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Mentoring in the rail context: the influence of training, style, and practice

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate workplace learning in the context of the rail industry, specifically for the type of learning required to become a train driver. It examines the impact of changes to the traditional learning model, and explores the potential of mentoring in the learning/training model.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper uses a participative research approach to examine training experiences with trainee drivers and driver trainers (n = 61) in six Australian rail organisations. The data are synthesised based on an inductive thematic analysis from focus groups, interviews and cab-rides.

Findings – Current driver-learning approaches contain a number of haphazard elements that provide an unfavourable learning experience. Mentoring practices appear to be happening incidentally, despite train drivers wanting mentoring experiences.

Practical implications – In the designing and planning of new driver-learning frameworks, it is important to identify the unintended consequences of implementing a condensed "classroom" curriculum. The condensed and accelerated driver-learning model currently used could be enhanced through the incorporation of a mentoring process.

Originality/value – The article fills an important research gap in the space of workplace learning and mentoring in the rail industry. The themes and findings provide a basis for why mentoring should be integrated as part of the training process. It draws attention to the importance of the situational context, and contributes to communities of practice by outlining important considerations for a holistic model of mentoring in the rail industry.

Keywords Training, Mentoring, Workplace learning, Knowledge acquisition, Rail industry, Train driving

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The mentoring process is often viewed as a strategy that enhances training, advances career prospects and encourages professional and personal development (Greene and

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Puetzer, 2002; Jewell, 2007). In workplaces where training occurs on-the-job, mentoring is used to support the development of skills and knowledge. The education, health and transportation sectors all utilise mentoring, but it generally occurs in an authentic workplace setting rather than in the classroom. Here, mentoring can be used as a guided learning approach (Billet, 2000), assisting in transition from theory or book knowledge to practical application in formal situations. However, while mentoring is often viewed as a solution, its effectiveness can vary (Eby *et al.*, 2000), mainly because it is a formal relationship and typically implemented by people with vested interests (Gilbreath *et al.*, 2008).

Two schools of thought about mentoring have emerged within the literature – one views it as a hierarchical dynamic whilst the other purports that it is reciprocal in nature. The hierarchical dyad is more traditional and tends to be adopted when the mentor is more experienced than the mentee, or in possession of exclusive knowledge (Jones and Brown, 2011). This form portrays the mentor as the dominant partner, and, whilst effective, can lead to problems of positional power, manipulation and sabotage (Awaya *et al.*, 2003; Eby *et al.*, 2000).

Reciprocal mentoring avoids potential relationship issues by providing both mentors and mentees the opportunity to contribute to and gain from the relationship (Allen, 2007; Heirdsfield *et al.*, 2008). However, in situations where the trainee is new to the organisation or profession, it is unreasonable to expect them to have the knowledge, skills or confidence to participate in this type of relationship. Thus, asymmetrical mentoring, which falls between the hierarchical and reciprocal approaches, provides an alternative. This is where the participants acknowledge that the experienced person takes the lead, but mentoring is negotiated and organised so that the mentee's and mentor's needs are identified and catered for (Eby *et al.*, 2007).

Reciprocal learning is based on cooperation; thus, skills are developed through role-modelling and provision of situational advice, and the mentee's observation and emulation of the mentor's actions (Koskela and Palukka, 2011). Both the guided and sociocultural approaches to learning recognise the experience, skills and knowledge of the mentor in their ability to enable developmental opportunities through constructivist strategies (Billet, 2000; 2008). In this respect, substantive research has identified crucial elements of the mentoring process. Connection, needs and context form the foundation of the relationship and direct the process (Kram, 1985), such that mentoring is said to involve three key components:

(1) *Relational* – Where connections are made between the participants in order to form a relationship.

(2) *Developmental* – Where needs are identified and the development of these guide the relationship.

(3) *Contextual* – Where the context guides what occurs and how it occurs in the relationship (Ambrosetti, 2010).

Beyond these components, links can also be made between mentoring and situated learning in that learning is embedded in the activity, context and culture (Lave and Wenger, 1999). Thus, when mentoring is utilised in an authentic setting, the mentee is immersed in the workplace culture, undertakes situated activities, and skills are

developed through mentor guidance. However, in situated activities, mentors may also undertake an assessor's role. This is common during the practical training of pre-service teachers, undergraduate nurses and train drivers. In this respect, mentors assess or make a judgment regarding the functional competencies of the mentee (Kilcullen, 2007; Walkington, 2005). Assessment is not traditionally part of the mentoring role; it has the potential to impede the process and increase the likelihood of hierarchical relationships where the mentor wields power through the assessment. Nevertheless, the context of the situation can easily influence the roles adopted (Scalon, 2008), such that the roles of the mentor and mentee are considered to be intrinsically interconnected and dependent on the interactions in the relationship (Ambrosetti and Dekkers, 2010).

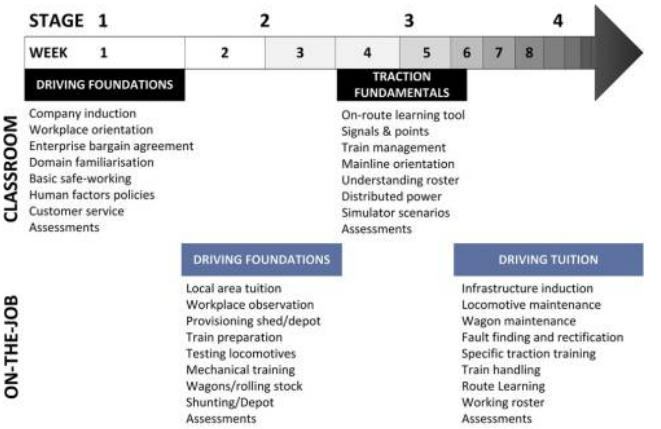
1.1 Mentoring and workplace learning in the rail context

In the transport sector, the use of mentoring has varied, but organisations have begun to incorporate formal mentoring processes as a mechanism for elevating the training experience. In train driving, mentoring has aligned with traditional hierarchical and situated learning models, but organisations have relied on filling job vacancies with people from within the same industry. In Australia, however, the median age of train drivers remains at forty-three (Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council, 2012), and the problem of an aging workforce and low retention rates has provoked change in employment models to address skill shortages (Department for Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009).

The change in recruitment method has engendered change in learning policies, and the traditional model has needed to adapt to accommodate *ab initio* drivers (i.e. "off-the-street" recruits with no prior rail familiarity). The introduction of classroom teaching methods, simulator training and an increase in assessments have split the focus from on-the-job tuition to the classroom, both to compensate for the lack of familiarity, but also to address resourcing needs. Thus, training in the transport industry shares a similar context to the health industry in that simulation is used in conjunction with authentic learning situations as a way of transmitting practical experience (Stirling and Smith, 2012).

However, beyond the economic and professional development perspective, the risks of the present rail recruitment policy and training approach are significant from a safety-critical point of view. A condensed training regime and the resulting pressures may be haphazard if improperly designed. Poor organisation of driver trainers may create inconsistencies in the trainees' experience and impact their competencies. An over-reliance on synthetic learning environments may engender underspecified driving techniques, and significantly impact safe working, particularly with respect to developing the decision-making for informed management of safety and service delivery (Naweed, 2013a).

Figure 1 shows a generic Australian train driver-learning model, illustrating the number of stages and approximate time it takes to proceed to driving tuition. The amount that has to be learned and assessed is compacted into a short time frame, and has introduced other factors that influence how, why, and when it happens. Although *ab initio* drivers are being recruited, there is little evidence to suggest that the increase in classroom teaching and use of simulators has enhanced learning (Naweed, 2013b). In practice, these changes are more likely to have engendered new



Source: Naweed (2013b)

Figure 1.
The current model for learning how to drive a train

relationship structures and altered the mentoring context. Although most rail organisations now report ownership of "mentoring programs", the evidence suggests they are being used sparingly and the role is being improperly understood (CRC for Rail Innovation, 2013). While research has started to investigate new initiatives for mentoring in rail, there is a scarcity of research in this context.

Given the infancy of new driver learning and recruitment models, there is a clear gap in the area of mentoring and learning in rail. A better grasp of how train drivers understand mentoring is required, particularly with respect to its relational, developmental, and contextual features. This should disaggregate the specific features that currently comprise a holistic mentoring model in terms of its relationship with the development of driving skills. A better understanding is also needed of the relationship structures that the new training regime has established between the mentor and mentee. While an abundance of hierarchical frameworks is expected, exploring how new training models have changed these structures may provide some insight into the types of recommendations needed for this and other reasonably generalisable learning contexts. Given the scarcity of mentoring research in rail, this research intended to investigate the way mentoring strategies are being utilised in the training of new drivers.

1.2 Aims and objectives

This study set out to explore the potential of mentoring to enhance learning in the train driving context and was guided by the following research question: How is mentoring understood by train drivers and what role does it play in the development of driver learning? This was composed of the following objectives:

- To determine the prevalence of mentoring in rail.
- To determine how mentoring is understood in the context of train driver learning.
- To explore the type of relationship structures that exist in training and/or mentoring in rail.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research context and study design

Study aims were couched in a larger context to investigate how train-driving skills were acquired and how training approaches facilitated their acquisition. While the research design included basic methods, they were suited to collecting data from naturalistic settings (Cooke, 1994). Data were collected through interviews and observations of drivers and their trainers at work, and through a review of industry materials, such as trainee progress reports, training schedules, checklists and work rosters. A research framework overview is illustrated in Figure 2.

Experience-based knowledge is tacit and difficult to articulate (Shadbolt, 2005), and this problem has been identified for train driving (Naweed, 2014). To address this, the research framework transitioned participants from their classrooms to the driver-cab, providing the time and space needed to formulate thoughts. The first part of the focus group explored driving skill and included pen-paper tasks to facilitate discussion. The second part explored skills acquisition and how these were maintained.

After focus groups, interviews were performed with individual participants (see Figure 2). These were carried out using the critical decision method (Klein *et al.*, 1989) and explored specific experience where the participant had operated a train under challenging circumstances. The protocol included a series of probes and "what-if" hypotheticals to understand the role that learning and mentoring had in their decision-making.

Driver and trainer observations were the final step and enabled participants to describe their actions and activities in situ (Shadbolt, 2005). These were informal but included a portion where drivers gave a "thought bubble" commentary of their actions (Ericsson and Simon, 1993). Observations were undertaken in both the live-environment and in a train simulator with two participants: a competent driver or trainee in the driving seat, and an accompanying senior driver or trainer.

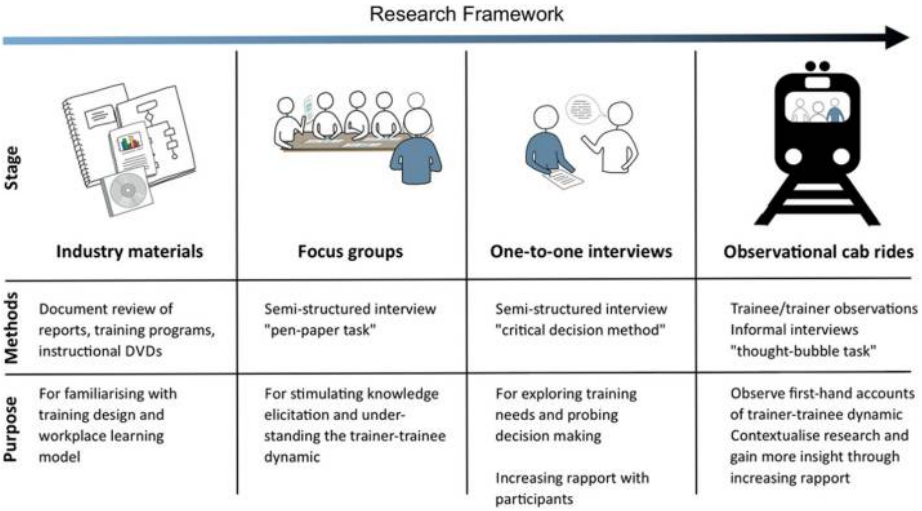


Figure 2.
Overview of the research framework

2.2 Participants

The study was undertaken in six Australian rail organisations (4 passenger; 2 freight). Two used dual-driving modes (i.e. primary driver and co-driver). The remainder used single driving. A total of 61 participants took part in this study (*mean age* = 47; *SD* = 11.5). Thirty-one were accomplished drivers (20 senior drivers; 11 driver trainers). The remainder were trainees in advanced or formative stages of tuition.

2.2.1 Organisational training profiles. All of the organisations managed their own in-house training programs, the standardisation and competencies for which are contained in a national training framework (Transport and Logistics Industry Skills Council., 2014). The first three stages of training (shown in Figure 1) took approximately 6 weeks. However, the process of driving tuition was longer and varied depending on the size and nature of the organisation. Most large passenger rail operators could take up to 25 weeks to complete the driving tuition stage, whilst freight operators could take twice as long.

The official role of a driver trainer was to plan and deliver training within the workplace, and to conduct assessments. This also included training design, though it varied and was often done in collaboration with learning and development departments. None of the participating organisations had implemented formal mentoring processes in their training frameworks.

2.3 Data collection process

Focus groups lasted 90 minutes and typically incorporated five drivers. Pen-paper tasks were used to facilitate the discussion in the first part of the focus group. This involved inventing challenging routes and noting navigation strategies. The second part focused on skills acquisition and the trainer – trainee dynamic. Sample questions included:

- How did you develop your route knowledge?
- What role does the additional driver play in your train driving operations?[1]
- What are your thoughts on the way driver training is currently conducted?
- What are your thoughts on the way train driving competencies are currently maintained and assessed?

Following the focus group, participants took turns to participate in individual interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes. These explored incidents that the participant had experienced where better driving competencies could have produced a different outcome. Questions to probe decisions included:

- What specific training or experience is necessary or helpful in making this decision?'
- If the decision was not the best, what training, knowledge, or information could have helped?
- Would you have made the same decision at an earlier point in your career?

Following the individual interviews, participants took part in cab ride observations. These were pre-rostered and lasted 30 to 120 minutes. Informal questions were used to help contextualise comments from drivers in the earlier stages of data collection. The thought-bubble portion lasted between 15 to 30 minutes, and drivers were asked to verbalise their actions, goals and information being attended to.

2.4 Ethical considerations

Data were de-identified, participation was voluntary and written consent was obtained. Cab rides were granted prior to data collection, and involved a safety briefing to ensure there would be no impediments to train driving.

2.5 Data analysis

The larger research context used a variety of data (see Figure 2). However, this study incorporated and analysed interview data only. This was taken from focus groups, individual interviews and informal interviews during cab rides. The data from each of these were used for the thematic analysis and answered the first two objectives. The third objective was explored through the analysis.

Transcriptions of interviews from all stages were analysed for key words/phrases substantive to study aims. Data within the focus group transcripts included verbal elaborations of pictorial data from pen-paper tasks. Data drawn from industry documentation were compared against the participative data through a cross-data validity check, to determine consistency (Patton, 2002). This part of the analysis was undertaken in multiple rounds and included constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

The predefined framework was composed of the three mentoring components (relational, developmental, contextual) as the overarching coding system (Ambrosetti, 2010). This framework allowed the better definition, management and coordination of individual data units, and exploration of the whole relationship over individual parts. Table I outlines a description of each of the mentoring components and provides

Component	Description	Examples of identified words/phrases	Situational factors
Relational	Interactions which develop the relationship	Trust Support Mutuality Collegiality Advocacy	Time together in the train Time together off the train Negotiated communication channels
Developmental	Mentoring functions and processes	Guidance Teaching/learning Experience Confidence Knowledge transfer Assessment	Identification of specific knowledge and skills Verbalising what, how and why Facilitating and demonstrating actions in time Active participation Shared experiences Co-driving
Contextual	Situational features of rail environment	Immersion Driver role and responsibilities Schedule driven	Authentic experiences of situations and responsibility

Table I. Overview of data analysis showing mentoring components and examples of identified words and phrases (codes)

examples of identified words and phrases. Examples of situational factors are outlined to provide an example of how each of the components could be developed in mentoring.

3. Findings

Three themes emerged from the data. These were – training, individual style and mentoring practices. Although the data were initially categorised according to the focus of the questions (route knowledge, training, driving challenges and assessment), the three themes were identified in each set of questions. Participants were direct in their responses and identified what worked and what did not work for them, and in each instance, identified with each theme. Figure 3 illustrates the themes that were identified, and consistent with the type of analysis adopted, clarifies each theme with subcategories. The next sections present the finding associated with each of the themes with excerpts from these data.

3.1 Theme 1: training

The first theme related to training itself and provided insights into how mentoring was understood and how relationships operated within the context. Participants indicated that the training structure impacted their development of driving skills, specifically issues such as time, support and the organisation of trainers. In each instance, the trainees linked these structural issues to impact on their learning and future ability to do the job.

3.1.1 Time. The training that trainees undertook was consistent with the timelines shown in Figure 1. Many participants commented that these were too short given the volume of material that they needed to learn. Trainees were placed with more experienced drivers who essentially disseminated knowledge and skills through role modelling, demonstration and narratives. Participants also identified that the limited timeline constrained the time for on-the-job driving. They were also conscious of the assessment that concluded driving tuition, and some expressed fear of not having the opportunity to develop their knowledge in meaningful ways. Thus, participants intimated that the quality of training was impacted through the short timelines allocated to training:

> Trainees want more time in the seat, cut the course in other areas.

> Some trainees learnt the route knowledge [only to] pass the test, as it was too much information crammed for learning at one go.

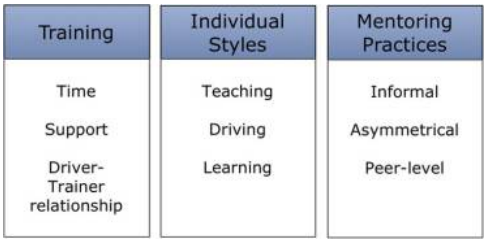


Figure 3.
Diagram illustrating the themes and subcategories identified in the study

Several participants emphasised the importance of spending quality time with their trainer. It was highlighted that quality time included the opportunity to develop a relationship with their trainer and have the training customised to their needs:

> One month driving training is done with a single trainer ideally, but not always in practice. [It] helps to build a relationship and customise training to match trainee's skills gap.

3.1.2 Support. Participants perceived a lack of support for their trainers. In particular, the trainees expressed concern for a perceived lack of resources that were made available to them. Several participants commented on the absence of a training guide or format for the trainers to use and follow, and also identified that the trainers would benefit from their own training processes:

> Improve tutors by providing them with more training.

> Provide facilitator guide for trainers.

Also identified were limited communication channels between organisations, trainers and trainees, particularly regarding teaching and learning techniques. Opportunities to provide feedback to trainers regarding the training they had received were also very limited:

> Various different learning strategies [exist] among new and older drivers, but the organisation is poor in making this knowledge and information public to new learners.

> There is no feedback to trainers on how to better improve training. In fact, providing feedback is sometimes thought as bad criticism by trainers.

3.1.3 Driver – driver trainer relationship. Participants exhibited mixed feelings in relation to the way that trainees were trained. Many views focused on the variance in the organisation of training sessions, which also impacted upon the driver trainer they worked with. Thus, some trainees experienced multiple drivers due to the nature of the shift work whereas other trainees spent their entire training time with one trainer. Some trainees liked the variance of multiple mentors whereas others did not:

> Some trainees didn't like at all the weekly change in tutor drivers. Because each had their own driving style and trainee had to keep changing the driving to please each trainer.

> Having one trainer helps to build relationship, rapport and tailoring of training methods to suit the trainee.

3.2 Theme 2: individual styles

The data that focused on individual styles were consistent throughout the study. The consideration of individual styles of both the trainer and the trainee during the training was a frequently raised concern. Trainees identified the teaching style and driving style used by the driver trainer, along with their own learning styles, as key components that impacted on their learning experience.

3.2.1 Teaching style (Driver trainer). Participants indicated that trainers had their own styles of teaching and were teaching the way that they learnt to drive (consistent with the traditional model), but that this approach did not necessarily suit the context or the learner. The responses also implied that the trainer made decisions to teach

particular skills or knowledge over others; therefore, the trainers themselves determined the curriculum. In some instances the trainer adjusted their teaching according to their assessment of the trainee's needs, and used more of a mentoring type of approach:

> Different drivers, experienced and new, recall and remember their route knowledge differently. Every driver has their own way and approach and they also find different elements of the route more important than others.

> Learning under different train drivers can be challenging for trainees, as each driver has his own style [and] approach.

3.2.2 Driving style (Driver trainer). Participants indicated that the trainer had their own driving style and this was linked inexplicitly to their teaching style. In this respect, trainees perceived they needed to drive the way the trainer taught them. Thus, many trainees felt that in order to pass the assessment, they needed to copy the style of driving conveyed by their trainer rather than develop their own:

> Guide trainees very closely on their first trips. Trainers will "drive the train without controlling the controls" by providing very clear and specific instructions to trainees.

> Have to follow tutor driver's driving style to get sign-off during assessment.

3.2.3 Learning style (Trainee). Just as participants identified trainers as having their own way of teaching, they identified trainees as having their own ways of learning. Participants indicated that trainees supplemented training by creating their own learning resources. It was intimated that in most cases, this occurred because the trainer was not adapting the training to their learning style, and some felt that the trainer's teaching stifled their ability to learn and lowered their confidence. Many of the participants even commented that the "real" learning would occur after driving tuition and that they would develop their own driving style and skills at that point:

> Some drivers create their own learning methods to compensate for the lack of teaching that suits their learning style. One driver created his own card game to learn.

> Some drivers learn more in a month or two after being away from their route tutor telling them what to do.

3.3 Theme 3: mentoring practices

The theme of mentoring practices provided further insights concerning the nature of mentoring and how it was understood, and highlighted differing types of mentoring relationship structures.

3.3.1 Informal. The data indicated that informal mentoring was occurring. Some of the participants intimated that they were not just learning from their trainer, but also from other drivers. The participants identified mentoring practices that were important to them such as building a relationship with their trainer, and having the training tailored to their own needs:

> Drivers continue to build the route knowledge and driving skills by experimenting with observations of other experienced drivers that they encounter on the job.

As well as being involved in informal mentoring, several participants suggested that they would like to be involved in an ongoing and more permanent mentoring relationship, and moreover, one that was different from their training mentor:

> Look at possibility of incorporating older drivers as mentor drivers for new trainees upon completing training. Be permanent mates for a while. [2]

3.3.2 Asymmetrical. The data hinted that asymmetrical mentoring was occurring in some relationships. The participants indicated that they could contribute to the relationship and training in their own way. However, there was considerable evidence of mentoring practices aligned to a more traditional hierarchical relationship where the trainer assumed more of a supervisor/boss role as shown in the following comments:

> Pressure to change driving style. Imposed by trainer drivers or TMIOs[3].

> Some trainers still tend to micro-manage the trainee's driving practice during the last stages [of learning].

3.3.3 Peer-level. There was evidence to suggest that mentoring was perceived as an experience that could be shared beyond the trainer – trainee relationship, and shared between regular drivers. This was inferred from the pen-paper scenarios and reflection over critical incidents, where drivers in single-driver modes assigned "mentoring" as a benefit of a co-driver:

> Shared load, company, 2nd set [of] eyes, learn more, mentoring, wheelchair support.

3.4 Summary

The findings provide insight into the prevalence of mentoring in rail. The organisation and format of the training itself created issues with time, support and the trainers. In many instances, these structural issues created an environment where mentoring and learning were not contextually conducive with one another. The findings associated with individual styles linked to those with training, and developed the story of how mentoring was not a tacit property of this context. The existence of individual styles highlighted that trainers were unfamiliar with how to differ their teaching and driving approaches to cater for their trainees. Yet it also highlighted that the trainees themselves were relatively resourceful and found ways of contributing towards their own learning. While hierarchical relationships were expected, the findings also evidenced asymmetrical mentoring practices, indicating that while it was occurring within some relationship structures, it may have been circumstantial. In light of these findings, the discussion section will consider what it adds to what is already known, and consider important elements for a holistic mentoring framework in the rail industry.

4. Discussion

The first two objectives were to investigate the prevalence of mentoring in rail and how mentoring was understood in the context of learning to become a train driver. These were revealed within the themes. While mentoring was not a formally implemented process in any of the organisations from which data were collected, trainers and trainees liked the idea, and there was evidence that it was occurring incidentally. In this respect, the themes and findings provided a basis for why mentoring should be a part of the learning process during the training.

The third objective was to explore the type of relationship structures that existed in training and mentoring in rail. The workplace-training context impacted the trainee's learning outcomes, and this was also the case for the relationships the trainees developed with their trainers. Clearly, the context of the workplace can embed a variety of mentoring approaches, and it became apparent that several types of mentoring relationships were at play. Some of these were hierarchical, whereas others were more asymmetrical. However, the comments articulated by many of the participants highlighted that hierarchical mentoring did not meet their learning needs and did not prepare them for the tasks at hand.

Traditionally, mentoring can be classified as formal or informal. Formal mentoring programs are usually short term, specific in purpose, and are organised by a third party (Bally, 2007; Eby and Lockwood, 2005). The way that the workplace was organised suggested that mentoring needed to be formalised. However, the trainers also coordinated assessments, which is not a traditional element of formal mentoring, despite its existence in other circumstances (Ambrosetti, 2010). Formal mentoring programs include a matching process, training sessions, a formal training and/or meeting schedule, and an outline of the mentoring process (Heirdsfield *et al.*, 2008; McCormack and West, 2006). Evidence of a formal matching process was not revealed within the data.

The study suggested a need for a mentoring framework in rail. This was evident in that the learning being experienced was haphazard. To clarify, scheduled shifts, a compacted training schedule, the way that trainers were organised, assessment pressures and the combination of on-the-job and classroom learning were contextual factors that created a haphazard approach to mentoring. Participants often spoke of assessment and how the trainer would assess them formally and informally as part of their role. This placed pressure on the trainee to learn knowledge and skills for assessment, and trainees noted that because the trainer was assessing them, they found that they simply learnt the knowledge for the assessment or imitated their trainer rather than develop their own skills. The current focus of learning and mentoring in the train-driving context equates with people passing on their knowledge and skills, rather than nurturing, supporting and building collegiality.

Given that mentoring was linked with training dimensions, it is important to consider how this dynamic may be designed to promote mentoring in other learning activities. This would support the notion of mentoring as a complex and interconnected activity, but invariably breed contention in the way mentoring is seen. Thus, mentoring approaches for the rail industry and other reasonably generalisable environments would require careful consideration. Adapting mentoring frameworks from other professions may provide a start point, but each environment is unique as context guides the relational and developmental mentoring components. Figure 4 illustrates some important elements derived from this study that would need to be considered for a prospective model of mentoring in the context of train driver learning.

4.1 Enhancing the mentoring relationship structure: key considerations

Figure 4 lists key considerations for the trainer and trainee to enhance the relationship structure from the perspective of upstream and downstream learning. These were underrepresented or fundamentally omitted within the study themes and include – flexibility in the training process; access to resources; cultivating an on-going

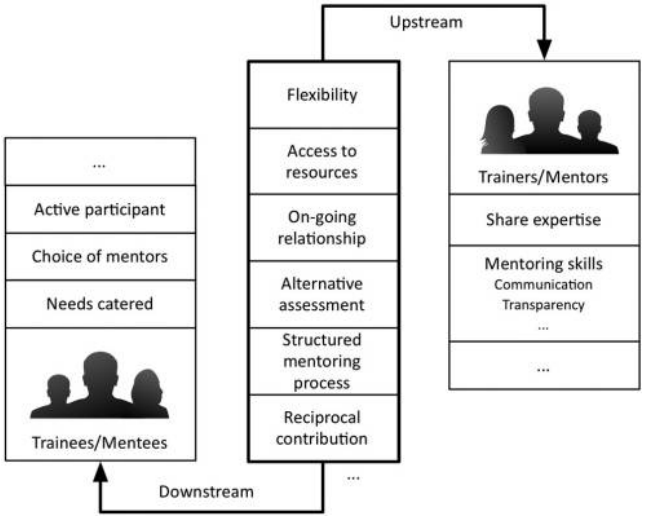


Figure 4. Important considerations for a holistic model of mentoring in the rail context

relationship; considering an alternative assessment model; a mentoring process with a defined structure; and ensuring that contribution to learning is two-way. The underrepresentation of these elements suggests that the three key mentoring components were underdeveloped in many of the trainer–trainee relationships. The findings indicate that the new training structure did not provide enough opportunities to build a relationship, the individual teaching/driving/learning styles created an *ad hoc* approach for learning, and mentoring practices were not conducive to the context. The approaches used in the rail industry and their applications demonstrate that mentoring is currently being used in a very limited capacity.

Each of the roles shown in Figure 4 also has its own requirements for effective mentoring to occur. For the trainee, this is that their needs are catered for, that there is a choice of mentors, and there is active participation. For the trainer, passing on knowledge is a staple of the role, but this would translate to sharing their expertise, and ensuring that this is achieved through key mentoring skills. This would include communication skills that render the tacit explicit, increasing the transparency in the relationship so as to avoid attitudinal conflicts or positional power, and a willingness to accept mentoring responsibilities. Figure 4 is by no means a complete list of all the elements that may serve a holistic mentoring process in the context of learning train driving, but is proposed here for further thinking and specification.

4.1 Strengths, limitations and future directions

One of the main strengths of the study was the grounded and participative method used to obtain data. Although it suited the exploratory approach, it was subject to many filters and lacked specificity for certain directions or questions associated with the specific training or experience that would be necessary or helpful for mentoring. Future research may use more sophisticated methods, such as recording the driver and trainer verbal interactions, and analysing the discourse for mentoring moves. The key findings outlined in this paper may be transferrable to other transport contexts, such as the tram

industry, but may also benefit other generalisable vocational trainings that share the same analogue, such as nursing.

In general, four key findings from this study can be highlighted and provide future directions. First, trainees consider mentoring a worthwhile learning strategy. Second, mentoring needs to be structured and include training opportunities for mentors, provision of resources and input from mentors and mentees. Third, individual requirements need to be taken into account within the relationship, and fourth, the mentoring circumstance has its own set of factors that influence the application of the process. Consideration of these can influence the success of mentoring in workplace training, and research that explores this could provide a measure of the extent of success.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study supports the observation that mentoring programs are being used sparingly or ineffectively as interventions that enhance learning in Australian rail. The driver-learning model currently used by the industry may be enhanced with mentoring; however, the organisation will need to take steps to implement mentoring practices with their employees. In conclusion, the rail industry has much work to do in order to create successful workplace training that promotes quality-learning experiences for new recruits.

Although the study showed that trainees were learning from their trainer, there was no evidence of trainers learning from the trainee, as would be expected in a reciprocal mentoring relationship. In the truest sense, mentoring benefits both the mentor and the mentee, so the development of a framework would also need to consider the benefits to the trainers. Thus, the development of an asymmetrical mentoring model may be more suited to this particular context, whereby the experience of the trainer is recognised and the trainee is able to share the learning opportunities with their mentor. The trainees indicated that mentoring would enhance their learning, and the lack of a mentoring framework may go some way to explain the problems the industry is currently experiencing with recruitment and retention. It is clear that rail organisations like the idea of mentoring, but aside from the incidental practices, the process appears to have penetrated rail organisations in terminology only. The themes and findings in this study provide a basis for why mentoring should be part of the learning process in the rail context, and mentoring may assist in creating a more effective learning experience.

Notes

1. Only asked in focus groups where the operations were performed with two drivers.
2. The "permanent mate" model is where two train drivers drive together in a long-term partnership.
3. Training Management Improvement Officer.

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