior (IWB) positively affects product development, organizational processes, market entry, job satisfaction, and overall performance (Akhigbe, Bibiebi, 2017; Mishra et al., 2017; Santoso et al., 2019; Akram et al., 2020; Janssen, 2000; Shanker et al., 2017).

Research on the drivers of innovative behavior is worth noting. A number of factors have been studied as antecedents of IWB, including organizational climate (Shanker et al., 2017; Scott, Bruce, 1994), leader-member exchange commitment (Agarwal, 2014), passion for inventing and performance expectations (Yuan, Woodman, 2010). In general, these studies point to external institutional factors, such as intellectual property rights (Ederer, Manso, 2013; Eckartz et al., 2012), compensation systems (Erat, Gneezy, 2016), but also internal factors influencing innovative behavior at the individual level, such as leaders motivating employees, enhancing their creativity, and knowledge management capabilities (Mittone, Morreale, 2022). Studies have also focused on finding information about the actual effort that simulates the innovation process (Buchanan, Wilson, 2014) or the work of creative employees (Brügge-mann et al., 2016; Ostermaier, Uhl, 2020).

At the same time, the impact of some factors on stimulating the innovative behavior of employees is far from being resolved in the literature, such as the impact of mentoring (its various forms) on the growth of innovative behavior of employees. To address the gap in the extant literature, this study focuses on the role of mentors and

mentoring processes in fostering employees' innovative behaviors in the workplace. A quantitative questionnaire survey was conducted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of mentoring focused on innovative behavior at work on employees' well-being and commitment to work?;

RQ2: What are the correlations between mentoring focused on idea exploration, idea generation and idea implementation and employees' innovative behavior in the workplace?;

RQ3: What is the impact of face-to-face mentoring and e-mentoring on employees' innovative behavior?

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between the form of mentoring processes and innovative behavior of employees in the organization. The findings refer to an analysis conducted on a research sample of 527 employees participating in mentoring processes.

Theoretical framework

Innovative work behavior

In a competitive environment, innovation is crucial for enhancing competitiveness at organizational, group, and individual levels (Janssen, 2004). Innovation involves extracting value from knowledge through creation, diffusion, and transformation, leading to new or significantly improved products or processes (Raykov, 2014). Innovative work behavior (IWB) is the intentional generation, promotion, and application of innovative ideas in the workplace (Janssen, 2000; Akram et al., 2020), encompassing the creation and implementation of fresh ideas to improve performance.

Innovative behavior includes generating, introducing, and implementing new ideas, which is a complex process with various motivations and challenges (Cerne et al., 2017; Wisse et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2015). This multi-stage process begins with employees identifying new opportunities or problems, finding support for their ideas, and ultimately implementing these innovations in their role, team, or organization (Scott, Bruce 1994; Wisse et al., 2015).

While innovative behavior is distinct, it is often confused with creativity or initiative. Unlike initiatives focused on self-implementation, innovation behavior encompasses the entire change process (Deng et al., 2022). IWB involves individual efforts towards the development and application of new ideas, products, procedures, and processes, impacting the individual, team, or entire organization (Yuan, Woodman, 2010; Deng et al., 2022).

Employee innovation behaviors enable employees to successfully perform difficult and complex tasks that require intense effort. They make it easier for employees to cope with work stress or work-related strain (Janssen, 2000). Innovative behavior generally requires individuals to have the energy to find new ways to solve problems and

continuously make self-adjustments based on changes in the environment (Garg, Dhar, 2017; Luu, 2019; Yang et al., 2021). This means that employees must have sufficient resources and invest them in creative development. Therefore, it is very important for the success of companies to stimulate and nurture the innovative behavior of employees.

Role of the mentor

The process of innovation involves three stages: idea generation, promotion, and implementation. The generation stage focuses on creating new products, practices, and services, influenced by employee motivation. The promotion stage aims to strengthen these ideas and overcome organizational resistance, requiring strong organizational support. The final implementation stage actualizes these ideas into new products, services, and work procedures (Janssen, 2000).

Innovation is improvement-oriented and develops from goals to benefit oneself and/or others (Forgeard, Mecklenburg, 2013). Support and self-promotion orientation can enhance an innovator's potential (Montani et al., 2022). Newman et al. (2018) studied the impact of supervisors' entrepreneurial leadership style on employee innovation.

Organizational factors, particularly institutional support for employee engagement, are crucial for fostering innovation (Kwon, Kim, 2020). Perceived organizational support for creativity and innovation enhances employees' willingness to adopt innovation goals. Leaders should listen to and support new ideas for their development and implementation (Shanker et al., 2017).

Leadership plays a significant role in motivating employees towards innovative behavior by meeting their basic psychological needs and fostering autonomy, competence, and interpersonal relationships (Bagheri et al., 2022; Iqbal et al., 2020; Kimbu et al., 2021). Participative leaders, involving employees in problem-solving and decision-making, positively influence creativity and innovation (Miao et al., 2019). A psychologically empowering organizational climate with transparent communication promotes innovative work behavior (Dhar, 2016).

Mentoring significantly contributes to organizational culture and individual development, enhancing performance, productivity, creativity, and knowledge sharing. This leads to increased organizational innovation (Baran, 2018; Zasloff, Okurowski, 2012; Carvin, 2011).

In summary, while the role of leaders and supervisors in shaping employee innovation is well-examined, the impact of mentoring on innovative behavior needs more research, especially regarding different mentoring forms and their influence on employee innovation. Currently, a popular division of mentoring is based on the form of meetings of the participants, i.e. the use of technological tools in the mentoring process. Face-to-face mentoring and virtual mentoring are most frequently indicated. In face-to-face mentoring, sessions with mentor take place in a stationary mode, while virtual mentoring takes place via video conferencing

and the Internet, e.g. using webinars, Skype, chat rooms, discussion forums, blogs or email (Clutterbuck, Hussain, 2010; Tenhunen, Leppisaari, 2010).

Research methods

A quantitative questionnaire survey was conducted in 2021. The research questionnaire was sent to companies in the university's databases, which were selected according to the criterion of the number of employees (large company). The author took as another criterion – the use of mentoring in the company. According to published research results, most often large companies are mentoring mature and have mentoring programs in place (Baran, 2018). Employees of the companies that participated in the study were a group of 527 people. These were employees who participated in the mentoring process at the surveyed companies. The research results presented in the article refer to the analysis conducted on a research sample of 527 mentees. The sample of 527 employees participating in formal mentoring processes included 203 virtual mentoring participants and 324 face-to-face mentoring participants. All employees surveyed were from 10 large companies (with >500 employees) based in Poland, meeting the conditions for mentoring maturity (i.e., providing structured and managed mentoring programs for its employees). The employee's age, gender, education level, seniority and position held were not considered.

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between the form of mentoring processes and innovative behavior of employees in the organization. The following types of mentoring processes were considered: face-to-face mentoring and e-mentoring.

Mentoring was defined, according to the EMCC definition, as „a developmental process, which may in some forms involve a transfer of skill or knowledge from a more experienced person to a less experienced, through learning, dialogue and role modelling. In other forms may be a partnership for mutual learning between peers or across differences such as age, race or discipline” (EMCC, 2018). Face to face mentoring was understood to be mentoring that takes place offline. In contrast e-mentoring was understood as taking place remotely (virtually) using video, as in Zoom or Teams (Clutterbuck, Hussein, 2010).

The following were distinguished as the goals of the application of the mentoring studied: mentoring is dedicated to the exploration of ideas, mentoring is related to the generation of ideas at work, and mentoring is related to the implementation of ideas in the workplace.

The study of work engagement and well-being was based on the concept by Schaufeli and Bakker (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004; Bakker, Demerouti, 2007). Work engagement was examined with the Polish version of the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) containing three dimensions defined as (Schaufeli, Bakker, 2004): vigor (experiencing high levels of energy at work, willingness to go the extra mile, and resilience); dedication (working with enthusiasm, feeling that the work being done is important, and taking pride in doing it); absorption (feeling

fully focused on and engaged in work, accompanied by experiencing a sense of unnatural passage of time).

Relationships between the purpose of mentoring and mentored employees' well-being at work were analyzed using single-factor analysis of variance. Relationships between employees' participation in mentoring and satisfaction at work were analyzed using Student's t test for independent samples. On the other hand, the relationships between the type of mentoring and the frequency of working with a mentor on employees' innovative behaviors, were analyzed using the chi-square test of independence (χ^2). Relationships between the type of mentoring and its effects – the impact on employees' innovative behavior (including idea exploration, idea generation, idea implementation) were analyzed using the chi-square test of independence (χ^2). The values of statistically significant tests of independence were supplemented with the values of Cramer's V effect strength measure and the values of statistically significant results of analysis of variance were supplemented with values of effect strength measure η^2 .

Results

The importance of mentoring targeting innovative work behavior on the mentees' well-being at work

Table 1 shows the average values of indicators of well-being at work in the group of mentoring focused on idea exploration, idea generation and idea implementation. The summary is supplemented with the values of single-factor analysis of variance.

Statistically significant differences were obtained for all indicators of well-being at work. The strength of the obtained effects was medium and was $\eta^2 = 0.06$ for vigor, $\eta^2 = 0.05$ for devotion, $\eta^2 = 0.08$ for preoccupation and $\eta^2 = 0.08$ for commitment. Based on Gabriel's post-hoc test, it was found that for all indicators of well-being at work, the mean values obtained in the group of people receiving mentoring focused on idea exploration were higher than the mean values obtained in the group of people receiving mentoring focused on idea generation, $p < 0.05$.

The mean values of all indicators of well-being at work were higher in the group of people receiving mentoring focused on idea exploration than in the group of people receiving mentoring focused on idea generation and idea implementation.

The mean ratings of job satisfaction and job commitment were slightly higher in the group of employees participating in face-to-face mentoring than in the group of e-mentored employees.

The mean rank attributed to cooperation and mutual assistance between employees among the factors influencing job satisfaction in the e-mentoring group was 7.64 with a standard deviation of 3.68 and was similar to the mean rank obtained in the group of mentees of the face-to-face mentoring process, which was 7.86 with a standard deviation of 3.64. Based on the Mann-Whitney U test, it was found that the obtained difference was not statistically significant, $Z = -0.76$, $p > 0.05$.



Table 1. Well-being at work and objectives of mentoring processes

Well-being at work	The mentoring process focuses on						F	df	p
	idea exploration		idea generation		idea implementation				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
vigor	11.02	3.39	8.71	4.27	9.57	3.88	4.40	2.142	0.014
dedication	12.69	3.75	10.64	4.07	11.25	4.05	3.41	2.142	0.036
absorption	12.56	3.15	9.88	4.10	10.80	4.35	5.86	2.142	0.004
engagement	36.27	9.07	29.24	10.67	31.63	11.17	5.75	2.142	0.004

M – mean value; SD – standard deviation; F – test value; df – number of degrees of freedom; p – statistical significance

Source: own work

Table 2. Mentoring effects in idea exploration – comparison of e-mentoring group and peer mentoring group of employees

Idea	E-mentee	Mentee	Total
exploration	%	%	%
Definitely yes	76.9	65.0	70.5
Rather yes	11.8	19.1	15.7
Rather no	8.4	6.5	7.4
Definitely no	2.9	9.4	6.4
Total	100	100	100

% – percentage of the group

Source: own work

The importance of mentoring for innovative work behavior of mentees

According to the research results, mentees (those participating in the face-to-face mentoring process) are more likely to collaborate with a mentor on their innovativeness than those participating in e-mentoring. Based on chi-square test of independence (χ^2), there was no statistically significant relationship between being in either the mentored group or the e-mentored group and working with a mentor on the mentee's innovativeness, $\chi^2(2) = 0.83$, $p > 0.05$.

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution for mentoring effects in the face-to-face mentoring group and the e-mentoring group.

Based on chi-square test of independence, a statistically significant relationship was found between belonging to either the e-mentored group or the mentored group in the face-to-face mentoring process and mentoring effects related to idea exploration, $\chi^2(3) = 15.92$, $p < 0.01$. The strength of the effect obtained was average, $V = 0.18$. Ideas exploration according to the e-mentored participants was easier than according to the mentored in the face-to-face way.

Table 3 shows the frequency distribution for the effect of mentoring in the form of idea generation opportunities in the mentored and e-mentored groups.

Based on chi-square test of independence, there was no statistically significant relationship between membership in either the traditionally mentored group or the e-mentored group and idea generation effects, $\chi^2(3) = 6.58$, $p > 0.05$.

Table 4 shows the frequency distribution for the mentoring effects of idea implementation opportunity in the mentored and e-mentored groups.

Based on chi-square test of independence, there was no statistically significant relationship between membership in either the face-to-face mentoring group or the e-mentoring group and the possibility of idea implementation, $\chi^2(3) = 2.69$, $p > 0.05$.

Discussion of the research results

The analyzed research results show the relationship between mentoring and employees' innovative behavior. Participation in mentoring dedicated to the development of innovative behavior of employees at work influences employee innovation, both at the stage of idea exploration, idea generation and idea implementation. This is confirmed in the literature, where the importance of mentoring is indicated as supporting the individual development of employees, leading to increased intensity

Table 3. Mentoring effects in idea generation – comparison of e-mentoring group and peer mentoring group of employees

Idea generation	E-mentee	Mentee	Total
	%	%	%
Definitely yes	30.7	33.5	32.2
Rather yes	57.1	47.5	51.9
Rather no	8.0	13.3	10.9
Definitely no	4.2	5.8	5.0
Total	100	100	100

% – percentage of the group

Source: own work

Table 4. Mentoring effects in idea implementation – comparison of e-mentoring group and peer mentoring group of employees

Idea implementation	E-mentee	Mentee	Total
	%	%	%
Definitely yes	72.1	71.2	71.9
Rather yes	14.8	12.3	14.3
Rather no	8.3	6.8	8.0
Definitely no	4.8	9.6	5.8
Total	100	100	100

% – percentage of the group

Source: own work

of communication between individuals in the organization, increased exchange of knowledge and experience, encouraging the development of intellectual capital and better teamwork, resulting in cumulative benefits in terms of implemented innovation and organizational development. Mentoring is also a strong catalyst for the individuals involved, leading to their transformation and development, including through increased awareness of their competencies and needs in the organization. This awareness results in a greater focus on the exchange of knowledge, information and experience, which in turn influences the employee’s openness to change and innovation, as well as an increase in well-being at work and commitment to work. As the results of the study indicate, mentoring aimed at developing employees’ innovative behavior increases well-being at work and employee engagement at work. However, it does not matter the form, in which mentoring process is carried out – whether offline or online mentoring.

Through participation in mentoring processes, employees appreciate the efforts and implemented improvements in the organization to bear their own skills. In these difficult tasks, mentors help by providing feedback, offering support, motivating innovative actions. Mentors perceived as leaders can become role models in the

development of innovative attitudes and behavior. The results of the survey indicate that mentored employees take up working with a mentor in order to develop their innovation (more than 80% of mentored employees indicate such a goal of working with a mentor). In addition, goal-oriented employees in the learning process treat failures as learning opportunities, so they are not afraid to make mistakes, and mentors providing them with psychosocial support encourage them to overcome obstacles and develop (Dweck, Leggett, 1988). The mentoring process influences the strengthening of employees by helping them find their own place in the organization, strengthens their commitment to work and influences their job satisfaction (Baran, Sypniewska, 2019; Clutterbuck et al., 2017; Laukhuf, Malone, 2015).

Analyzing the impact of mentoring on the development of innovative behavior of mentored employees, taking into account its form, it is noted that more often the effects of mentoring are indicated by employees participating in e-mentoring than participants in face-to-face mentoring. However, the differences are small (in terms of idea exploration – 86.9% of mentees in e-mentoring, 83.5% of mentees in face-to-face mentoring; in terms of idea generation – 87.8% of mentees in e-mentoring, 81% of mentees in face-to-face mentoring; in terms of

idea implementation – 88.7% of mentees in e-mentoring, 84.1% of mentees in face-to-face mentoring). A statistically significant relationship was obtained for the studied relationship in the mentoring group dedicated to idea exploration.

Conclusions

In a world where access to information has increased exponentially, the ability to manage employees is very important. Adequate stimulation and support positively affects employee motivation and promotes innovation.

Innovative work behavior represents an employee's ability to generate new ideas, processes, practices and procedures at the individual, group and organizational levels. It is believed that an organization's employees and their behavior are the strongest drivers of innovation (Chen, Huang, 2009; Bhatti et al., 2021; Akram et al., 2020).

Engaging employees in innovative activities requires appreciation and support from the organization, and such support is offered by mentoring programs, among others.

The present study makes a theoretical contribution to the existing literature, as the role of mentoring in the processes of stimulating employee innovation in an organization is identified. The positive impact of mentoring processes on the development of innovative behavior of employees in the workplace is indicated. The findings of this article contribute to the literature by determining the importance of the form of mentoring conducted (face-to-face, virtual) and its impact on the innovative behavior of employees.

Despite the presented findings on the role of mentoring in the processes of innovation generation and diffusion in the work environment, several limitations should be considered in future research. The present study has limitations, due to the very narrow analysis conducted and due to the limited length of the article.

First, this study was conducted only in companies in Poland. The findings presented may not be reflected in other countries. Future research should be expanded to survey different countries and compare with the results of this study.

Second, this study provides evidence of the impact of a mentoring process dedicated to employee innovation on an employee's innovation behavior in the workplace. However, the influence of other mediating and moderating factors from other perspectives, such as perceptual factors (e.g., perceptions of the mentor); or personal factors (e.g., fear of technology), cannot be excluded.

Third, the basis of analysis in the study was the data obtained at the time. Future studies should adopt a longitudinal design, taking into account the obtained effects of mentoring over time.

To sum up, the present work adds new insights into the role of the process of mentoring employees in their innovative behavior in the workplace. Participation in mentoring programs dedicated to the development of innovative behavior of employees at work influences employee innovation, both at the stage of idea exploration, idea generation and idea implementation (RQ2). As the results

of the study indicate, mentoring aimed at developing employees' innovative behavior increases their well-being at work and employee work engagement (RQ1). However, it does not matter the form, in which mentoring process is carried out – whether face-to-face mentoring or online mentoring (RQ3).

Current findings point to several practical implications that managers should pay attention to in order to promote desirable employee behavior at work. Managers who are interested in fostering innovative behavior among employees can provide them with development programs in the form of mentoring programs focused on developing the innovation of mentored employees.

When assigning mentors, managers may need to consider specific elements like the form of the mentoring process, for the highest possible effectiveness of the mentor and mentee and in order to get the best results from mentoring.

Mentors can closely monitor their employees to make sure they fully understand what is expected of them in their work and how much freedom they have to generate new ideas. From a practical perspective, managers need to actively support their employees by stimulating their ability to apply innovative approaches in action. In addition, more effective implementation of mentoring in employee development processes enables companies to stimulate innovative and creative attitudes, which can ultimately result in increased innovative behavior (Kim et al., 2021).

The research also has important implications for managers who want to strengthen or develop a strong work climate for innovation in order to achieve better organizational performance. Potosky and Ramakrishna (2002), point out the need to understand at the individual level that an individual's behavior in the workplace is often influenced by the support of the immediate work environment. It is important for employees to feel safe in groups and at work so that they are more willing to share new ideas.

An organizational climate for enhancing an individual's innovation can be provided through the use of tools in the form of face-to-face mentoring or e-mentoring programs that emphasize proactive innovation behavior. To create the right environment for innovation, organizations can look for manager-mentors, who in turn will strive to enhance individual innovation (Osadolor et al., 2021; Shanker et al., 2017; Dhar, 2016).

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Mentoring jako narzędzie wspierające innowacyjne zachowania pracowników w pracy

Streszczenie

Artykuł koncentruje się na roli mentorów i procesów mentoringu we wspieraniu innowacyjnych zachowań pracowników w miejscu pracy. Celem badania było określenie związku między formą procesów mentoringu a innowacyjnymi zachowaniami pracowników w organizacji. Przeprowadzono badanie ilościowe, aby odpowiedzieć na następujące pytania badawcze: Jaki jest wpływ mentoringu skoncentrowanego na innowacyjnych zachowaniach w miejscu pracy na samopoczucie i zaangażowanie pracowników w pracę? Jakie są korelacje pomiędzy mentoringiem skoncentrowanym na eksploracji pomysłów, generowaniu pomysłów i wdrażaniu pomysłów a innowacyjnymi zachowaniami pracowników w miejscu pracy? Jaki jest wpływ mentoringu bezpośredniego i e-mentoringu na innowacyjne zachowania pracowników?

Wyniki odnoszą się do analizy przeprowadzonej na próbie 527 pracowników uczestniczących w procesach mentoringu bezpośredniego i e-mentoringu. Uczestnictwo w programach mentoringowych dedykowanych rozwojowi zachowań innowacyjnych pracowników w miejscu pracy wpływa na innowacyjność pracowników zarówno na etapie eksploracji pomysłów, ich generowania, jak i wdrażania. Jak wskazują wyniki badania, mentoring ukierunkowany na rozwój zachowań innowacyjnych

pracowników zwiększa ich dobrostan w pracy oraz zaangażowanie w pracę. Nie ma przy tym znaczenia forma, w jakiej prowadzony jest proces mentoringu – czy jest to mentoring twarzą w twarz czy mentoring online.

Słowa kluczowe

mentoring bezpośredni, e-mentoring, innowacyjne zachowania pracowników, innowacje
