A Cross-Cultural Examination of Culture, Gender and Age on Employee Perception toward Mentoring: A Case Study of Kenya and the United States

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Abstract

Purpose: Despite the many benefits associated with mentoring, the changing cultural demographics in the workplace compel organizations to increase their awareness on demographics' influence on the perception toward programs such as mentoring. Minimal cultural research exists related to employees' willingness to participate in mentoring programs. The purpose of this study was to examine whether differences on perception toward mentoring program vary between culture, gender and age.

Design/methodology/approach: This study used quantitative approach using a questionnaire to collect data from respondents in Kenya and the United States. A correlation analysis was performed to find a relationship between the variables of gender, age, culture and perception toward mentoring.

Findings: The results of this study revealed a relationship between gender, age and perception of mentoring. It was also revealed that there was no correlation between culture and perception toward mentoring.

Practical implications: Results of this study will contribute to a greater understanding of cultural and demographic influences on mentoring programs. These findings will help companies and especially managers establish effective mentoring programs.

Originality/value: Few studies have studied perception toward mentoring programs across cultures. This research examines this perception of employees in Kenya, a low individualistic culture and employees from the United States, a high individualistic culture.

Keywords: Mentoring, individualism, culture, gender, age, Kenya, United States

Introduction

Many organizations are realizing the value of developing their employees through mentoring programs and are especially utilizing these programs for their new employees. Due to globalization and integration of world markets, culturally diverse workforces in global businesses have continued to increase (Olsen & Martins, 2012). For example, in the United States, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) recorded that foreign-born employees in 2009 accounted for 15.5 percent of the civilian labor force, up from 14.5 percent in 2004. Even though a cultural diverse workforce gives a company a competitive advantage, it also creates a

challenge for these companies when dealing with a multicultural workforce, especially in understanding the perceptions, values and attitudes of employees of different cultures (Olsen & Martins, 2012). Culture plays a significant role in organizations' new employee development programs such as mentoring, and creates a need for greater understanding of differences in national culture and its influences on such programs.

An important element that is often overlooked when studying employee participation in mentoring programs is culture. Mentoring programs are especially designed to develop new employees (Kram, 1983), and it is essential for organizations to be aware that some of these new employees might be foreign-born and that their values, behaviors and perception may vary. Since employers, especially those with informal mentoring programs, cannot force employees to participate in a mentoring program, the importance of understanding the factors that influence employees' willingness to participate cannot be underestimated. There is a limited amount of cross cultural studies in this subject (Sewon & Egan, 2011), which is particularly important in this era of globalization and integration where organizations are progressively becoming more diverse with employees from different cultural backgrounds and values.

In the age globalization and as demographics change in the workforce, it is also increasingly becoming important to research the role and impact of demographic factors such as gender and age to work-related development programs such as mentoring. A study conducted by Kim and Egan (2011) indicated that future research on mentoring should address the role of gender and age on the perception of mentoring programs. To address this gap in literature, the purpose of this study is to examine employees' perception toward mentoring programs by researching whether this perception is influenced by the demographic factors of age and gender. To address the issue of cultural differences in organizations, the study will look into whether differences exist among individuals from a high individualistic culture and a low individualistic culture.

This study is significant for organizations as they seek to remain productive and innovative. Findings from this study will contribute to the existing knowledge about mentoring and the understanding of the factors that motivate employees to participate in such a program. From such knowledge, organizations and employers are therefore in a better position in strategizing their efforts and communication of potential benefits of mentoring to employees. Better knowledge and understanding of differences in terms of personal values and perception could contribute to better ways of leading and managing a diverse group of employees.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development
Mentoring
Mentoring has been defined as a relationship that exists between a more experienced employee (mentor) and a less experienced employee (protégé), where the experienced employee provides personal and career guidance to a less experienced employee (Eby et al., 2004; Murdock, 2006; Wasburn & Crispo, 2006; Leck & Orser, 2013). The concept of mentoring dates back to an ancient Greek mythology, where Odysseus entrusted the appearance of Athena to teach and guide his son Telemachus (Friday & Friday, 2002). Over the years the concept has been re-defined to make it applicable to different settings, and as such, there has been conflicting definitions of mentoring in various literatures.

The term mentor has been defined and conceptualized differently, with many using it interchangeably with the term 'coach' even though both terms apply to different situations (Emmerik, 2004). According to Minter and Thomas (2000), the frequent use of these terms interchangeably in most research is due to lack of proper conceptualized definitions in relation to employee work relationships. Mentors are considered senior, knowledgeable, experienced and influential employees (Hegstad & Wentling, 2004; Emmerik, 2004). In most studies, a mentor is defined as an individual or an employee with greater experience and knowledge who

provides support and guidance to a less experienced employee. In addition to offering career guidance, mentors are regarded as individuals who support psychological and personal growth functions of protégés (Emmerik, 2004). In her original work, Kram suggested the career and psychosocial functions in defining the term mentor (Kram, 1983).

Protégés are employees who receive career and personal guidance from mentors. Kram (1983) mentions the importance of career and personal developmental tasks for a new adult individual beginning his or her career. Mentoring relationship, with a mentor serving as a guide, supports such a development.

Organizations that use mentoring as a development tool recognize that an important objective that new employees expect to achieve in their new jobs is job satisfaction and success, and to assist in meeting this goal, organizations encourage a relationship between these new employees with more experienced employees (Lyons & Oppler, 2004). Globalization, evolving technological advancements and increased competition, has forced many organizations to increase their efforts in employee retention in an attempt to ensure that they maintain a high quality workforce. These organizations consequently turn to tools such as mentoring to fulfill this purpose. Earlier study on mentoring by Kram and Hall (1989) linked mentoring and organizational learning as an effective way to meet the changing demands in the global market. One element of organizational learning is interpersonal learning for employees, and mentoring is a resource tool that enables individuals to learn from each other.

Types of mentoring
Mentoring can either be informal or formal. In formal mentoring, the process is structured and organizations are responsible for the design and the pairing of mentors and protégés (O'Neil, 2005). In Informal mentoring, employees are responsible for choosing their own mentors or protégés as well as how or when to meet (McCauley, 2007). The results of numerous studies documenting benefits of mentoring have challenged many organizations to establish formal mentoring programs to ensure that some mentoring occurs. Apart from these benefits, another reason why some organizations choose formal mentoring is because its nature makes it more controllable and thus efficient over time. On the other hand, some studies have suggested that formal mentoring is not as effective and does not produce as positive results as informal mentoring. To support this notion, Lee, Dougherty, and Turban (2000) compares formal mentoring to "arranged" marriages, which in the long run may not produce positive benefits, but suggest that the more formal mentoring programs are made to resemble informal mentoring programs, the more effective they may be. Organizations that favor informal mentoring do so because they believe that protégés should feel comfortable with a mentor with whom they can share their personal and career experiences.

Benefits and outcomes of mentoring
Mentoring benefits mentors, protégés, and the organization as a whole. Apart from employee retention, an organization that encourages and implements this program is mostly regarded as one that values the professional and personal development of its employees (McCauley, 2007). The highly competitive global market, along with vast demographic changes, forces organizations to increase their efforts in employee retention by meeting the diverse needs of employees. In addition to meeting the career and personal developmental needs of employees, O'Neil (2005), points out that organizations that use mentoring also gain competitive advantage in terms of enhanced job performance and higher organizational learning.

The role that mentors play in this program benefits them as well, especially in enhancing their confidence (Grima et al., 2014). In addition to the ability to utilize their knowledge, skills and expertise, mentors also benefit from protégés by enhancing their knowledge through learning

of new ideas from different perspectives (Wasburn & Crispo, 2006). Through the achievement of protégés, mentors may gain recognition from the organization executives for their contributions (Rueywei, Shih-Ying, & Min-Lang, 2014). Employees serving as mentors feel valuable by sharing their experiences with less experienced employees, which in turn lead to a feeling of satisfaction with their jobs.

Studies on mentoring have shown that protégés benefit from this program in terms of increase in job satisfaction, career advancement, higher compensation, and quicker promotions (Rueywei, Shih-Ying, & Min-Lang, 2014; Wasburn & Crispo, 2006; Egan, 2005; Lee, Dougherty, & Turban, 2000). Job satisfaction and career advancement are the most cited outcomes of mentoring (Rueywei, Shih-Ying, & Min-Lang, 2014).

Perception toward mentoring

There is a familiar saying which states that perception is reality. A protégé's perception toward mentoring and its relationships can affect the commitment and willingness to participate as well as the positive impact mentoring contributes. Several authors have studied the impact of protégés' expectations and perceptions toward mentoring and have argued that perception is an important factor in a successful mentoring relationship (Young & Perrewe, 2004; Fagenson, 1989; Leck & Orser, 2013). A study by Fagenson (1989) of employees from a large company investigated their perception toward mentoring programs and found that employees that were paired with a mentor had more positive job experiences and felt important compared to those that were not. Expectations from mentoring, according to Young and Perrewe (2004), center mostly on career related and social support functions such as sponsorship, protection and counseling.

Mentoring and gender

The role of gender in mentoring relationships has been examined widely in various researches but according to Okurame (2007), there have been conflicting findings, where some studies show gender to have an effect on such relationships while other studies show no effect. Findings by Leck and Orser (2009), revealed that irrespective of expectations, gender did not impact the decision to be a mentor. A research by Levesque et al., (2005), also suggest that women and men did not differ in the perceived expectations of mentoring. A research by Orser and Dyke, (2009), indicated that women are less likely to believe that mentoring will have a bigger impact on the career success and development because of the challenges they continue to face in advancement of their careers and garnering outcomes such as higher pay. Such perceptions can impact expectations and influence behaviors. This study will examine whether genders differences on mentoring perception exist between the two cultures

Hofstede studied the role of gender in which he identified that mental programming depends on gender and that the gap varies with countries (Stedham & Yamamura, 2004). It is thus important to study gender across cultures and examine whether differences exist between gender groups across different cultures in the perception toward mentoring. Hence we hypothesize:

> H1: There is a significant relationship between gender and employee perception toward mentoring programs.

Mentoring and age

Most studies that relate to age and mentoring focus on the relationship between mentors and protégés. Findings from Kram (1983) study revealed that there are inherent challenges in mentoring relationships where the mentors and protégés are of similar age. Fewer studies have focused solely on the willingness of employees to participate in mentoring programs based on

their age despite of the mentor-protégé relationship especially in a cross cultural context. One benefit of mentoring programs is advancement in careers. According to Finkelstein, Allen and Rhoton (2003), older people to some degree may have low interest in mentoring programs because they expect less career-related rewards. Thus, this expectation may affect the perception toward mentoring programs in that, if older employees do not have or see a need for career and developmental support, then they may be less willing to be involved in mentoring relationships.

H2: *There is a significant relationship between age and employee perception toward mentoring programs.*

Mentoring and Culture

One common definition of culture comes from Geert Hofstede who defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from those of another" (Hofstede, 1984, p. 1). Globalization and increase in diversity in today's workforce environment presents enormous opportunities but also creates challenges especially in areas of cultural understanding of values and practices (Osula & Irvin, 2009; Alas, Kaarelson, & Niglas, 2008). The study of culture is important because its components determine behavior, perception and values both individually and collectively. Similarly, Barrera (2010) citing Althen (1988) mentions this study is important because even though individuals have a culture, too often they are unaware that their actions, lifestyles, and traditions are based on culture.

Culture can be measured in terms of national culture. One most widely used research on national culture is that of Geert Hofstede. Hofstede's 1980 study was conducted by surveying IBM employees representing more than 40 countries. In his later research more countries were included. In his original study of national culture, Hofstede identified 4 cultural criteria that he called dimensions: individualism versus collectivism; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; and masculinity versus femininity. All countries selected for the study scored an index between 0 and 100. For example, a score of 0 represented a strongly collectivist society while a score of 100 represented a strongly individualistic society. Results of Hofstede's study showed that cultural values have an impact on the organization and motivation of employees.

Hofstede (1984) states that "personal choices are affected by the cultural environment in which people are brought up" (p.1). If this is the case, a choice to participate in a mentoring program can then be influenced by culture. In organizations mentoring is used as a tool in human resources. The presence of different national cultures and attitudes is also mentioned by Alas, Kaarelson and Niglas (2008) as an influence to human resource practices. National culture has a strong influence in individuals' lives such that it can affect personal choices and can be a hindrance for members in an organization to pursue management practices without resistance. Osula and Irvin (2009) mention that in mentoring relationships, both mentors and protégés bring values, perceptions and assumptions that differ culturally and emphasize the importance of cultural awareness of these differences for effective mentoring relationships. For instance, a mentor from a low power distance culture may become frustrated with a protégé from a higher power distance culture and therefore the mentor may want to engage in a more informal relationship (Osula & Irwin, 2009). Likewise, a mentor from an individualistic culture may need to gain trust of a protégé from a collectivist culture by first building a personal relationship. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H3: *There is a significant relationship between culture and employee perception toward mentoring programs.*

Methodology

Sample

Participants in this study consisted of employees from two organizations, a healthcare organization located in Kenya and an education institution in United States. These two organizations were selected from different industries with varying organizational cultures to provide generalizability of the findings. Defining national culture, Hofstede (1980), asserted that values are specific to national culture whereas, the organizational culture is characterized by shared values within an organization. Irrespective of the organization, this study specifically addressed employees' attitudes and perceptions toward mentoring programs, which are rooted deeply in their national culture. The main assumption is that perception toward mentoring programs is intrinsically and deeply embedded with one's national culture, hence, any relationship between mentoring perceptions and national culture will hold across different companies and industries in each country.

The two countries were chosen for this study based on Hofstede's classification of culture ranking on individualism dimension. High individualism versus low individualism score indicates the relationship level that an individual has with other individuals. In his research, some societies which are termed as individualistic showed less concern for other members of the society in the logic that each individual paid more attention to his or her own self-interest (Hofstede, 1983). One reason for such a high self-interest in these societies is the degree of freedom given to individuals from society. On the other hand, in the low individualistic/collectivist societies, individuals look after the interest of a greater society. According to Hofstede's research, on an index scale of 0 to 100 Kenya is ranked as a low individualistic/collectivist culture with an individualism score of 25 while the United States is ranked as a highly individualistic culture with a score of 91 (Hofstede, 2001). According to Huang and Tai (2003), cross cultural studies require that matched samples be drawn from identifiable subgroups of a population. Therefore, the non-probability method of stratified purposive sampling was necessary for this study to make sure the sample was representative of the population been studied. According to Hofstede, a minimum of 20 respondents per region is required to perform comparisons. One hundred surveys were given to each organization to be administered to employees. A total of 152 surveys were completed, 72 representing 47.4% from the United States institution and 80 representing 52.6% from the Kenyan organization.

Measures

The survey instrument included questions that measure the perception toward mentoring. In cross cultural studies, words can have different meanings, therefore, to ensure accurate interpretations and reliability of data, definitions of mentoring, mentor and protégé were provided in the survey's cover page. The 10-item scale that was based on Kram (1983) two dimensional construct involving career development and psychosocial support was measured on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A sample item in the questionnaire is "Mentoring will help enhance my career goals". Reliability for the mentoring perception scale had a coefficient alpha of 0.84.

Analysis and Results

Descriptive statistics

The characteristics of participants by age are shown in table 1. The highest participant percentage by age categories in Kenya belonged to ages 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34 with 26.2%, 33.7% and 25% respectively. In the United States, the highest percentage by age categories belonged to ages 40-49, 50-59, and over 60 with 34.7%, 26.4% and 11.1% respectively. Most

participants in Kenya aged between 20 and 34 while in the United States the participants were aged between 40 and 60.

The United States' under 20 age participants reported a higher mean of 3.10 implying that this age group had a higher positive perception toward mentoring programs. Participants in the 25-29 age category in the United States reported a lower mean of 1.30 indicating a lower perception toward mentoring programs. Likewise Kenya under 20 age participants reported a higher mean of 2.36 while the 40-49 age category reported a lower mean of 2.00. Participants from both countries aged under 20 reported a higher perception toward mentoring programs and participants over the age of 40 reported lower perception toward mentoring programs.

Table 1: Perception toward Mentoring by Age

Age	Country	Mean	N	% of Total
	Kenya	2.3667	6	60
Under 20	United States	3.1000	4	40
	Total	2.6600	10	100
	Kenya	2.1000	21	72.4
20-24	United States	2.1500	8	28.6
	Total	2.1138	29	100
	Kenya	2.1148	27	96.4
25-29	United States	1.3000	1	3.6
	Total	2.0857	28	100
	Kenya	2.1050	20	90.9
30-34	United States	2.2000	2	9.1
	Total	2.1136	22	100
	Kenya	2.1250	4	44.4
35-39	United States	2.4200	5	55.6
	Total	2.2889	9	100
	Kenya	2.0000	2	7.4
40-49	United States	2.1200	25	92.6
	Total	2.1111	27	100
	United States	1.8263	19	100
50-59	Total	1.8263	19	100
	United States	1.5750	8	100
60 or over	Total	1.5750	8	100
	Kenya	2.1250	80	52.6
Total	United States	2.0514	72	47.4
	Total	2.0901	152	100

Total percentage of female participants was 54.6% compared to 45.4% of male participants. Male participants in Kenya represented 46.3% compared to 53.7% female participants. Male participants in United States represented 44.4% compared to 55.6% female participants. Male participants in Kenya reported a lower perception toward mentoring with the mean of 2.10 compared to the female participants with the mean of 2.14. In the United States however, male participants reported a higher perception mean of 2.39 compared to female participant perception mean of 1.77. In both countries, men participants generally reported a higher perception toward mentoring than female participants.

Table 2: Perception toward Mentoring by Gender

Country	Gender	Mean	N	% of Total
Kenya	Male	2.1054	37	46.3
	Female	2.1419	43	53.7
	Total	2.1250	80	100
United States	Male	2.3938	32	44.4
	Female	1.7775	40	55.6
	Total	2.0514	72	100
Total	Male	2.2391	69	45.4
	Female	1.9663	83	54.6
	Total	2.0901	152	100

On a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), descriptive for perception toward mentoring by culture as displayed in table 3 show that participants from a low individualistic culture (Kenya) had a mean score of 2.12 which is slightly higher compared to participants from a high individualistic culture (the United States) with a mean score of 2.05

Table 3: Perception toward Mentoring by Culture

Individualism	Mean	N	% of Total
Low Individualism	2.1250	80	52.6
High Individualism	2.0514	72	47.4
Total	2.0901	152	100

Relationship between perception toward mentoring and gender, age and culture
A Pearson coefficient was calculated for the relationship between perception toward mentoring and gender, age and culture. Table 4 shows a strong negative correlation was found for age (r (150) = -.215 and sig= .008 or $p < .05$). The results indicated that the older the employees, the lower the perception is toward mentoring programs. The findings also show a strong negative correlation for gender (r (150) = -.195 and sig= .016 or $p < .05$). The results showed significant differences among gender in the perception toward mentoring. The relationship between culture and perception toward mentoring shows a weak negative correlation that was not significant (r (150) = -.053 and sig= .519 or $p > .05$). This result indicated that perception toward mentoring is not influenced by culture.

Table 4: Correlation between Gender, Age, Culture and Perception toward Mentoring

		Mentoring Perception
Age	N	152
	Pearson Correlation	-.215[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008
Individualism	N	152
	Pearson Correlation	-.053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.519
Gender	N	152
	Pearson Correlation	-.195[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion and Implications
Literature review provides empirical evidence to substantiate the assumption that the higher the perceived value of mentoring, the more likely an individual will be willing to participate in a

mentoring program. Young and Perrewe (2004) asserted that if mentoring is perceived as a positive reinforcement to rewards, then there is a high likelihood that many employees will participate. The results of this research contribute to studies aimed at understanding cultural and demographic influences on mentoring programs.

Findings from this study will have practical implications to the study of demographics and cultural influence on perception toward employee development programs such as mentoring. Pearson correlation results showed there was no significant difference between a high individualistic culture's perception and a low individualistic culture's perception toward mentoring programs. The finding that the two cultures have similar perception toward mentoring programs is valuable information for global organizations that seek to use mentoring programs as development tools. Hence, managers should consider encouraging all employees despite of their cultural backgrounds to participate in mentoring programs. Participants from both cultures as shown from the mean results in Table 3 appeared to have almost similar perception toward mentoring programs with employees from a low individualistic culture having a slightly higher positive perception than employees from a high individualist culture. This is supported by research that indicates that employees from high individualistic cultures prefer to do things alone related to their careers while employees from low individualistic cultures prefer to involve others in career activities (Merel et al., 2010). Employees from low individualistic cultures according to (Yang et al., 2012) believe that they are interdependent on each other and will support each other disregarding the investment and return.

The study showed a correlation between gender and perception toward mentoring. Female participants in the low individualistic culture (Kenya) had a higher perception than female participants from a high individualistic culture (the United States). The opposite is for men participants from both cultures. Descriptive statistics indicated that overall, men had higher perception toward mentoring programs than females. This result can be supported by Orser and Dyke, (2009) who indicated that women in general are less likely to perceive that mentoring will be beneficial to their career development because of the challenges they continue to face in advancement of their careers and earning outcomes such as higher pay. The practical implications of this evidence is that managers should provide women more career advancement opportunities with higher pay, which then will encourage them to utilize development tools such as mentoring programs.

Another practical implication concerns the perception toward mentoring by age groups where the findings indicated a relationship between these two variables. The descriptive statistics also showed that the perception toward mentoring becomes lower as employees get older. This result is substantiated by Finkelstein, Allen and Rhoton (2003), who explain that, to some degree the older an individual is, the low interest in mentoring he or she may have because of lower expected career related rewards. Therefore, managers should consider providing incentives and reinforcing the benefits of mentoring programs to older employees.

Career success and development can also be influenced by other factors other than culture, gender and age. Benefits of mentoring programs have been widely discussed in existing literature, and employees, despite of their cultural background may have high perception toward this program if there is perceived value in relation to their careers. According to Merel et al. (2010), apart from culture, gender, age, employment tenure may influence one's career and thus the perception toward mentoring programs. Employers are therefore encouraged to utilize a survey tool to assess their new employees' perceptions toward mentoring programs for effective structure and management of this program.

Limitations and Further Research

This research aimed at capturing perceptions toward mentoring programs from employees of two organizations, an education institution and a healthcare organization rather than the general public and even though the sample of respondents was ideal for this research, it failed to take into account the education level of the participants. Hence, the results of this study should not be generalized to apply to all other populations within each culture. In a rapidly globalized world, the study of culture is becoming highly complex because of other factors such as social and economic status that are likely to influence an individual's perception of human resource development programs. Future research on culture should examine the influence of other variables in the perception toward mentoring programs.

A limitation of using Hofstede's national cultural dimensions to distinguish cultures, is that in a country's given culture, there are subcultures or variations of cultures. Even though it is assumed that individuals from a particular country or region share common attitudes, values and beliefs, the presence of subcultures between and within them could influence this commonality. Merel et al. (2010) suggest that measuring individuals' cultural orientations directly can be a better approach.

To strengthen the findings of this subject, future research may also use a different research method such as qualitative method of in-depth interviewing, which will allow the researcher to investigate meaningful and richer information about the cultural perception toward mentoring programs.

Conclusion

Understanding the impact of culture, gender and age on developmental and leadership programs of new employees such as mentoring is important to maximize their benefits. This is especially important in establishing effective mentoring programs. Various studies have documented that mentoring programs are perceived very highly and with employees' willingness to participate in mentoring programs, career development will be greatly enhanced. The study found that the gender and age variables are strongly related to the perception toward mentoring programs. Even though no significance was found between culture and perception toward mentoring programs, the effect of culture should not be undermined. With an increasingly globalized world, there is the assumption that cultures are converging and this may translate to similar perceptions toward mentoring programs. Critics of this notion argue otherwise, suggesting that there is a divergence on cultures implying that career development programs should be customized to specific cultures. This study adds on to this discussion by examining the cultural influence by specifically exploring the individualism cultural dimension.

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