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Building a Sustainable Mentorship Support Model in Manufacturing: Integrating Recruitment-Training Alignment and Stakeholder Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at building a sustainable mentorship support model in the manufacturing industry, integrated recruitment-training alignment with stakeholder engagement. It highlights that traditional mentorship systems struggle to meet the contemporary needs of manufacturing employees, particularly in terms of skills and emotional connections. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative analysis to propose a demand-supply-sustainability ternary model intended to optimize resource allocation and enhance the sustainability of mentorship programs. The findings provide an actionable framework and strategies for mentorship initiatives in manufacturing, while enriching the theoretical content of mentorship in specific context.

Keywords: Mentorship Programs (MPs), Mentorship Support Model (MSM), Recruitment-Training Alignment, Education for Sustainability, Stakeholder Engagement.

1. Introduction

Mentorship Programs (hereinafter MPs) have gained global recognition as an important tool for organisational capability development. Statistics show that 100% of US Fortune 50 companies have mentorship programmes, and 84% of Fortune 500 companies have integrated them into their human resource strategies (Pursell, 2023). Most of the current research on the mentorship focuses on the medical field, as medicine is the most developed field of the mentorship, which is based more on a mentorship way of transferring knowledge and psychological guidance. Yet few studies have focused on MPs in the fields of industry and construction. Above all, few studies have focused on the specific environmental characteristics of manufacturing (Bjursell & Florin Sädbom, 2018). In addition, most organisations currently face these problems of 'insufficient mentors', 'mentors too busy to mentor', and 'insufficient rewards and incentives'. In particular, the support of mentorship is important to compensate for the level of mentorship, relax mentor time and strengthen motivation.

Scholar Jennifer Labin (Labin, 2017) has proposed the AXLES model, but has not elaborated further on it for mentorship support programs in the manufacturing industry. The manufacturing industry has its own specific industry characteristics and faces obvious differentiation from other industries in MPs. Firstly, in the 2023 UK industry turnover statistics (see Figure 1), it is seen that the number of employees with more than 5 years' experience in the manufacturing sector remains at 55.1%, which is higher than the 25% in accommodation and food services and 52.5% in other service activities. Although the turnover rate in manufacturing is lower than that in the FMCG, its unique stability exacerbates a potential challenge: high-performing mentors (mostly senior employees between 30-40 years old) have reached saturation in explicit skills (e.g., 'communication' and 'listening'), making it difficult to meet their requirements for development through the traditional mentoring system. The mentorship has become saturated with explicit skills (e.g., 'communication' and 'listening'), making it difficult for traditional mentors to meet their advanced development requirements. For example, many mentorship support programs in the literature mention the improvement of 'listening' skills. Many mentors in the manufacturing industry are selected from high-performing employees in their 30s and 40s, with a wealth of workplace experience. Skills such as 'communication', 'listening', 'reporting', etc. are all well developed for them. Therefore, explicit competence enhancement for this type of people will no longer

meet their requirements for personal competence enhancement. Secondly, the common saying that 'recruitment is more important than training' (G&A Partners, 2018) is also an incomplete view. It is difficult to find 100% of the candidates who fit the position, but only those who match the position as closely as possible. For example, find candidates who are 80% or 75% match to the position (see Figure 2). And the role of training is to help the selected candidate and the position as far as possible to achieve a 100% match, so that they can be competent for the job requirements of the position (see Figure 3). In other words, Training is a complement to recruitment deficiencies. Therefore, it can be argued that training is as important for talent development as it is for organisational sustainability. These contradictions highlight the urgency of reviewing the design logic of mentorship in manufacturing.

This study will use theoretical elaboration from qualitative research for theory building, as well as a structured questionnaire for quantitative analysis and testing of data consistency to calibrate and construct a mentorship support model in manufacturing. This study introduces the stakeholder theory of organisational behaviour (Freeman, 1984) and the KSAOs framework of human resource development (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011) to construct a demand-supply-sustainability ternary model, which can make up for the lack of multidisciplinary intersections in current mentorship research. It also breaks through the existing literature on the medical field. It also breaks through the excessive focus on the medical field in the existing literature, and reveals for the first time the unique contextual characteristics of mentorship support in the manufacturing industry. At the same time, this study provides an actionable framework for mentorship support in the manufacturing industry, and optimises the allocation of resources to a certain extent, so as to promote the sustainability of the program.

This study will be developed based on the following frameworks: (1) guidance on how to build a mentorship support program in a manufacturing firm; (2) exploring the attitudes and behavioural choices of firm stakeholders towards mentorship support programs; and (3) how to make a mentorship support program sustainable.

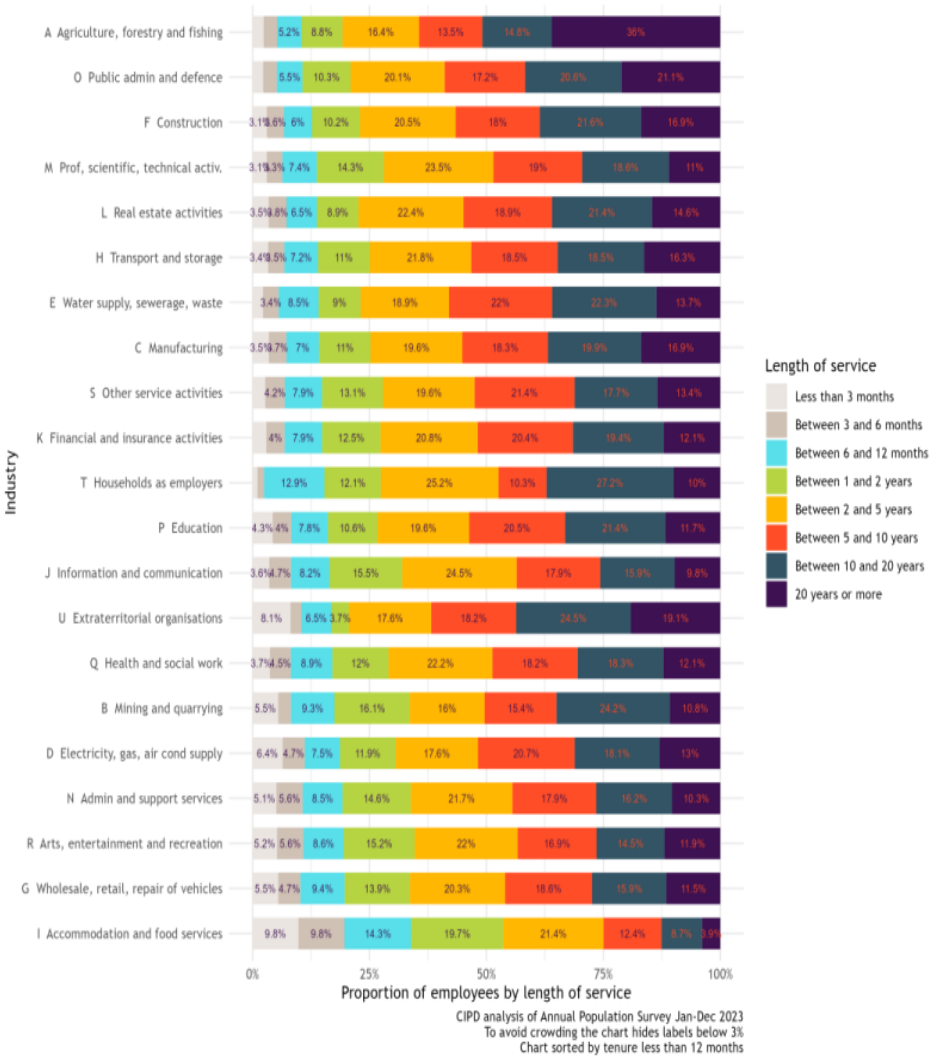

Fig. 1. UK tenure by industry (Jan–Dec 2023).
Source. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2024.

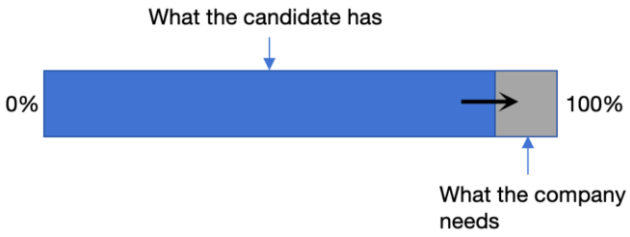

Fig. 2. The compatibility of position.

Fig. 3. The competence of position.

2. Literature Review

1.1 Mentorship

Mentoring first originated from Greek myth, which is a way of transmitting one's wisdom, knowledge and ideas from an experienced person to a relatively less experienced one by involving all parties together (Sarri, 2011). Subsequently, mentors have emerged across the world in various schools to transfer knowledge, ideas and skills, such as Plato, Aristotle, Confucius and other notable figures. Currently, there are various definitions about mentors. In the role, mentors provide the help needed in the personal development of junior, inexperienced employees (Shandley, 1989). By content, mentors provide support and guidance to the mentees, including career development advice, skills training and emotional support (Allen & Eby, 2007). And mentorship as a system is widely found in schools, hospitals and other organisations (Ehrich & Hansford, 1999).

Mentorship differs from coaching. Coaching is task-oriented and focuses primarily on specific performance gaps (Cleary & Horsfall, 2015). while Mentorship is a wide variety of organised, managed mentoring relationships that exist in an organisation (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008). A formal mentors program includes a start date, a deadline, a complete implementation process, and a content framework (Bjursell & Florin Sädbom, 2018). According to the AIHR definition (Verlinden, 2023), mentorship refers to a system in which two or more people transfer knowledge, skills, and emotions to a less experienced party over an extensive period of time based on mutual trust. Mentorship is characterised by developmental, bi-directional, supportive and guiding, and emotional links (Allen & Eby, 2007).

Although there is adequate research on mentors and mentorship, there are few studies in the empirical literature that focus on the structure and impact of training in mentorship-supported programs. In addition, mentorship research currently lacks theoretical integration from other disciplines (Scandura & Pellegrini, 2008). At the same time, the idea that mentors don't need training is common in the community. Program planners may argue that their mentors can get away with not participating in training because they have a gift for mentoring (Allen & Eby, 2007). In conclusion, what kind of support is available for mentors and how to ensure that it is effective need a topic for further discussion.

1.2 Recruitment-Training Alignment

Talent selection is a core part for organisations to acquire high quality human resources. Traditional selection methods focus on candidates' explicit skills and experience, and CV screening is the main selection method (Liu et al., 2016). However, contemporary talent selection methods place more emphasis on the assessment of implicit abilities (Skuza et al., 2022). In the manufacturing industry, selection for operational positions usually relies on technical aptitude tests (Borman et al., 1997), while R&D positions are more focused on professional knowledge (Quélin, 2000). Existing research indicates, the selection process in the manufacturing industry does not pay enough attention to candidates' attitudes and implicit abilities, resulting in more training to cover them after onboarding (Gospel, 2010). Psychometric assessments are gaining popularity in talent selection, with the advantage of predicting candidates' long-term development potential (Ployhart et al., 2017).

KSAOs is the classic theoretical framework for human resource selection and development, which includes four aspects of knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics. (Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). In recruitment, KSAOs identify key competencies through job analysis and design assessment tools. However, practice has shown that the recruitment process often relies too much on explicit metrics such as ‘knowledge’ and ‘skills’ while ignoring invisible conditions such as critical thinking, mental toughness, and motivation (Bretz

et al., 1993). This imbalance leads to a situation where new employees can be brought on board quickly, but have difficulty adapting to the iterative demands of skills in complex situations.
The effectiveness of training design depends on its alignment with organisational strategy and individual demand. Traditional education mode is still dominant in the manufacturing industry, but it is difficult to meet the advanced development requirements of senior employees (Bingham et al., 2018). Training design based on adult learning theories is gradually gaining attention, which is centred on facilitating the transfer of tacit knowledge through practical feedback and reflection (Chalofsky, 2014). For example, successful examples of mentorship in manufacturing have shown that combining technical training with psychological support can significantly improve employee retention (Herjuna et al., 2024).
Recruitment-training alignment (RTA) emphasises the complementarity of the two in talent management: recruitment identifies the candidate's 'Baseline Fit', while training fills the 'Developmental Gap' (Lewis & Heckman, 2006). The apparent skills saturation of manufacturing mentors suggests the prioritisation of KSAOs needs to be redefined, thereby designing personalised training map that incorporate competency development and attitude activation into a synergistic framework.

1.3 Stakeholder

The stakeholder approach and concepts have been elaborated in business in the early 1930s (Clarkson, 1995). It is now widely used in various fields such as political science, medicine, organisational management, marketing, etc. (Brugha, 2000). Stakeholders can be categorised into primary and secondary stakeholders (Costa & Goulart da Silva, 2019). And in this study, the direct supports of mentorship are mentor and mentee. secondary stakeholders are HR (or project leader) and the management.
Management attitudes and resource allocation are core driving force of mentorship program sustainability. Research has shown that management's recognition of mentorship directly influences project priorities and resource allocation (Bower, 2017). In the manufacturing industry, management is often pressured by short-term production goals to regard mentorship as a 'non-essential cost' rather than a long-term investment, resulting in programmes being abandoned or reduced to a mere formality (Laverty, 1996).
Furthermore, most mentors in manufacturing are senior technical staff or middle managers whose explicit skills are mature but whose implicit competencies are underdeveloped. At the same time, the expectations of new employees have reshaped the engagement logic of mentorship. Different from the traditional 'one-way teaching' model, Generation Z prefers 'interactive learning' (Erişen & Bavlı, 2024). It requires mentors to focus on the emotional connection and attribute development for mentees while teaching traditional knowledge and skills, which helps mentees to understand the organisational culture and integrate into the organisation more quickly.
In short, program coordination requires management strategy, HR resourcing, mentor competency improvement and mentee engagement needs so as to provide a sustainable path for manufacturing mentorship with multi-agency synergy.

3. Method

The study adopts a Mixed-Methods Approach, combining qualitative exploration and quantitative validation, in order to systematically construct a model of mentorship support in the manufacturing industry and test its effectiveness. The research design is divided into three stages. Firstly, the article adopts the literature analysis method and in-depth interviews to refine the core dimensions of mentors' support model based on the literature gaps and the characteristics of the manufacturing industry. By systematically reviewing the KSAOs framework, stakeholder theories and existing mentorship models, we identify the specificities of the manufacturing context (e.g., explicit skill saturation, generational differences). At the same time, this study focuses on the intersection of 'recruitment-training alignment' and 'stakeholder engagement', and develops preliminary theoretical hypotheses. Secondly, this study adopts quantitative analysis to validate the theoretical model through structured questionnaires and to quantify the relationship between the supporting programs and the key players. Finally, questionnaire data and interview transcripts are integrated to modify the dynamic feedback paths in the model.
A total of 324 people who have experienced mentorship in the manufacturing industry participated in this research. The sample was selected from 170 mentees and 154 mentors in the manufacturing industry in Chongqing, China, using a structured questionnaire. The 95 mentees were from new employees, and 75 mentees were from different group mentoring, including digital competency development program, synchronised engineering competency development program, and 6 Sigma program. Similarly, each of the 95 mentors matched with the new employees, 49 mentors matched as mentors for the 6 Sigma program, and the rest of the mentors matched with different group mentoring programs. The respondents were generally male dominated with a male to female ratio of 5.48:1, which is also in line with the basic characteristics of the manufacturing industry.The age range of the 95 new employees was 21-28 years old, with a mean of 23.88 and a variance of 2.10.The age range of the 75 mentees involved in the group mentoring program was 22-57 years old, with a mean of 35.65 and a variance of 7.31.154 mentors were in the age range of 24 -52 years old,

with a mean age of 39.17 years, a variance of 4.72, and a mean length of service of 12.98 years. More details can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the sample (N=324).

Characteristics		Mentee		Mentor	
		New employee	Group learner	Newbie mentor	Group mentor
Gender	Male	83	58	85	48
	Female	12	17	10	11
Age	Range	21-28	22-57	23-52	24-52
	Mean ± SD	23.88±2.10	35.65±7.31	39.16±4.75	36.85±5.00
Tenure	Range	-	1-23	1-21	2-21
	Mean ± SD	-	7.13±5.40	12.97±4.06	9.92±4.14

The questionnaires used a five-point Likert scale and a binary scale for data collection. The questionnaires focused on 'what mentees are expected to support', 'what mentors are expected to support', and 'the importance of stakeholders' support for mentorship'.

4. Result and Discuss

Firstly, descriptive statistical analyses were conducted in order to explore what mentorship supports. Combining the importance of KSAOs for employee selection in the field of HR recruitment (Amel et al., 2023) with the complementary role of training for organisational development (Jun et al., 2024), knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics were categorised as mentorship's four main support components. Next, by distributing questionnaires to mentors and mentees, we recognised 308 questionnaires as being able to provide support for mentorship in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics, with 158 questionnaires filled in by mentees and 150 questionnaires filled in by mentors, and the validity of the questionnaire was 95.06%. This result shows that 95.06% of the respondents agreed that mentorship support programs can be designed in four aspects: knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics. Therefore, it can be said that the four aspects of KSAOs training can provide positive support for mentorship to a large extent, both for mentors and mentees.

Further, we asked the question 'What would you like to be supported more when participating in a training programme?' for each of the four dimensions: knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics, and asked to rank the options in order of priority. Since mentees and mentors are different in these four aspects, the questionnaire was designed differently. In the mentees' questionnaire, knowledge includes Alert, PFMA, GPDS, vehicle production process, etc. Skills include office application, workshop practice, operation of Jira process system, etc. Abilities include managerial communication, teamwork, problem solving, presentation skills, career planning, etc. Other characteristics include work attitude, environmental adaptation, hobbies and interests. In the mentors' questionnaire, knowledge includes new technology, artificial intelligence, performance management, etc. Skills include teaching technique, communication skills, practice of new technology, etc. Abilities include leadership, management communication, problem solving, design thinking, etc. Other characteristics include positive psychology, mental models, strategic thinking, influencing people, etc. In the mentees' questionnaire feedback (see Table 2), 48.24% of the mentees chose knowledge as the first priority, which is much more important than the other three items, 44.71% chose skills as the second priority, which is much more important than the other three items, and 86.47% of the mentees thought the least important item was other characteristics. However, as can be seen in the mentors' questionnaire feedback (see Table 3), 40.26%% of mentors considered abilities to be more important, while there was relatively no significant difference between the three choices of knowledge, skills and other characteristics. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between mentors' and mentees' support for the four aspects (see Table 4). mentees were more interested in the improvement of significant aspects. Mentors, on the other hand, were more interested in the improvement of invisible aspects. In conclusion, support resources for mentorship need to be differentially designed for mentees and mentors.

Finally, we investigated the alignment of the stakeholders with the program by surveying them. Mentors and mentees, as the main support participants of mentorship, belong to a strategic alliance to some extent, and their devotion to the program will largely influence the effectiveness of the mentorship program. The results of the chi-square test (Table 5) showed that there was no significant difference in the distribution of the engagement ratings between the mentees' group and the mentors' group ($\chi^2 = 4.219$, $p = 0.121$, $E = 6.18$). It indicates that both mentors and mentees consistently agreed that the degree of support for the program from management and HR / project leader affects the degree of engagement of both mentors and mentees when participating in the program.

Based on the conclusions drawn above, we can get the following relationship (see Figure 4).

Table 2. What would you like to receive more support from when participating in the mentorship programme? (priority evaluation from the mentees) (N=170).

Support dimension of mentorship	Rank order			
	1	2	3	4
Knowledge: Alert, PFMA, GPDS, whole vehicle production process, etc.	48.24%	28.82%	17.65%	5.29%
Skills: office applications, workshop practice, Jira process system operation, etc.	26.47%	44.71%	26.47%	2.35%
Abilities: management communication, teamwork, problem solving, presentation skills, career planning, etc.	25.29%	25.29%	43.53%	5.89%
Other attributes: work attitude, environmental adaptation, hobbies, etc.	0%	1.18%	12.35%	86.47%

Table 3. What would you like to receive more support from when participating in the mentorship programme? (priority evaluation from the mentors) (N=154).

Support dimension of mentorship	Rank order			
	1	2	3	4
Knowledge: new technology, artificial intelligence, performance management, etc.	22.73%	24.68%	35.06%	17.53%
Skills: instructional skills, communication skills, practice of new technologies, etc.	12.34%	38.31%	24.68%	24.68%
Abilities: leadership, managerial communication, problem solving, design thinking, etc.	40.26%	14.94%	27.92%	16.88%
Other attributes: positive psychology, mental models, strategic thinking, influencing people, etc.	24.68%	22.08%	12.34%	40.91%

Table 4. Manufacturing mentorship KSAOs supply and demand matching matrix

Type of competence	The mentors demand level	Mentor supply level	The mentees demand level	Gap type
Dominant	Low	Very high	High	Excess supply
Recessive	High	Low	Average	Undersupply

Table 5. How much it affects your input when you are involved in a program

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.219[a]	2	.121
Likelihood Ratio	4.222	2	.121
N of Valid Cases	324		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.18.

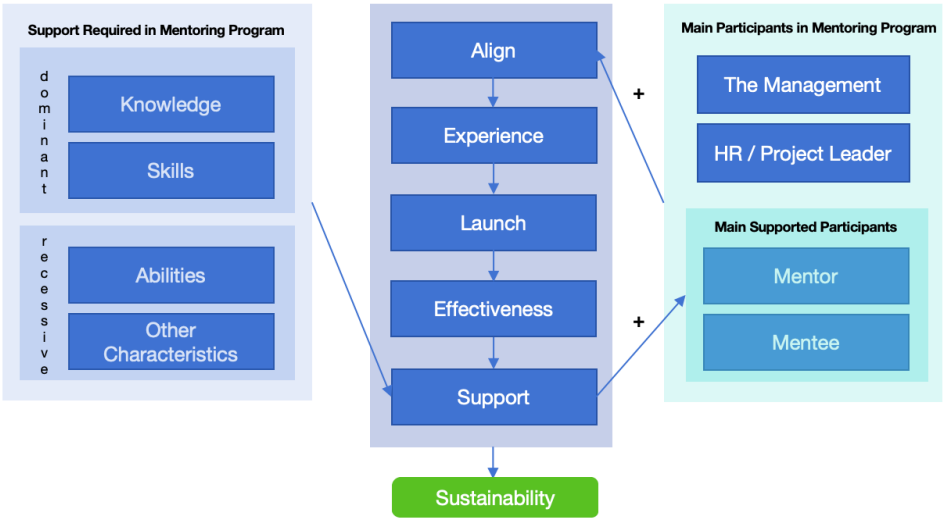

Fig. 4. The sustainable mentorship support model in manufacturing

5. Conclusion

The mentorship system currently faces multifaceted challenges including 'insufficient mentor-mentee competency alignment', 'time constraints limiting mentoring availability', and 'inadequate recognition and incentive mechanisms'. Particularly within manufacturing contexts, these systemic issues are compounded by industry-specific operational realities. Crucially, institutional support for mentorship programs emerges as a pivotal determinant influencing both stakeholder engagement and programmatic sustainability.

This paper explores the specific directions for training from the perspective of recruitment. Knowledge, Skills, Attributes and Traits as important dimensions for talent selection can also be used as important directions for talent development within the organisation. The results of the analysis show that KSAOs play an important role in the development of mentors and mentees in mentorship. However, mentors and mentees have significant variability above the selection preference of mentorship support. In addition, the joint commitment of the mentors, the mentees, the HR / project leader, and the management affects the sustainability of the mentorship. Finally, through literature review and questionnaire analysis, this paper constructs a sustainable mentorship support model in manufacturing.

As this paper focuses on causal research, the focus is on the exploration of the impact and sustainability direction of the mentorship support aspect on the main participants. Future research can continue to further explore the mentorship support program on employee performance, satisfaction, ROI and other indicators. In addition, whether the mentors support program can be expanded to other industries and fields needs to be further discussed. For example, whether it can be extended to service-oriented enterprises, financial firms, or to the education and government fields. In conclusion, this paper further develops the mentorship program in the manufacturing industry and provides a sustainable mentorship support model in manufacturing, which hopefully provides more ideas and insights for mentorship-related practitioners.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Author Contributions

Yun Zeng: Paper idea; Introduction; Literature review; Methodology; Validation.
Simin Yang: Investigation; Data collection; Proofs; Review; Supervision.
WeiHsiang Hsu: Data analysis; Data curation; Review; Overall writeup proofs.

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