

LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING PROGRAMMES: AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO STRENGTHENING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Ali Sanci

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies

Abstract: *This paper examines the cultural impact potential of leadership and mentoring programmes based on Schein's three-level model. Using current literature, opportunities and risks are critically analysed across the levels of artefacts, values and basic assumptions. The results show that while visible structures and values can be communicated, the influence on deeply rooted basic assumptions remains limited – especially in the absence of leadership coherence and structural embedding. Key areas of tension arise from the discrepancy between proclaimed values and actual leadership behaviour. In such contexts, mentoring loses its reflective effect and becomes functionalised. Leadership emerges as an ambivalent factor – either as a cultural enabler or as a reproducer of existing power relations. The underlying cultural model provides analytical orientation but falls short in terms of subcultures, ambivalences and power asymmetries. The study remains conceptual and points to the need for in-depth empirical analysis. Recommendations for action aim at strategically embedded, power-conscious and culturally coherent programme design that does not stage change but enables it.*

Keywords: *Cultural transformation; Leadership development; Mentoring practices; Organisational culture; Reflexive leadership*

INTRODUCTION

In a working world shaped by digitalisation, demographic change and multi-generational workforces, organisational culture and strategic human resource development are becoming increasingly important. Leadership and mentoring programmes are considered key tools for individual development and cultural transformation. However, it remains unclear whether and how they influence deeper cultural levels. This article examines the extent to which integrative leadership and mentoring programmes can contribute to strengthening organisational culture. The theoretical basis is Edgar H. Schein's three-level model, which analyses culture as the interaction of artefacts, values and basic assumptions. The methodology is based on a systematic review of the literature from the last ten years on the interfaces between leadership, mentoring and organisational culture. The contributions are critically examined in terms of theory, method and practical relevance. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of effectiveness and to identify conditions that promote cultural impact.

Theoretical Framework: Schein's Model of Organisational Culture

Analysing organisational culture requires a model that captures both visible and invisible cultural phenomena. Edgar H. Schein's three-level model proves particularly suitable for this purpose, as it differentiates cultural processes into artefacts, values and basic assumptions on a sound psychological basis (Schein 2010).

Schein distinguishes between three cultural levels: artefacts, values and basic assumptions. Visible structures such as mentoring formats only become effective in context. Values provide orientation but can contradict unconscious assumptions. The latter shape deeply rooted beliefs. Schein's model serves as an analytical tool here – sustainable change can only be achieved if all levels are addressed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This work is based on a selective, theory-driven literature review with the aim of critically examining key findings on the impact, scope and limitations of leadership and mentoring programmes in the context of organisational culture (Alveson 2012). The selection focuses on academic articles published between 2013 and 2024, which were identified. Included were works with explicit reference to organisational culture, mentoring in an organisational context, and leadership behaviour as a cultural influence factor (Ehrich, Hansford and Tennent 2004). The evaluation was carried out using Schein's three-level model, whereby key statements from the literature were assigned to the levels of *artefacts*, *values* and *assumptions* (Schein 2004). To reflect on the cultural impact, central patterns of argumentation and blind spots in the literature were analysed with the aim of developing a theory-based, non-exhaustive classification of possible impact patterns.

RESULTS

Opportunities offered by inclusive leadership and mentoring programmes

Integrated leadership and mentoring programmes offer organisations a multifaceted potential for cultural development, especially when they are strategically implemented at all three levels according to Schein.

At the artefact level, programmes initially have a visible and structuring effect: they establish rituals (e.g. mentor-mentee meetings), new communication formats and symbolically charged roles. These visible structures signal a willingness to change and serve as cultural reference points (Eby, et al. 2012).

At the value level, well-implemented programmes enable the conscious communication of normative orientations such as willingness to learn, openness or cooperative leadership. Studies show that mentoring helps managers to reflect more critically on their own role and communicate values more explicitly (Clutterbuck 2014). Mentoring thus becomes a cultural translation service.

At the level of basic assumptions, programmes – if sufficiently in-depth – can contribute to challenging implicit cultural premises in the long term (Ghosh and Reio Jr. 2013). This is the case, for example, when cross-generational mentoring relationships challenge traditional ways of thinking (e.g. about power, knowledge or status) and replace them with new narratives.

Overall, the cultural opportunity of such programmes lies in their ability to act as a bridge between strategic objectives and the organisation's lived self-image – provided that they are more than isolated personnel development measures (Ragins 2016).

Risks and limitations of inclusive programmes

Despite their creative potential, leadership and mentoring programmes also harbour considerable risks, especially if they are not embedded in a culturally coherent manner or are purely symbolic in nature.

At the artefact level, there is a danger of symbolic politics: programmes are implemented but not lived. Visible formats such as mentoring tandems or leadership training remain ritualised and superficial if they are not integrated into real decision-making processes. This can lead to cynicism among employees and reinforce cultural ambivalence (Eby and Robertson 2020).

At the value level, risks arise in the form of discrepancies between communicated and actual norms. If, for example, participatory leadership is promoted but authoritarian leadership is practised, cultural dissonance arises. Mentoring then cannot contribute to the communication of values, but rather reinforces inconsistent mission statements (Tuma, Adams, Hultquist and Dolan 2021).

Changes are particularly challenging at the level of basic assumptions. Programmes that do not address deeper-seated beliefs (e.g. about power relations or performance ideals) remain structurally ineffective. In some cases, they even stabilise existing hierarchies, for example when mentoring is designed exclusively as a top-down process (Scandura and Williams 2004).

Without structural anchoring, self-reflection and coherent leadership, cultural change will not happen – programmes will stage change without actually bringing it about.

Leadership as a cultural practice: a multidimensional factor

The analysis shows that leadership has a decisive influence on the cultural impact of mentoring. It not only has a formal effect, but also shapes artefacts, values and basic assumptions – for example, by visibly supporting mentoring or symbolically marginalising it in everyday life (Den Hartog and De Hoogh 2023).

Leadership conveys values such as trust and openness and gives mentoring cultural legitimacy. However, a profound impact can only be achieved if leadership questions fundamental assumptions about power and control. (Liu, Tai, Cheng, Wei and Lee 2022). In this respect, mentoring is not only a tool for leadership development, but also an expression of the leadership culture that is lived and breathed in an organisation. Its cultural reach depends largely on the fit between proclaimed leadership values and actual leadership behaviour.

DISCUSSION

This analysis clearly shows that integrative leadership and mentoring programmes can be a fundamentally effective tool for influencing organisational culture – but only under certain conditions. The key finding is that programmes do not develop their cultural reach simply by existing, but rather through the way in which they are embedded in existing leadership, communication and power structures (Parmelli, et al. 2011).

At the artefact level, Programmes send visible signals for change. However, if

they lack depth of content or are marginalised in everyday life, they quickly become symbolic. Visibility alone is not enough to have a lasting cultural impact (Schwartz-Shea 2020).

At the value level, it has become clear that programmes certainly have the potential to communicate or shift organisational norms and objectives. However, the critical point lies in the **coherence between communicated and lived values**. If mentoring guidelines promote values such as openness, but control and hierarchy are practised in everyday management, cultural dissonance arises. This undermines the credibility of the programme – cultural success depends largely on authentic leadership (Newman & Nollen 1996).

Tensions arise primarily at the level of basic assumptions. Programmes rarely change implicit beliefs, but often reproduce them – especially in hierarchical structures or where there is a lack of structural embedding (Wankhade and Brinkman 2014).

Leadership is ambivalent because it can promote cultural change when programmes are supported and individual behaviour is reflected upon, but at the same time it can stabilise existing patterns. This is clearly evident in mentoring when its cultural potential remains untapped because it is used purely for career purposes (Hay 2000).

The discussion thus highlights a central paradox: **programmes are intended to change culture, but are themselves a product of that culture**. This recursive relationship is often neglected in the existing literature. A one-sided optimism about design obscures the structural contradictions that hinder cultural change – such as power asymmetries, informal subcultures or economic pressure (Zander 2021).

Schein's model is suitable for analysis, but requires abstraction. Cultural processes are contradictory and context-dependent. Programmes rarely have a transformative effect – their value lies in provoking irritation and stimulating reflection.

CONCLUSION

Leadership and mentoring programmes have considerable potential to shape organisational culture – provided they are designed as cultural interventions and not merely as additional personnel development measures. The analysis shows that such programmes – if strategically grounded and coherently implemented – can be effective at all three levels of Schein's cultural model: as visible structures (artefacts), normative orientation (values) and impetus for reflection on fundamental assumptions. Cultural impact does not happen automatically. Programmes can remain ineffective if they are staged symbolically, not integrated into existing management structures or culturally incoherent. The decisive factor is whether management practices and mentoring actually correspond to the values that are promoted. Cultural depth is revealed in the tension between aspirations and actual behaviour. This work remains conceptual and literature-based; it draws on systematically but selectively chosen contributions. In addition, Schein's model neglects aspects such as subcultures, power relations and ambivalences. This points to a clear need for fur-

ther research: future empirical studies should examine how integrative programmes influence cultural contradictions, tensions and change processes in everyday organisational life.

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ПРОГРАМИ ЗА ЛИДЕРСТВО И МЕНТОРСТВО: ИНТЕГРИРАН ПОДХОД ЗА УКРЕПВАНЕ НА ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННАТА КУЛТУРА

Резюме: В тази статия се разглежда потенциалът за културно въздействие на програмите за лидерство и менторство, базирани на тристепенния модел на Шайн (Schein). Като се използва актуална литература, се анализират критично възможностите и рисковете на нивата на артефакти, ценности и основни предпоставки. Резултатите показват, че докато видимите структури и ценности могат да бъдат комуникирани, влиянието върху дълбоко вкоренените основни предпоставки остава ограничено – особено при липса на съгласуваност в лидерството и структурна интеграция. Ключови области на напрежение възникват от несъответствието между провъзгласените ценности и действителното лидерско поведение. В такива контексти менторството губи своето рефлексивно въздействие и се функционализира. Лидерството се очертава като амбивалентен фактор – или като културен катализатор, или като възпроизводител на съществуващите властови отношения. Основният културен модел предоставя аналитична ориентация, но не е достатъчен по отношение на субкултурите, амбивалентностите и властовите асиметрии. Проучването остава концептуално и посочва необходимостта от задълбочен емпиричен анализ. Препоръките за действие са насочени към стратегически въгледено, съзнателно по отношение на властта и културно съгласувано програмиране, което не поставя промяната на сцена, а я прави възможна.

Ключови думи: културна трансформация; развитие на лидерски умения; практики за наставничество; организационна култура; рефлексивно лидерство

Ali Sanci, PhD Candidate

Scientific Advisor: Prof. Mariela Modeva, PhD

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies

Sofia, Bulgaria

E-mail: alisanci@web.de