

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH MENTORING: A CASE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT**

Workforce Development through Mentoring: A Case Study

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This study utilized a qualitative case study research design to evaluate mentoring as a workplace development strategy in the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company. Data were collected from company documents and interviews with key stakeholders. Data analysis revealed that the mentoring program at this company has helped to close the employability skills gap but still needs to be improved. The following themes emerged: succession planning, achievement of company objectives, development of self and skills in communication and technical competence, cultural fit, mentor selection and commitment, communication, mentor/mentee matching, promotion and competence. Findings and recommendations for improving the program are discussed.

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**DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my dear nineteen month old daughter, Renee Destiny Eryka Hinds who started the course with me from the womb and to my other three children Joshua, Caleb and Kerysa Hinds. May God continue to bless them.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

According to the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) (2012), workforce development is becoming much an issue for employers. The impact of globalization and technology have closed the distance between countries, bringing the world closer together and therefore demanding more skillful and competitive workforce today. This demand for skilled labor by industry has led to a skills gap in many industries. The ASTD (2012) defined a skills gap as a significant gap between an organization's current capabilities and the skills needed to achieve its goals. This skills gap is threatening so many organizations today in terms of their growth and their ability to compete in the global market. There is therefore a mismatch between the employability skills and the skills of the workforce which ultimately leads to unemployment. Vacancies for a skilled workforce coexist side by side with large numbers of unskilled labor and therein exists the skills gap. According to the ASTD (2012), there are jobs available, in spite of the high unemployment rate, but such jobs are for a skilled workforce. Job openings are on the rise, with 3.8 million being noted in June 2012 in comparison to 3.1 million in June 2011. However, employers are still experiencing a disparity of skills to that which is required by the industry.

The reasons for the skills gap, according to the ASTD's Member Survey Report (2012) of more than one hundred countries include insufficient funding and support for the learning of the workforce. Other reasons highlighted include a lack of leadership voice in matters pertaining to training needs and mismatched skills of new recruits to that needed by the industry. The new recruits are unqualified to fill the roles for which they were hired and the lack of skilled talent in the company. The impact of such skills gap, according to the report, leads to lower productivity and lower efficiency due to missed opportunities by the organization.

The CompTIA's State of the Information Technology (IT) Skills Gap Report (2011) stated that eighty percent of the Information Technology (IT) employers claim that the skills gap in the industry negatively impacted the workforce. For instance, staff productivity was impacted by forty one percent, customer service/engagement by thirty two percent and security by thirty one percent. The workforce shortages and skills deficiencies in production manufacturing roles therefore affected the expansion of the operations and improved productivity.

The need for competitive strategies to develop a workforce that will meet the employability skill needs of industry and therefore close the skills gap has become crucially important in attaining and sustaining a competitive edge in industry. There is need for the workforce to attain the necessary skills set that will close the employability skills gap that exists in industries (Sitek, 2012). A

workforce that is unskilled is unable to fill the gaps in the labor market. Many organizational strategies have been employed to reduce or totally eradicate the skills gap that exists by introducing training to the workforce in the form of seminars, training sessions, workshops and programs such as apprenticeship, on the job training, in-service training and mentorship programs to name a few. In this study, I will examine mentoring as a workforce development strategy that employers use to close the employability skills gap of the workforce.

‘Mentoring in the workplace has taken many forms over the years (Maclean, 2008). Apprenticeship of craftsmen in the 18<sup>th</sup> century focused on trainees being trained by one skilled workman in a trade in the actual work place. The apprentice learnt a trade by imitating the skilled craftsman to whom he was attached. Various skills were therefore learnt on the job site, by practice in the field with the experienced tradesman. The trainees were therefore mentored by an experienced tradesman into the trade. According to Maclean (2008), mentoring the workforce contributes to learning in the workplace which is the oldest and most common method of acquiring vocational qualifications. The alignment of training, attitudes, skills and values to that of industrial workplace standards calls for more sophisticated strategies to ensure that employees are well trained and prepared for a dynamic workforce (Maclean, 2008). Mentoring individuals into workplace standards, attitudes, skills and values seem to be a means by which the learner can gain support and guidance to become a competent professional (Neary, 2003).

On the global level the European Union has endorsed mentoring as a means of workforce development by forming a European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) in 2009. The EMCC network established accreditation of mentor programs based on European Quality Award (EQA). The European Individual Accreditation (EIA) ensures that mentors differentiate themselves by up-keeping high mentoring standards that yield competence and ability with continuous development and excellent mentoring practices (EMCC, 2009).

Several institutions on mentoring skills have been established offering postgraduate diplomas and masters in this subject area. For instance, the International Mentoring Company of the United Kingdom and the Global Network for Coaching and Mentoring have envisioned that by 2020 they would have influenced twenty million people in the world, directly or indirectly by training persons to be world class mentors (EMCC, 2009).

According to the 2013 Mid-Year Report of the National Mentoring Partnership Program in the United States of America, research continues to validate the transformative impact of mentoring. Efforts are also being made to help youths to find critical support and guidance to build productive lives. Quality mentoring according to the report is economically a proven investment as there is a three dollars return to society for every dollar spent. The investment in mentoring also breaks the cycle of poverty. The Annual Summit brought more

than six hundred governments and non-profit leaders together to share in creative mentoring models (MENTOR, 2013).

Regionally, the International Labor Organization (ILO) (2014) noted that skills development and employability are priorities for the Caribbean region. Thus, access to education and training for relevant skills development should be made available to all citizens of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). To this end, training agencies and educational institutions must make use of available delivery methodologies.

The Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) also promotes the development of positive work attitudes and ethics through mentoring in the classroom. CVQ offers vocational qualifications in the form of practical learning programs that are in direct relation to specific job roles or sectors of industries. Vocational qualification focuses on gaining employability skills in a particular job area. According to the National Training Agency (NTA) (2013), the course structure emphasizes the development of practical skills and knowledge, but is classroom-based with written and practical assessments. Teachers become the mentors advocating standards of competencies aligned to stated criterion of that of the workplace. The teachers are trained to instruct and perform continuous in-school assessments. When a student is ready, the assessor/teacher assesses his/her competence along with an external verifier from the industry (NTA, Vocational Qualifications, 2013).

Locally, according to the Trinidad and Tobago Social Sector Investment Program (SSIP) Report (2013), the Government of Trinidad and Tobago implemented a National Mentorship Program in April 2010. The mentees were to be paired off with positive role models and taught fundamental work-based skills. Twenty three mentoring centers were established throughout Trinidad and Tobago in different companies according to the SSIP Report (2013). One of these companies was used in this study and will be referred to by a pseudonym (The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company). The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company started its mentorship program in 2010 with recently graduated engineers. A Graduate Internship Program called *Mentoring Young Professionals* has also been established with a local tertiary institution. The program's aim was to allow graduates to gain skills and competencies that would allow them to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the Agricultural Sector (Social Sector Investment Programme, 2007).

The NTA also advocates mentoring of individuals in the workplace. According to a Creative Industries Sector Survey done by NTA in Trinidad, fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents/ organizations in the survey offered an apprenticeship, internship or mentoring program for staff (NTA, Creative Industries Sector Survey Trinidad, 2012). The Ministry of National Security Trinidad and Tobago has also designated January, 2014 as the National Mentorship Month in order to raise the awareness of mentoring and its benefits for the family, the community, the workplace and ultimately the nation.

Mentoring has thus been endorsed as a means of transforming the country (National Mentorship Programme, 2014). This dependence on the mentorship programs to fill the breech between the employability skills set and the skills of the market place demands an investigation.

### **Problem Statement**

The Management of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company has observed that recent graduates in engineering are entering the company without the requisite employability skills to competently perform their jobs. It appears that there is a mismatch between the job requirements and the competency levels of the recent engineering graduates. It is perceived that this situation is negatively affecting the company's productivity and market sustainability. The management of the company has introduced a mentorship program to bridge the employability skills gap between the recent engineering graduates' skill set and the job requirements. This employability skills gap must be closed to ensure the sustainability of the company by efficiently matching the skills of the employees to the job requirements at the company.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study is to investigate and understand the extent to which the mentoring program of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company is helping to bridge the employability skill gap that exists between the job

requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers. The research questions are addressed:

1. To what extent does the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceive the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy?
2. What are the principles underlying the mentoring model employed by the company?
3. To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers?

### **Significance of the Study**

The findings of this study will be important because they will provide an understanding of workforce development through the mentoring strategy from key stakeholders. Such findings may help the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company to improve the existing mentoring program and may also assist providers of tertiary institutions in altering their engineering curriculum to meet the needs of the industry. The findings may also aid in reducing the gap that exists between the employability skill of the engineering graduates and the skill requirements of the job.

**Delimitations**

This study will focus on the employability skills of recently graduated engineers from a local tertiary institution and the job requirements of a single organization. The study will focus on the program implementers, the mentors and the mentees who are part of the mentoring program at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company.

**Limitations**

It is anticipated that there may be some challenges in conducting interviews and accessing documents. Some of these challenges may include: time constraints and disallowance of interview taping and access to some of the company's documents.

To resolve the issue of time constraint, open ended questionnaires may be distributed to participants to take home and complete on their own time. A diary of interview notes will be kept if the taping of interviews is not permitted. Pertinent questions will be asked about the contents of the document if they are inaccessible.

## **Operational Definitions**

**Case Study Method:** A kind of research that concentrates on one thing; person, group, institution, country, event, period in time for instance, looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalize from it (Thomas, 2001).

**Workforce development:** Training programs that provide existing and potential workers with skills to complete tasks needed by employers to let the organization stay competitive in a global market place (Haralson, 2010).

**Workforce:** The group of people who work for a particular organization or business (Webster, 2013).

**Competency:** the group of attitudes, dexterities, skills and knowledge required to carry out to a good standard determinate productive functions in a work ambient (Bhardwaj, 2006).

**Mentor:** the title and status given to a person who assumes the primary responsibility for providing mentoring. The mentor is more experienced and frequently a more senior person who works in a similar location and has a similar level of job responsibility as their mentee (Sweeny, 2008).

**Mentee:** a beginning or new person that is working with a mentor. He or she has little or no previous experience in the field (Sweeny, 2008).

**Mentoring:** refers to a ‘learner support ‘system that offers the learner support and guidance in becoming a competent reflective professional (Neary, 2003).

**Mentoring model:** refers to a mentoring program that reflects a range of activities such as the standards or the elements of competence (Neary, 2003).

**Employability skills:** refer to a group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace. Employability skills are typically considered essential qualifications for many job positions and hence have become necessary for an individual's employment success at just about any level within a business environment (Business Dictionary, 2014).

**Skill set** is a particular category of skills necessary to acquire a job. Examples of specific skill sets include human relations, research and planning, leadership, management and computer skills (Doyle 2014).

**Principles** refer to the rules of conduct ( Merriam Webster Dictionary).

**Perception** refers to the way you think about or understand someone or something (Webster Dictionary 2014).

**Skills gap** –American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) defines a skills gap as a significant gap between an organization's current capabilities and the skills it needs to achieve its goals. It is the point at which an organization can no longer execute its strategies, fulfill its mission, grow, or change because it cannot fill critical jobs with employees who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities.

## **Organization of the Other Chapters**

The following chapters will follow chapter one in expanding on the topic:.

**Chapter Two: Literature review.** The literature review will focus on the issues arising from the research questions as well as explore the models of mentoring. This chapter will outline the various research, theories, main variables and models pertaining to the problem; Workforce Development through Mentoring. The literature on mentoring will be reviewed from all aspects. Various forms of searches will be done such as books, internet, journals, magazines and other related documents. The data will give an overview of mentoring activities to better handle the case study. The literature review will focus specifically on the following aspects:

1. Definition of the term ‘Mentoring’ as it applies to the workforce.
2. Research of mentoring models as it relates to the workforce.
3. Principles of mentoring programs.
4. And any other relevant information that the literature reveals.

**Chapter Three: Methodology.** This chapter describes how the study will be done. It includes a description of the research paradigm, population and sample, research instruments used, research procedures, data collection, data analysis methods and ethical considerations.

**Chapter Four: Analysis of Data and Findings.** This chapter outlines the analysis of the data and its findings based on the research questions.

**Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations.** The chapter discusses the findings of the study in relation to the research questions. Discussions will match the findings of this study with those found in the literature review. Conclusions and recommendations will be made based on the findings.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate and understand the extent to which workforce development through the mentoring strategy used by companies has been helping to bridge the employability skill gap that exists between the job requirements and the skill set of the workforce. Therefore the review of literature will include the different views held of mentoring as a workforce development strategy in bridging the skills gap and the principles underlying mentoring programs.

Workforce development is considered a constellation of activities from orientation to the world of work, recruiting, placement, mentoring, counseling and crisis management (Harrison & Weiss, 1998). Today, workforce development is impacted by various factors due to the evolving nature of business which demands a skilled workforce (Neary, 2003). In a global economic environment workforce development must be aligned to the business strategy and should therefore be an essential component of the work environment (Clark, 2007). Workforce development is not only essential to the business establishment but also to the development of the employees of the establishment. The author argued that:

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the development of human resource can no longer receive less top priority in any organization determined to be competitive. In fact in a knowledge economy the emphasis shifts from traditional capital resources to the human resource for competitive edge (Clark, 2007, p. 9).

According to Peter Senge (2006), organizations that foster workforce learning in the industry are learning organizations. Senge (2006) suggests that a learning organization is, "An organization which facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself" (Buckley, 2009). A learning organization therefore manages talents that are available since creativity and innovation is the maximum return. In fact work is considered a second family so companies require that their workers fit into the learning organization. Fitting culturally is important and mentoring is used as a means of achieving this cultural fit (Robbins, 1998). Also purposeful and meaningful training of the workforce is not for a selected few but for all levels of the organization. Employee retention and attraction to the organization is fostered as management effectively manages the talent of the organization. According to the ILO (2010), organizations in Asia are now investing in workforce development to increase their competitiveness as they are dissatisfied with the standard and quantity of training done by the public sector.

After a skills gap analysis of the workforce competencies and an assessment of the current competencies is done, then the required competencies

are realized according to Duggan (2013). Effective workforce development interventions are then identified for the workforce that enables employees to develop both professionally and personally to achieve the desired state. This typically results in improved employee morale, retention and business performance (Duggan, 2013).

Today, mentoring of the workforce is a growing trend as a means to workforce development and increased business competitiveness (ILO, 2003). Historically, the mentor-mentee relationship has long existed. When a new worker begins working at an industry or business, he or she is adopted by someone who has been part of the establishment for a long while. The mentor serves as a buffer and guide to the industry or business operations, making the transition easier for the newly hired (or mentee) to gain the required skills needed by the organization for succession planning purposes (Personnel, United States Office, 2008).

Mentoring can be used as a valuable tool in the workplace (Neary, 2003). Alternately, Long (1997) argues that mentoring can bring about work tension due to over worked mentors leading to conflicting relationships and to the lack of understanding of the mentoring process. Long (1997) described the mentoring process as a strain on all involved if it is not properly organized. He further claimed that the planning process should match mentors to mentees successfully.

The Personnel Office of the United States (2008)) advocates mentoring for the workforce as it instills a sense of worth and a feeling of being valued by the organization for both mentors and mentees (Personnel, United States Office,

2008). They also claimed that mentoring of the workforce helps bridge the gap between theory and practice and that formal education and training is complemented by the knowledge and hands-on experience of a competent practitioner that leads to career development (Personnel, United States Office, 2008). Long (1997) however claims that there is no link between mentoring and career advancement because mentoring programs lack clarity and therefore is not sufficiently outlined, to allow for the development of the workforce. Other concerns held by Long (1997) include the lack of sufficient funding for the program that leads to the termination of the program before the potential success is derived from the program. The program must be on stream for a while in order to reap the benefits to be derived and should be sufficiently funded to ensure continuity.

### **What is mentoring?**

The literature offers a variety of definitions for mentoring. For instance according to Sweeny (2008) the term mentoring is quite a complex process that is developmental in nature. It is a tool used by mentors to support and guide their mentees in the learning process.

On the other hand mentoring, according to the Network Employer Assistance Resource, (2013) is a one-on-one relationship between an elder mentor and a mentee who meet regularly in-person. The report added that today mentoring occurs in a variety of ways such as peer mentoring, group mentoring, virtual mentoring, flash mentoring and reverse mentoring. They claim that the

diverse nature of the workforce also has adopted cross-cultural, cross-gender, and cross-generational strategies in their mentoring programs.

Neary (2003) outlined mentoring as a learner support system. Mentoring is beneficial to the mentee as it provides learning support and guides the learner in becoming a reflective, competent professional. Murphy's (1996) research work on middle aged male mentors on the other hand described mentoring as having a 'shadow side' and outlines that mentoring involves 'the pain of fractured trust', 'the pain of letting go' and 'the pain of disappointment'. The literature on mentoring according to Douglas (1997) brings to the forefront mainly the positive nature of mentoring and the negative aspects are set aside. He claims that both the good and the bad of mentoring should be emphasized.

### **Principles of Mentoring Programs**

In development of mentoring programs there are certain principles to follow (Kirkpatrick, 2008). The development process should therefore include the following steps as outlined by Kirkpatrick (2008): firstly, a needs assessment is required to determine the needs to be addressed in order to fill the skills gap. The developmental plan or 'roadmap' of the mentoring program should be done to determine the path to the achievement of goals, for instance, the need to close the skills gap between the skills of the new intake and the skills needed to function effectively as part of the workforce. The support of the head managers such as the Human Resource Managers is also an essential component. Kirkpatrick (2008) also added that a steering committee should be created for the working

group who may include managers and other stakeholders. The implementation process should entail the development of a marketing strategy for recruitment to the workforce and the matching of mentors to mentees (Kirkpatrick, 2008). Other considerations for successful mentoring programs involve thoughtful planning, dedicated resources and staff for implementation and evaluation in order to measure outcomes and inform program improvement.

Hare (2008) claims that the principles of mentoring should include some common characteristics of successful formal mentoring relationships and programs that follow a traditional one-on-one format. These include the establishment of a one year commitment between the mentor and the mentee to make the relationship work. He noted that mentors need to spend time and effort to establish trust and respect with their mentees. The mentor/mentee should be a partnership relationship and therefore the partnership should forge high, clear and fair expectations. It is also crucial to the partnership that meetings are set up and kept for the overall purpose of communicating regularly which develops a strong relationship between the mentor and the mentee (Hare, 2008).

### **Principles underlying Mentor Selection Process**

Mentors must be carefully selected. According to Sweeny (2008), there are three methods for mentor selection: the “inclusive”, the “exclusive” and the “balanced” method.

The “Exclusive” Approach to mentor selection has as its motto, “Mentors must be the best available models of the best practice.” The method entails the following features:

- The technical skills of mentors are highly valued.
- The best models of excellent instructional practice are selected as mentors.
- Many other experienced staff is rejected as “not good enough”.
- As a result, mentors may be seen as the “elite,” which is divisive and restricts whole-staff collaboration.
- A higher degree of stress accompanies mentor status since they are viewed as “special”.
- The mentor’s job is to ensure that the mentees reach a minimal skill level.
- Mentors may be called on to “evaluate” the mentee to see whether they are “good enough.”
- The approach implies an assumption that “mentors should have all the answers .(Sweeny, 2008, p. 127)

Sweeny has, however, suggested that too much reliance on the exclusive model of mentor selection as a mentor model of best practice can lead to a possible mentor that he is not “good enough.” Sweeny cautioned that this method should be avoided because of the possible implications of associated problems.

The “inclusive” method, on the other hand, focuses on anyone as a mentor. However, the risk of selecting a mentor who lacks special skills, personal

qualities or experience surfaces and therefore this method should also be avoided (Sweeny, 2008).

The “Balanced” method is recommended as it fosters the development of mentors and mentee in the form of a “learning community”, according to Sweeny (2008, p. 127). Its motto being:

“The best mentors are models of continual, visible learning, openness to feedback and the daily, career-long struggle to be the best educators they can be.”

Mentees want their mentor to be ‘supportive, caring, and willing to assist in achieving goals. A mentor who tries to direct, evaluate, or take control of the mentees’ career is likely to meet resistance (Network, Employer Assistance Resource, 2013).

The tenets of the balanced approach:

- Highly values reflective, collaborative, continually improving mentors as learners.
- Defines the mentor’s primary job as a model of continual learning and growth.
- Believes most veteran teachers can be mentors because the commitment is not to be perfect teacher and mentor. Rather, it is to work at becoming an even better teacher and mentor every day.
- Lowers levels of stress as everyone will learn together.

- Requires ongoing training and support due to the expectation that mentors and mentees are continually growing.
- Requires anticipating and proactively checking for problems and dealing with challenges as they arise. Participants are trained in conflict resolution and are encouraged to value their differences as strengths for the pair.  
(Sweeny, 2008, p. 128)

### **A Theoretical View of Mentoring Programs as it relates to Learning on the Job**

The social constructivist's theory advocates mentoring as a means of increasing the learning of young people. Mentoring focuses on the 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky, cited in Miller, 2012). This 'zone of proximal development' implies that difficult concepts that cannot be grasped independently can be learnt when there is the support of older, more experienced persons or mentors. Additionally, learning is seen as an activity that is social and collaborative. In other words, it takes place with the help of other persons such as mentors. Also, learning in meaningful context on the job site is linked to the job roles which foster the possibility of learning and 'the out of school experiences which are related to the young person's school experiences' (Miller A. , 2012). (Vygotsky, cited in Miller, 2012) argued that useful learning must be situated in a context that is 'authentic and relevant'. Hence, learning that is on the job site is authentic and therefore becomes more meaningful as it is relevant to the

workforce to complete the necessary task more efficiently and therefore aids in bridging the skills gaps of the workforce.

### **Mentoring as it relates to the Organization**

Workforce training has been advocated by many researchers but the argument therefore for employers not training workers rest in the possibility that the workers/mentees may leave for another job after the employer had invested in his/her training. Work-based training therefore suffers as a result of the decisions made by both employers and individual workers (Maclean, 2008, p. 663).

Murray and Owen (1991) argue, however, that a mentoring program can be a cost effective means to workforce development as mentoring is done on the worksite so no additional resources are necessary and it is done using volunteered mentors who carry out the mentoring duties along with their regular duties. They claim that the mentees learn from the experience of the older mentor with no cost attached for training, training rooms or for additional trainers for the organization. They insist that the organization must be totally committed to the mentoring program for a successful program implementation and that it will benefit organizations to train the workforce. Additionally, Holt (1982) claims that a financial assessment plan should be done by the organization before the implementation of the mentoring program to ensure the program is sufficiently supported to the end of the mentoring process.

Although financing and brain drain are issues, according to the United States Office of personnel management (2008), certain considerations must be in view before implementing a mentoring program for the workforce to ensure success. For instance, a strong business case must be put forward to demonstrate the reasons the organization should devote time, attention and resources required to make a formal mentoring process work. Murray and Owen (1991) agree that a mentoring program must be linked to the organization's business goals. Business goals may be realized in mentoring new recruits/mentees so that they settle into the culture of the workplace quickly and allows for succession planning where mentors who are highly competent, experienced staff, pass on their expertise to others who need to acquire the specific skills. Antal (1993) also adds that organizational communication will be fostered especially between the new and older recruits, as knowledge of critical issues in the organization are shared. Geiger-Dummond and Boyle (1995) share a similar view of mentoring as an aid to critical information sharing in the organization.

Additionally, Hawley, (2013) argues that firms and educational organizations alike are being forced to engage more actively with older workers/volunteers to support the training needs of the workforce due to rapidly changing nature of work which demands that the workforce is introduced to a work-based curriculum that fosters work process knowledge through mentoring of the workforce to enable the closure of the skills gap as demanded by the changing nature of work of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Mentoring as it relates to Mentees**

Through the mentoring process, mentees are taught to be competent professionals in their work environment adding to their professional development and their leadership competencies which are more effectively developed through guided practice or experience than by education and training (Neary, 2003). This is supported by Dougherty and Dreher (2007) as they view mentoring as supporting training efforts of the organization. They argue that mentoring develops “human capital” and instills the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities for the mentee to perform his/her job competently. This process, therefore, caters to the needs of the organization by closing the skills gaps by empowering the mentees with the necessary skills needed.

Career guidance is also provided for mentees to develop and efficiently manage their career. The acquiring of the right attitudes and behaviors to work by the mentees will lead to their success as well as the success of the workplace (Personnel, United States Office, 2008). However, the mentoring program must also provide opportunities for promotion in order for mentees to be motivated to learn and make the program a success (Murray and Owen, 1991). Long (1997) also agrees that career advancement must be at the heart of the mentoring program to motivate the mentee to participate in the mentoring process. They also state that initially the roles and responsibilities of the mentees should be communicated to them so that their expectations will not exceed the actual outcome of the mentoring process.

**Mentor's issues and the Principles of Mentoring as it relates to Mentors**

Mentors are confronted with various issues and challenges. Long (1997) points out that some mentors are unqualified themselves to be mentors and those who are qualified are “overburdened” with the business of the organization and their “professional responsibilities”. In a formal mentoring process, the mentors should be compensated for assisting mentees and for their general involvement. For instance, they should be given a pay increase, incentives such as bonuses should be given, and opportunities for promotion granted (Owen, 1991). Byrne, (1991) also agrees that mentors should be compensated for their efforts as this may motivate them in the process.

Other studies have shown that mentors have been motivated to be mentors as it tends to lead to raised self-confidence, highly esteemed self- image as they view themselves as a competent practitioner leading and managing a younger/newcomer to competency (Murphy 1996). Others such as Farren (1984) have described mentoring for the mentor as ‘an ego booster’, whereas (Levinson, cited in Johnson 2002) claims that mentoring brings about a sense of ‘self-rejuvenation’ and relevant and new revelations for the mentor during the process of mentoring.

**The Matching of Mentors to Mentees**

Matching mentors to mentees is very crucial to program success. Mentor-mentee matching, are the two biggest sources of program problems and can interfere with the attainment of program goals hence care must be taken in

matching mentors to mentees. Program goals should be used to evaluate every decision and component, including the processes, criteria for selection, and matching (Sweeny, 2008, p.127).

The matching process must also meet the needs of the mentee to grow and develop therefore this should impact the decisions about the content of the program. The matching process should not be based on keeping standards because standards are based on “proving not improving” (Sweeny, 2008, p.138). Kirkpatrick (2008) also added that the mentor and mentee must work in close proximity and should have duties that are similar in order to improve the relationship. He added that the matching process should ensure that both mentor and mentee have similar timetable for lunch period to allow them to meet if even on an informal basis. The mentor, he adds, should be older and more experienced than the mentee.

## **Conclusion**

The mentoring process has been exploited as a workforce development strategy. The extent to which it has been used to bridge the employability skills gap that may exists in the workforce has attracted different views of the topic. Whereas some have seen mentoring as a means of helping new recruits to develop the necessary skills for employability, others have argued that there are various ills of mentoring as it relates to the organization, mentors and mentees. Mentoring of the workforce has its disadvantages and setbacks such as

mismatched mentor to mentee, communication issues, inadequate planning issues, brain drain and loss of investment, but mentoring allows the employee to learn on the job which allows learning to be authentic and meaningful. Compensation has been advocated as a mean to motivate both mentors and mentees to willingly complete the mentoring process. The mentee, for instance, should be given opportunities for promotion and advancement on the job and the mentors must be rewarded by different means such as higher salaries and other incentives.

The principles underlying mentoring programs, however, have clearly been identified by different researchers in terms of the organization, mentee and mentor. It is important to set standards for the organization, for managers, mentors and for the mentees to follow to promote the success of the mentoring program and to ensure that the goals and objectives of the program are achieved.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study was to investigate and understand the extent to which the mentoring program of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company is helping to bridge the employability skills gap that exists between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers at the company. The mentoring program has been used as a workforce development strategy in order to bridge the employability skills gap of the workforce at the company.

In order to uncover details of the program a qualitative case study method was used in this research to review the mentoring program, bearing in mind the need to promote creditability, authenticity and trustworthiness which are characteristics of qualitative studies (Miller, 2000). In an attempt to undertake this qualitative research, three research problems were outlined and interviews and document analysis were undertaken to provide answers to the following research questions:

- To what extent does the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceive the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy?

- What are the principles underlying the mentoring model employed by the company?
- To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skills gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers?

In an attempt to gather the necessary data to address these problems certain methodologies were used under the qualitative case study design and as a result justifications for the methodology selection and further explanations of the methodology have been presented:

- Description and justification of the research design.
- Description and justification of the sampling procedure used to recruit participants of the study.
- Description and justifications of the methods of data collection, instruments used with reference to ethical considerations and the time line for this study.
- An outline of the processes/methods of data analysis in relation to the research questions.
- Delimitations and limitations involved in conducting the research.

### **Description and Justification of Research Design**

Two basic research paradigms; quantitative and qualitative were considered for this study. The characteristics of both paradigms were examined to determine their suitability to answer the research questions. Quantitative research, according to Creswell (2009), inquires about an identified issue/problem, based on testing a theory, measured with numerical values and analysis with the use of techniques based on statistical data, whereas qualitative research is contrary to the fact. Qualitative data unfold not numbers but opinions and perceptions in the form of words that can be meaningful enough to acquire sufficient information to discover the necessary answers to the research questions (Creswell J. W., 2009). The nature of the qualitative methodology is one that answers questions such as what, how and why to discover the opinions, ideas, feelings and perceptions of participants (Creswell J. W., 2009). Marshal and Rossman (1999) suggest that qualitative research offers opportunities for conducting exploratory and descriptive research that uses the context and setting to search for deeper understanding of the case under study. Since this study required in-depth knowledge of the mentoring program at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company and questions such as what, how and why were needed to discover the opinions, ideas, feelings and perceptions of participants, a qualitative approach was undertaken. Qualitative methodology based on its ability to uncover the perceptions of the participants in this investigation by

allowing the data to be characteristic of the research question made a qualitative approach appropriate for this research.

According to Marshall and Rossman (2011), qualitative research is ‘pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people’, making the goal possible of uncovering the ‘real’ experiences from the participants of the research. A qualitative methodology was most fitting therefore for the task of revealing the authenticity of the case under review.

Information gathered about the research questions were guided by an interview protocol consisting of probing questions regarding the type of information to be collected (Yin R., 2003).

The case study method is a kind of research method that concentrates on only one thing; looking at it in detail, not seeking to generalize from it (Thomas, 2001). In this research the ‘one thing’ refers to the mentoring program of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company. A case study design was also employed to gain in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning from those involved (Merriam, 1998). It also allowed participants’ voices to be heard in their natural settings or place of work or ‘at the site where participants experienced the issue or problem under study (Merriam, 1998). This allowed the researcher to gather information from the program implementers, mentors and mentees in their natural context or environment at work.

The nature of the case study approach is that it fosters exploration of the phenomena in its context employing various data sources therefore enabling different views of the phenomena to be revealed and understood (Jack, 2008). There are two key approaches to case study research as advocated by Robert Yin (2003) and Robert Stake (1995) that allow for the research topic to be thoroughly explored and the issues of the phenomena to be revealed.

The constructivist paradigm is advocated by both Yin (2006) and Stake (1995). Constructivists' theory sees truth as being relative, depending on the participants' perspective in the research (Jack, 2008). However, it is through stories participants were allowed to share their experiences that allowed the researcher a better understanding of the participants' actions. In-depth interviews from a few participants enabled the researcher to gather sufficient perspectives on the mentoring program at the company through their stories (Merriam S. B., 2002).

## **Population**

The target population for this study included all engineers of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company who have a Bachelor of Science Degree in Engineering, also mentors and program implementers. The accessible population included the existing mentees, mentors and program implementers of the engineering mentoring program. The selection of the participants, were based on

their ability to best help the researcher to understand the problem and the research questions (Creswell J. W., 2009).

### **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants of the study from among groups of program implementers, mentors and mentees. Purposive sample sizes were determined on the basis of theoretical saturation (the point in data collection when new data no longer bring additional insights to the research questions) (Creswell J. W., 2009). This focussed on persons that would have most likely experienced, know about, or had insights into the research topic (Merriam, 1998).

Therefore two mentees were chosen, two mentors and one program manager to participate in the study. According to Creswell (2007), the smaller the sample meant more in-depth interviews can be held, so a small sample was selected from the population to be interviewed which added up to five participants for the study.

The sampling procedure included the deliberate selection of the participants to be interviewed based on their ability to best unveil answers to the research questions, therefore one program implementer, two mentors and two mentees were chosen based on their experiences with the mentoring program (Creswell J. W., 2009).

### The Instrument Described

The instrument used was the interview protocol which was divided into three columns (see Appendix A). Column one held the main research questions and column two pertained to the probing sub - questions to answer the main research questions. There were three research questions and each one had five to six probing questions. The third column contained a space to record the participants' responses to the interview questions. The following headings were inserted as suggested by Creswell (2007):

- A heading containing the date the interview was held.
- The research questions as described above.
- Probes to the research questions to follow up and ask the participants to give more detail or to elaborate even more on the topic of discussion.
- Response column

### Data Collection

The data were collected using interviews and analysis of documents as recommended in the work of Merriam (1998). Face-to-face interviews were held to acquire high quality data until saturation level had reached. Semi-structured interviews were employed. Semi-structured interviews consisted of a list of open-ended questions based on the research questions (Creswell J. W., 2009). Each research question had about five probing questions. The open-ended nature

of the questions provided opportunities for both the interviewer and interviewees to discuss the topic in more detail from their own experience. When the interviewee had problems in answering a question or had some hesitations, the interviewer continued with probing questions. Three types of probes utilized by the interviewer were: Detail-oriented probes, elaboration probes and clarification probes (Cresswell, 1998).

Document analysis was also done to investigate the mentoring program to discover patterns and trends of the participants' learning progress in terms of filling the gaps in the organization and to discover the underlining principles of the program. Therefore official mentoring documents, notes and magazines pertaining to the company's mentoring program were examined to better understand actions taken by the company pertaining to the principles of the program (Potter, 1996)

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

As suggested by Creswell (2009) data from the interviews were transcribed and coded. The notes were read and re-read and coded and recoded. The emerging themes and patterns in relation to the research questions were noted. The documents were also examined to get information based on the research questions.

Coding was used to analyze the data which helped to interpret and also organize the data. The data were read and segmented. Each segment was labeled

with a “code” usually a word or short phrase that suggested how the associated data segments informed the research questions. When coding was completed a report using the summarized codes was done. To add richness to the findings the codes were linked to avoid the data from appearing not as a mere list of codes. The data analyzed from the interviews were categorized and themes given by coding. The themes were classified into similarities and differences in terms of perceptions. The themes that were the same were identified and noted. So coding of data to gather meaningful segments was done and assignment of names to the segments. Patterns were discerned from the codes and allowed for the formation of several themes. The themes provided the answers to the research questions (Merriam, 1998). The findings will be presented in thick narrative description in relation to the research questions.

**Data Analysis specific to Research Questions-** In an attempt to discover answers to the research questions one and two, face to face interviews were conducted as seen below:

1. To what extent does the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceive the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy?
  
3. To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers?

Documents pertaining to the mentoring program were also analyzed though very little access was given, to provide answers to questions two and three in particular (Creswell J. W., 2009). Interviews also provided answers to these questions since very little information was acquired from the document. The questions are as followed:

2. What are the principles underlying the mentoring model employed by the company?
3. To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skills gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers?

### **Qualitative Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability were aspects of this study that were considered, which are characteristics of quantitative studies, however the terms validity and reliability were explained by Creswell (2009) in terms of how they can be applied to qualitative research.

Validity does not carry the same connotations as it does quantitative research, nor is it a companion of reliability. Qualitative validity means that the researcher checks for the accuracy of the findings by employing certain procedures, while qualitative reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (Creswell J. W., 2009) p 190.

**Qualitative Validity-** Since qualitative validity ensures accuracy of the findings, the researcher therefore ensured that the data collected were accurate from the standpoint of the researcher and the participants interviewed (Miller, 2000). In some cases, the participants were allowed to confirm or refute what was documented by the researcher as a result of the interviews held with them. To ensure accurate findings were reported the following procedures were adhered to according to Johnson (1997):

- Data triangulation where different sources of data brought a closer understanding of the mentoring program was employed such as the interviews and documents.
- The researcher returned to the participants who were interviewed to confirm what they had said in the interview.
- The interpretations and conclusions of the findings were discussed with a peer who was not involved in the study but was interested in the topic of research and yet more likely to be critical and challenge what was written.

**Qualitative Reliability-** The step by step process of the case study was also outlined and documented (Yin R. , 2003). Qualitative reliability must document the step by step process of the research (Gibbs, 2007). Therefore, a diary of events was documented with firstly, the interview protocol, which was piloted to ensure that the data I wished to collect, would have been derived from the instrument to ensure the instrument's reliability. This was done using an employee of the company who was outside of the participants Credibility was

also built into the research by using the two methods; interviewing and document analysis for the study (Yin R. , 2003).

The second step of the process involved examining the transcripts of the interviews to ensure that obvious errors were not made (Gibbs, 2007). The next step involved checking the codes to ensure that there were no shifts in the definition or meaning of the codes during the coding process as outlined by Gibbs (2007).

### **Ethical Considerations**

A written approval (see Appendix B) was given by the company giving me access to the participants and documents of the Company. Confidentiality was assured, in terms of the company's real name and matters discussed with the participants. A pseudonym was given to the company, hence the name: The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company. Hence the name of the organization and the persons involved were not revealed. Participants were also told that they can withdraw from the study at any time. The participants were even given access to the notes pertaining to the interviews.

### **Timeline**

Conducting this case study required scheduling various times for interviews with the participants. Two initial interviews with the program implementers were held in January 2014 and in February of 2014 to acquire information about the company and other pertinent information about the

mentoring program to do a proposal for the research. Another interview was held with the mentors and mentees on a date specified by the company. This took place in March of 2014. A follow up interview was also held with one of the program implementers in March of the same year. Interviews were also done on the phone after the face to face sessions to ensure credibility.

Documents were also given on the mentoring program concerning principles of the program. A minimum of at least four days were required to gather the case study data. The data analysis took three days and the findings, recommendations and write up of the paper took the process to the end of June.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

**Delimitations-**This study focused on the employability skills of the recently graduated engineers from a local tertiary institution and the job requirements of a single organization which was the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company.

**Limitations-** The challenges of the research included:

1. Time constraints was a challenge as the process began in January and the time line ended in May of this year 2014 which was too short of a time to conduct an in-depth research into the mentoring program at the company.
2. Interview taping was disallowed and access to some of the company's documents was also restricted. Notes were taken to resolve the issue of no taping of interviews hence the researcher had to cautiously take accurate

notes and restate what was said by the participants to ensure that creditability was maintained throughout the process. Also the Human Resource Manager was present for most of the interviews. Phone calls were therefore made to the interviewees prior to the interview to ensure the credibility of their contributions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

#### Introduction

This chapter outlines the analysis of the data and its findings based on the research questions. A total of five persons were interviewed at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company concerning the mentoring program. Each research question had probes that were used to reveal in-depth information and to uncover answers to the research questions from the participants. The following were interviewed on a one and one basis:

- One Human Resource Manager
- Two mentors
- Two mentees

Two of the accessible company's documents were also examined: A general magazine about the company's activities and a no name general handbook on mentoring.

**Analysis of Research Question One:**

**To what extent does the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceive the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy? Research question one had the following probes:**

- Probe # 1: What for you are the characteristics of a good workforce development strategy?
- Probe # 2: Are you seeing these characteristics in the mentoring program?
- Probe # 3: To what extent do you think the program has assisted in developing the workforce at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company?
- Probe #4: Do you think that appropriate skills are learnt from the program to help the mentees to complete the tasks needed by the employer?
- Probe #5: Do you think that the program is helping the company to have a competitive edge in the global market?
- Probe #6: What aspects of the program do you think can be altered, remain or omitted to make the program a more effective workforce strategy?

See Table 4.1 for a summary of the coded responses of the five participants of this study.

Table 4.1

**Summary of Coded Responses and Themes from Respondents for Research****Question 1**


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Research Question #1

**To what extent does the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceive the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy**

Respondents	Themes				
	A	b	c	d	e
HRM	√	√	√	√	√
MENTOR 1		√	√	√	√
MENTOR 2				√	√
MENTEE 1			√	√	√
MENTOR 2				√	√

---

Key:

- Succession planning- (a)
- Meets the overall objectives of the company – (b)
- Development of self and skills in communication and technical competence– (c)
- Cultural fit – (d)
- Mentor selection and commitment (e)

The data presented in Table 4.1 indicate that succession planning, achievement of company's objectives, self and skills development, cultural fit and mentor selection were the major themes that emerged in respect to research question one.

**Succession Planning-** Three respondents- the human resource manager, Mentor 1, and Mentor 2- indicated that 'Succession Planning' is one of the company's objectives. Respondents also identified succession planning as a component of a good workforce strategy of the mentoring program.

According to the Human Resource Manager (HRM),

"Succession planning is made possible where the older more experienced engineers are able to transfer knowledge to the younger recruits. Most people will like to work under a mentor with a good name or background because they will be considered a good successor of that mentor. The older mentors share their experiences with the younger ones to enable sustained efficiency and achievement of the company's goals."

Mentor one and mentee two also referred to succession planning as a characteristic of a good workforce development strategy.

**Meets the Overall Objectives of the Company-** The mentoring program also aids in the achievement of the company's goal to 'utilize best practices by empowering their employees with commitment to excel' according to the

company's documents. In considering the objectives budgeting was one of the considerations according to the HR manager.

"We considered the value for money or putting value to our mouths. The Human Resource Department plan was also considered that specifies the number of hired persons per year based on value for money. We look at the needs of the organization and the budget to see if the company can pay them. We look at how much engineers are needed over the two years. The program however helps the company to stay abreast of what is current and relevant to accomplish the job."

Mentee 2 added that a 'world class' level vision will be derived as a result of the mentoring program while mentee 2 claimed that 'we can learn from our mistakes as we progress in the mentoring program to achieve competency.'

**Development of self and skills in communication and technical competence-** All of the respondents agreed that appropriate skills were learnt from the mentoring program. The HR manager said, "the mentees learn from their mentors' experiences, they gain people skills, collaboration and to seek advice."

The HR manager also added,

"The mentoring program helped to a great extent in the development of skills such as communication, collaboration, assisting mentees in fitting into the culture of the organization."

Mentor one contributed by saying; “Time management, work techniques, priority, reliability and collaborative skills are learnt.”

Mentor two added,

“People skills are not developed when they begin the program. They need to be knowledgeable in this area. They must interact with the wider group not just those that they are comfortable with. When the mentees start they lack confidence.”

Mentor one and two also claim that skill development, achievement of objectives and experience are gained, as well as help is available when needed. “The program helps the company to stay abreast of what is current and relevant to accomplish the job.” Mentee two added that a ‘world class’ level vision will be derived while mentee two claimed that ‘we can learn from our mistakes.’

According to the company’s documents:

“The mentoring program is an invaluable approach for employee development which provides assistance for the organization to evaluate competencies, identify competency gaps and to develop a strategy to acquire new and required competencies.”

**Cultural Fit-** Cultural fit is an important employability skill that the mentees need to learn as addressed by the Human Resource manager. Cultural fit was also another theme that emerged. The mentees’ adjustment to the company’s culture was seen as a component of the mentoring program “They start out being

very immature, unaware of the office environment and how to deal with people. They learn the different departments, technical skills, administrative skills etc”. stated the HR manager. Mentor two also claimed that communication skills, management skills, real world skills, interpersonal skills, adaptive skills, confidence are key employability skills that must be gained by the mentees in their progression in the mentoring program . Mentor two claimed, ‘Adapting skills, best fit are important to the program as it helps employees to fit into the environment quickly.’ The HR manager claims that ‘an understanding of the culture of departments is quickly gained as the mentees are mentored, which is achieved by the mentoring program.’

“The company is an Engineering based company. The engineers are critical to the company hence and most of the managers are engineers and are there for able and experienced in the trade to train/mentor new recruits into the culture of the organization.

The mentee roles are may include:

- Running a section/ department on their own
- Dispatching crews of four to five persons on a crew
- Report writing
- Managing and supervising
- Switching and line extensions

They just cannot send up people on a live line. They need to be there to supervise those people.”

Various skills are learnt by the trainees that are necessary for them to function and do their jobs in an efficient manner. In field work they can seek their mentors' advice on some matter they did not quite understand. They can explain the scenario to a mentor by calling him/her while on the field work for clarification. Succession planning is also made possible where the older more experienced engineers are able to transfer knowledge to the younger recruits.

**Mentor Selection and Commitment.** The HR manager also described the mentor selection process by the company:

"The experience in the organization, the personality they display. I will know based on how the person performs or how well he does his job. Most people will like to work under a mentor with a good name or background because they will be considered a good successor of that mentor. The mentors are not paid extra for this duty. It is a matter of their willingness to do the job. Time management is also considered. The mentor has to balance his time for work and still be there for the mentor."

There have been some challenges in terms of the mentee mentor relationships. Mentee one found that meetings with the mentor should be scheduled properly but the meetings should remain non- formal whereas mentee two found that mentees should be involved in the selection of their own mentors. Mentor one insisted that all stakeholders should learn from their mistakes whereas mentor 2 found that that a one day workshop on mentoring skills should be changed to be an ongoing program. Mentor two also found that mentors should be trained and mentees

informed of their roles. He claimed that the use of experience should be gathered and the experiences of previous mentors employed in follow up workshops and create a community of practice. He also added that time to meet with the mentees should be more structured. Hence mentor improvement and scheduling of meetings were important aspects for consideration by both mentors and mentees.

Based on the data collected, the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company does perceive the mentoring program to be an appropriate workforce development strategy as they all felt that it helped the mentees to develop needed workforce skills, however the program does have room for improvement in the area of mentor selection and training. Scheduling of meetings between mentees and mentors is another issue to be improved.

**Findings:** It is perceived that the company's mentoring program is an effective workforce development strategy by the participants because it fostered the following: Succession planning, met the overall objectives of the company, led to the development of the mentees skills in communication, technical competence and adjustment into the culture of the organization.

Although there is a process for selecting the mentors the mentor selection and commitment seem to be inadequate.

**Analysis of Research Question Two:**

**What are the principles underlying the mentoring model employed by the company? Research question 2 had the following probes:**

Probe #1: What are the general rules of conduct of the mentoring program for you as a manager/mentor/mentee?

Probe # 2: What are the principles underlying the relationships between the mentors and mentees in terms of learning tasks?

Probe # 3: What are the principles in the selection and matching of mentor and mentees?

Probe # 4: What principles underlying the teaching/learning of tasks?

Probe #5: What are the principles concerning monitoring of the program/mentors/mentee?

Probe #6: What are the principles concerning progression in terms of mentees in the program?

Table 4.2

**Summary of Coded Responses and Themes from Respondents for Research****Question 2**


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Research Question #2

**What are the principles underlying the mentoring model employed by the company?**

Respondents	Themes		
	a	b	c
HRM	✓	✓	✓
MENTOR 1	✓		
MENTOR 2	✓		
MENTEE 1	✓		
MENTOR 2	✓		

---

Key:

- Communication and meetings (a)
- Mentor/mentee matching (b)
- Promotion (c)

The table 4.2 above refers to the themes derived from research question two.

The documents analyzed gave general information pertaining to mentoring but no fixed principles or directions for the company's mentoring program were

provided. The interviews held gave information pertaining to some of the practices underlying the mentoring program at the Trinidad Utility Company.

According to the Human Resource Manager, there are no documented principles for the program however informal practices such as follow ups are done.

“I check up on the mentees on a monthly basis and a monthly report is done for my boss. We referring to HR manager, mentors, and mentees communicate by telephone, email, skype or by face to face interaction and by other mediums of communication. The engineers are interviewed every six months to determine their level of maturity and growth. Based on their response they can remain at that particular level if little or no growth is seen or they move up the ladder of engineering to the top management if they show progression. The mentees are also paid as they train. The mentors on the other hand are volunteers therefore they are not paid for their services.”

Embedded in the themes are the informal principles/practices of the mentoring program.

**Communication-** Communication is an informal on-going process that should take place between all participants. Certain goals and tasks involving communication are set out by the Human Resource department, according to the Human Resource manager. Communication skills were found lacking in the new

recruits. The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company therefore sought to develop these employability skills in their mentees.

“Communication is an important aspect of the mentoring program. The mentors and mentees are expected to communicate regularly in order for the program to run smoothly. I communicate with the mentees and mentors on a monthly basis to ensure that they are communicating in some way or the other and to ensure that the relationship between the mentors and mentees are interactive and supportive. A report is done on a monthly basis. I communicate with both the mentors and mentees through telephone, skype, email and so on. Mentors and mentees who are having difficulties getting along and are not meeting as much as they should are told to make it happen in some way or the other and the relationships are monitored on a regular basis. This is important to determine the reasons for the problems and to make future decisions on mentor/ mentee matching.”

Mentor one also claimed that communication with his mentee is not as consistent as it should be. The meetings are arranged but business schedule does not permit the type of interaction needed but the willingness is there. Mentor two also claimed that there are no set principles regarding meeting and communicating with the mentees.

“Through the interviews weaknesses are picked up and we move on from there. Informal meetings are sometimes held about real world situations so as to help the mentee in daily life. An informal report is done. Feedback, evaluation and interviews are done with a panel of mentors and HR to determine the progress of the mentee and therefore they are given feedback so improvements can be made by the next interview session. Issues with relationships and communicating regularly with the mentees/mentors are discussed so that improvements can be seen. Discussions are held with the mentees and my experiences given No set principles are given Isolated problems are deal with and technical/ non- technical issues addressed”

The mentees are expected to hold to general rules of conduct in their interactions with their mentors. For example, mentee one stated.

“I am expected to be prompt for appointments, be open to feedback not making everything about me, I also need to have a willingness to learn by following, listening to issues and receive advice on matters. No formal guidelines are given though the following are discussed: How to approach leadership, interest with crew members, learning from the appropriate personalities and so on.”

Mentee two said that communication with her mentor is not fixed as well.

“If I have a problem I will just go to my mentor to seek his assistance. I make it happen, because I am the one who needs the help. We

communicate by telephone and email. We set times to meet but demands of work makes it impossible. I try to learn everything by asking questions.”

**Mentor/Mentee Matching-** The matching of the mentors to the mentees is however done using set principles. The HR manager described.

“They were matched to the mentees based on the common qualities listed by both mentors and mentees. A mentor was asked to make a list of desirable qualities he would like to see in a mentee and the mentees were asked to do the same listing. They listed desirable qualities they would like to see in their mentor or mentee. They were matched based on the common qualities requested. When the matching process was done only three mentors did not fit or match. However extra mentors are necessary to cater to persons leaving and to allow for the mentor/mentee matching to take place. Mentors and mentees were then chosen based on qualities observed. Mentors and mentee feedback on what they required were matched based on the information they gave.”

Certain principles also outlined who is chosen as a mentor. The HR manager stated:

“The experience in the organization, the personality they display. I will know based on how the person performs or how well he does his job. Most people will like to work under a mentor with a good name or

background because they will be considered a good successor of that mentor. The mentors are not paid extra for this duty. It is a matter of their willingness to do the job. Time management is also considered. The mentor has to balance his time for work and still be there for the mentor.”

**Promotion-** There are opportunities for promotion for the new recruits as they develop the employability skills needed by the company. The mentees are also well paid according to the HR manager. As they are promoted along the duration of the two year program they are paid a higher salary. The mentors on the other hand are not compensated for their efforts in any way by the company.

“They learn the different departments, communication skills, technical skills, administrative skills. Based on their response they can remain at that particular level if little or no growth is seen or moves up the ladder of engineering to the top management. The mentees are paid as they train. The mentors are not paid extra for this duty. It is a matter of their willingness to do the job. Time management is also considered. The mentor has to balance his time for work and still be there for the mentor.”

**Findings:** It can be concluded that although the mentoring program at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company has no documented principles there are certain unwritten expectations and requirements of the HR manager, mentors and mentee to ensure the achievement of the program goals which include empowerment of the new recruits/mentees with employability skills necessary to work independently and confidently as engineers. The following however are the

main principles adopted by the mentoring program as highlighted by the participants.

- Communication and meetings were important components however schedule meetings were not always possible due to the busy work schedule of the mentors.
- Mentor/mentee matching seem to be an important principle that followed a fixed process but with its challenges.
- Promotion was gained when competency in employability skills was attained. Promotion was determined after an interview session with the mentee and managers in the company. This principle was followed rigidly.

### **Analysis of Research Question Three:**

**To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skills set of the recently employed engineers? The probes for research question three were as follows:**

Probe #1: What employability skills are lacking in the recently employed engineers?

Probe # 2: To what extent is competency gained by the mentees in the particular skill set needed by the company?

Probe # 3: Do you think the program is bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the mentees?

Probe # 4: What level of improvement have you seen as they progress in the program?

Probe #5: Are the mentees able to work independently after they have been mentored in a particular task?

Probe #6: If you had to rate the program on a scale of one to ten how will you rate it in terms of closing the skill gap and why?

Probe #7: Is any other strategy employed along with the mentorship program to bridge the skills gap of recently employed engineers?

Table 4.3 provides a summary of the coded responses of the five participants of this study.

Table 4.3

**Summary of Coded Responses and Themes from Respondents for Research****Question 3**


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Research Question #3

**To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skills set of the recently employed engineers?**

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Theme - Competency

Respondents

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HRM	√
MENTOR 1	√
MENTOR 2	√
MENTEE 1	√
MENTOR 2	√

---

Table 4.3 displays an interesting pattern as competency emerged as the main theme. The mentoring program was perceived as one that helped the new recruits to gain a level of competency. The program was perceived by the participants as an excellent strategy to bridge the employability skills gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the mentees. According to the HR manager, however the program has to be monitored to gain feedback to make adjustments so the goals of the organization can be achieved successfully.

“The engineers are interviewed every six months to determine their level of maturity and growth. They start out being very immature, unaware of the office environment and how to deal with people. The level of skill development would have been lower without the mentoring program. Today they are at a level seven on the scale of ten. There is definitely room for improvement and as the mentees are interviewed we also receive feedback to better the program so that there will be value for money. A lot of engineers who can be mentors are right here in the organization. We did not have to go outside the organization as the company has mostly engineers in senior positions. The mentees would have been on a level two scale if there was no mentor/mentee program. We need a mix of senior clerks and persons from outside to be selected as mentors.”

Mentor one contributed by saying,

”Competency is gained as the mentorship continues and the learning is on-going. It helps the mentee to grow in confidence and communication skills. The mentees work with others confidently.”

Mentor two outlined that the mentoring program moves the company along to close the skills gap as the mentees attain competency:

“The program can be rated seven and a half out of ten. The mentoring program helps the mentors to see the mentees progress as they learn. It helps us to understand their deficiencies. We don’t throw them into a big

pool and they don't know how to swim so it bridges the gap. An observable difference in communication skills are seen as the mentees progress. Competency is gained gradually after a series of interviews. The program rates seven out of ten which is good in closing the skills gap. The mentoring program is very good as it led to improvement in people understanding their roles and responsibilities."

Mentee one also found that competency is achieved as a result of the program.

"I give the program a nine out of ten. The program helps us to grow in confidence and communication skills as our mentors direct us on how we should handle issues. We are also given feedback from the interviews so we can step up and improve by the next interview session. It teaches me to operate independently. Challenges will be there but my skills will be improved. When I do research I try not to go outside of the program for help. The program conditions you to behave a certain way."

Mentee two also felt that skills are learnt from the program but out of ten the program is rated as five which is average because choosing of mentors to match mentees is the downfall. If mentor/ mentee matching is appropriate the program will be rated seven or eight.

**Findings:** The mentoring program, according to participants, does bridge the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the mentees as competency is evident. Although competency is gained there have

been pitfalls in matching the mentors and mentees so there is a need to address the mentor/mentee matching process.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this case study was to investigate and understand the extent to which the mentoring program of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company has helped to bridge the employability skills gap that exists between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers. The company's goal to recruit a competent workforce of engineers has led to the development of a mentoring program in the engineering department.

An investigation into the mentoring program of the company led to a qualitative research paradigm where data were collected using the company's documents and interviewing the following respondents: The human Resource Manager, two mentors and two mentees at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company.

After a series of interviews were conducted themes were discovered and the data analyzed, the findings of this study revealed that the mentoring program has in fact aided the company in achieving the goal of a more skillful workforce. It has also helped to a great extent to bridge the employability skills gap that existed between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed

engineers in fostering competence such as development of human skills and social skills and build technical competence and allowed for mentees to quickly fit into the organization.

### **Discussion of Findings**

**Findings:** It is perceived that the company's mentoring program is an effective workforce development strategy by the participants because it fostered the following: Succession planning, met the overall objectives of the company, led to the development of the mentees skills in communication, technical competence and adjustment into the culture of the organization.

These findings support Dougherty and Dreher's (2007) view that mentoring as a workforce development strategy supports the training efforts of the organization. They argued that mentoring develops "human capital" and instills the necessary skills, knowledge, and abilities for the mentee to perform his/her job competently, therefore catering to the needs of the organization to close the skills gaps. The mentor serves as a buffer and guide to the industry or business operations, making the transition easier for the newly hired (or mentee) to gain the required skills needed by the organization for succession planning purposes (Personnel, United States Office, 2008), by empowering the mentees with the necessary skills needed. Closing of the skills gap has been the goal of the company and the mentoring program has been instrumental in achieving such.

Therefore the program not only meets the goal of the organization but also meets the mentees need for career development.

The mentees' ability to fit culturally into the organization is also important to the company and mentoring as a workforce development strategy is used by the company as a means of achieving this cultural fit (Robbins, 1998). Therefore mentoring has been used as a valuable tool in the workplace (Neary, 2003).

The mentor selection and commitment seemed, however, to bring about some tension because although there is a process for selecting the mentors the mentor selection and commitment seem to be inadequate. The mentoring workforce development strategy caused tension since the mentors are over worked and this is likely to lead to conflicting relationships and misunderstandings of the process. The mentors are not paid an additional sum of money or given any incentives by the company for the additional role as mentors. Byrne (1991) claimed that mentors should be compensated for their efforts as this may motivate them. The principles of the program must clearly outline the importance of meeting the needs of all stakeholders to ensure the success of the program and ultimately the achievement of the company's goal to fill the skills gap in the workforce.

According to Owen (1991) the mentors should be compensated for assisting the mentees. In mentoring programs the mentors should be rewarded for their involvement. For instance, they should be given a pay increase, incentives such as bonuses should be given, and opportunities for promotion granted (Owen, 1991).

Murphy (1996) has, nevertheless, argued that some mentors have benefitted from mentoring programs due to raised self-confidence, highly esteemed self- image as they view themselves as a competent practitioner leading and managing a younger/newcomer to competency. The goal of the company must be at the forefront and therefore the company has to be proactive in ensuring all aspects of the program's success is considered (Sweeny, 2008). Mentors are confronted with various issues and challenges and this is supported by Long (1997) who outlined that some mentors are unqualified themselves to be mentors and those who are qualified are “overburdened” with the business of the organization and their “professional responsibilities”.

Although the mentoring program has its challenges it has helped the company to cater to succession planning. Thus, as Antal (1993) stated, communication between the new and older recruits, encouraged knowledge of critical issues in the organization to be shared. Geiger-Dummond and Boyle (1995) shared a similar view of mentoring as an aid to critical information sharing in the organization. This knowledge sharing took place between the mentors and the mentees and has therefore assisted the company in utilizing its older and more experienced workers to mentor the new recruits into the culture of the organization, in developing their communication skills and other skills necessary for them to develop competency and work confidently on the job. It is to this extent that the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceived the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy. This workforce development

strategy has provided the mentees with an avenue to learn the necessary skills from the more experienced older workers in the company thereby promoting continuity and competency among the workforce. It is also to this extent that the workforce development mentoring model has been found to be bridging the employability skills gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers.

**Findings:** Although the mentoring program at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company has no documented principles there are certain unwritten expectations and requirements of the HR manager, mentors and mentee to ensure the achievement of the program goals which include empowerment of the new recruits/mentees with employability skills necessary to work independently and confidently as engineers. The following, however, are the main principles adopted by the mentoring program as highlighted by the participants.

- Communication and meetings were important principles however schedule meetings were not always possible due to the busy work schedule of the mentors.
- Mentor/mentee matching seemed to be an important principle that followed a fixed process but with its challenges.
- Promotion was gained when competency in employability skills was attained. Promotion was determined after an interview session with the

mentee and managers in the company. This principle was followed rigidly.

It is important for the company to carefully document the principles of the mentoring program based on their assessment plan and this developmental plan or ‘roadmap’ of the mentoring program should be done to determine the path to the achievement of the company’s goals (Kirkpatrick 2008). Successful mentoring programs involve thoughtful planning, dedicated resources and staff for implementation and evaluation in order to measure outcomes and inform program improvement Kirkpatrick 2008). The mentoring process can cause a strain on all involved if it is not properly organized and the planning process should match mentors to mentees successfully (Long 1997). . The mentor/mentee should be a partnership relationship and therefore the partnership should forge high, clear and fair expectations. It is also crucial to the partnership that meetings are set up and kept for the overall purpose of communicating regularly which develops a strong relationship between the mentor and the mentee (Hare, 2008). It is therefore important that all these principles be documented to allow for clarity and to avoid misconceptions of the mentoring program.

The principles of the program although not explicitly stated imply that career development of the mentees is important as supported by Long (1997) who outlined that career advancement must be at the heart of the mentoring program to motivate the mentee to participate in the mentoring process. Thus, the Human

Resource Manager and a committee of senior engineers interview the mentees every three to six months to assess their level of growth. If the mentee has gained competency in the specified skills needed by the company then promotion is recommended. These interviews are done in the two years of the program to assess the level of competency of the mentee until he/she reaches a stage of maturity, where he/she can work independently.

The above principles though not documented however are linked with the business goals of the company to develop its workforce. A mentoring program must be linked to the organization's business goals Murray and Owen (1991). Business goals may be realized in mentoring new recruits/mentees so that they settle into the workplace quickly and allow for succession planning where mentors who are highly competent, experienced staff, pass on their expertise to others who need to acquire the specific skills.

Finding: The mentoring program, according to participants, does bridge the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the mentees as competency is evident. Although competency is gained there have been pitfalls in matching the mentors and mentees so there is a need to address the mentor/mentee matching process.

In order to sufficiently bridge the skills gap at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company there is need to ensure that the mentors and mentees communicate

sufficiently so that there can be a transfer of knowledge between the mentors and the mentees. Matching mentors to mentees is very crucial to program success. Mentor- mentee matching, is the biggest source of program problems and can interfere with the attainment of program goals hence care must be taken in matching mentors to mentees. Program goals should be used to evaluate every decision and component, including the processes, criteria for selection, and matching (Sweeny, 2008, p.127).

Mentors must be carefully selected. According to Sweeny (2008), The “Balanced” method is recommended as it fosters the development of mentors and mentee in the form of a “learning community”, according to Sweeny (2008, p. 127

Mentees want their mentor to be ‘supportive, caring, and willing to assist in achieving goals. A mentor who tries to direct, evaluate, or take control of the mentees’ career is likely to meet resistance (Network, Employer Assistance Resource, 2013).

There have been some challenges in the mentoring model advocated by the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company in terms of matching the mentors to the mentees and this has led to a lower rating of the program among the mentees. Kirkpatrick (2008) claimed that the mentors and mentees must work in close proximity and should have duties that are similar in order to improve their relationship. He added that the matching process should ensure that both mentor and mentee have similar timetable for lunch period to allow them to meet if even

on an informal basis. Program goals should also be used to evaluate every decision and component, including the processes, criteria for selection, and matching (Sweeny, 2008). The principles of the program have not been thoroughly specified and the mentors have not been trained sufficiently so difficulties in making and keeping scheduled meeting have been challenging. The use of technologies such as e-mail, skype, telephone has therefore assisted the mentees and mentors as well as the human resource manager in their communication.

#### Limitations and challenges

The study was limited due the short space of time to complete the investigation. More time could have been spent in the field doing observations and follow ups but the time did not permit. The Human resource manager's presence in the interviews also proved challenging as respondents; mentors and mentees may have answered differently. This however was dealt with by communicating with the respondents by telephone after the interviews were done. Just one mentee was interviewed without the Human Resource manager's presence in the interview. The interviews were not allowed to be taped hence the challenge to document all of the exact quotes of the participants, however the participants were able to review what was documented and confirmed or refuted where necessary.

## **Implications and Recommendations**

- Mentor training was identified as a need in order to facilitate relationship building with mentor and mentees. An on-going program should be established to train or qualify the mentors to perform their role in such a way as to achieve the objectives of the program and the organization on the whole. Participants should be trained in conflict resolution and encouraged to value their differences. There should be support systems where mentors can seek advice in dealing with challenging issues. The training process should include the development of communication skills, leadership skills and other necessary skills that they need to effectively perform their role. A community of practice can be established among the mentors so they can learn from each other and share their experiences in mentoring.
- Compensation of mentors by providing incentives in the form of money or otherwise. The mentors should be compensated for assisting the mentees. This could include financial rewards and not just the experience of mentoring in a leading capacity should be an incentive for mentors. The mentors should be rewarded for their involvement for instance they should be given a pay increase, incentives such as bonuses should be given, and opportunities for promotion granted so they will be motivated to perform their duties well.

- Hiring of retired persons who are experienced and yet have the time to mentor the mentees is recommended. Retired persons possess the time and skill and will not see the mentees as a threat to their position as they are not a part of the organization. They should also be compensated for their efforts.
- Group mentoring with several mentors and mentees meeting is also recommended. This does not remove one and one mentoring as is presently done by the company. This will ensure that the mentoring process is progressive and the goal of the mentees acquiring the required employability skills to meet the needs of the organization are met. Group mentoring may fill the gap that has not been filled by the one and one mentoring process.
- Matching of mentors to mentees can involve a rotation process whereby mentees are given a different mentor after a period of time. This will ensure the mentees gain competencies from different engineers in different fields and the skills gained will be wider. The mentees will also learn to communicate with different individuals and they will discover how they handle different aspects of work.

In conclusion a balanced approach is recommended as advocated by Sweeny (2008) where the mentors are trained to be highly reflective, collaborative and life- long learners themselves. The ongoing training and support may lead to the expectations that mentors and mentees will continually grow. The mentor's

primary job is to serve as a model of continual learning and growth. The commitment therefore is not to be a perfect mentor but rather, it is to work at becoming an even better mentor every day. Additionally, a community of learners lowers levels of stress of both the mentors and the mentees as everyone will learn together.

Management has to therefore anticipate challenges and proactively check for problems than dealing with challenges as they arise. The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company therefore needs to clearly outline the principles of the Mentoring program in order to get their monies' worth in the achievement of the company's goal to close the skills gap in the workforce and produce a more competent workforce that will lead the company to be competitive and successful.

The investigation has proven though that although there have been some challenges the mentoring program of the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company has helped to a great extent to achieve the company's goal to bridge the employability skills gap that exists between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers.

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**APPENDIX A****INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2014      **Place:** The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company

**Interviewer:** Ferica Cadogan    **Interviewee:**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Probing Questions</b>
1. To what extent does the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company perceive the mentoring program to be a workforce development strategy?	Human Resource Manager, Mentors, Mentees: 1) What for you are the characteristics of a 'good workforce development strategy? 2) Are you seeing these characteristics in the mentoring program? 3) To what extent do you think the program has assisted in developing the workforce at the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company? 4) Do you think that appropriate skills are learnt from the program to help the mentees to complete the tasks needed by the employer? 5) Do you think that the program is helping the company to have a competitive edge in the global market place? 6) What aspects of the program do you think can be altered, remain or omitted to make the program a more effective workforce development strategy?

## **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2014      **Place:** The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company

**Interviewer:** Ferica Cadogan    **Interviewee:**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Probing Questions</b>
2. What are the principles underlying the mentoring model employed by the company?	<p>Human Resource Manager, Mentors, Mentees:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) What are the general rules of conduct of the mentoring program for you as a manager/mentor/mentee?</li><li>2) What are the principles underlying the relationships between the mentors and mentees in terms of learning tasks?</li><li>3) What are the principles in the selection and matching of mentor and mentees?</li><li>4) What principles underlying the teaching/learning of tasks?</li><li>5) What are the principles concerning monitoring of the program/mentors/mentees?</li><li>6) What are the principles concerning progression in terms of mentees in the program?</li></ol>

## INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2014      **Place:** The Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company

**Interviewer:** Ferica Cadogan    **Interviewee:**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Interview Probing Questions</b>
3. To what extent is the workforce development mentoring model bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the recently employed engineers?	<p>Human Resource Manager, Mentors, Mentees:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) To what extent competency is gained by the mentees in the particular skill set needed by the company?</li><li>2) Do you think the program is bridging the employability skill gap between the job requirements and the skill set of the mentees?</li><li>3) What level of improvement have you seen as they progress in the program?</li><li>4) Are the mentees able to work independently after they have been mentored in a particular task?</li><li>5) If you had to rate the program on a scale of one to 10 how will you rate it in terms of closing the skill gap and why?</li></ol>

**APPENDIX B****COMPANY APPROVAL LETTER****Trinidad & Tobago Utility Company**

17<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Mr, Cipriani Davis

Academic Co-ordinator, MA TVET Programme

School of Education

University of the West Indies

ST. Augustine

Dear Mr. Davis,

Ms. Ferica Cadogan who is currently enrolled in the Master of Arts in Leadership & Technical Vocational Education and training & Workforce Development Programme at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, has been given permission from the Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company to gather information and interview persons on the Mentoring Programme of our organization.

Ms. Cadogan has been liaising with the Human Resource Officer 111, attached to the Training and Development Section of the Human Resource Department.

Yours sincerely

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Assistant General Manager- Human Resource (J, 1997)

Trinidad and Tobago Utility Company

