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Evaluating the Contribution of Workplace Mentoring to Meaningful Work Among Employees Experiencing Workplace Anxiety in the Insurance Sector in Guangdong Province, China

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ABSTRACT: The insurance sector in China has faced increasing workplace anxiety due to heightened competition, high performance pressure, and organisational change. Under such circumstances, organisations are now increasingly highlighting the role of workplace mentoring as a way of fostering employee well-being and creating meaningful work for them. Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine the effect of workplace mentoring on meaningful work for anxious employees in the insurance sector in Guangdong Province, China. The researcher used a quantitative research strategy based on structured questionnaires given to selected participants to collect significant data. The use of a convenience sampling method helped to select 300 Chinese insurance sector employees from Guangdong Province, China. The acquired data were examined using IBM SPSS Statistics version 28.0. Moreover, the researcher utilised descriptive statistics, Welch's t-test, and one-way ANOVA to analyse the role of workplace mentoring in creating meaningful work for individuals suffering workplace anxiety. The study demonstrated that employees who received mentoring in the workplace were likely to have experienced significantly more meaningful work compared to those who had either temporary or no mentoring at all. The findings also showed that the ongoing mentoring process offered employees professional direction, psychosocial support, and higher self-confidence when encountering work-related challenges. The research concluded that workplace mentoring is an efficient human resource (HR) management practice to develop meaningful work for anxious employees. These findings have significant practical implications for insurance organisations that are emphasising employee well-being, organisational commitment, and the development of sustainable mentoring programmes

1. INTRODUCTION

The current work environment has become more demanding as a result of fast-paced technology development, restructuring within organisations, improved competition, and inflated expectations from customers. This has resulted in more workplace anxiety, which is characterised by extended stress and anxiety about work responsibilities. Employees who suffer from workplace anxiety tend to find it challenging to concentrate, be confident, and be motivated, which may have a pessimistic impact on their performance at work. However, increasing attention has been given to the importance of having meaningful

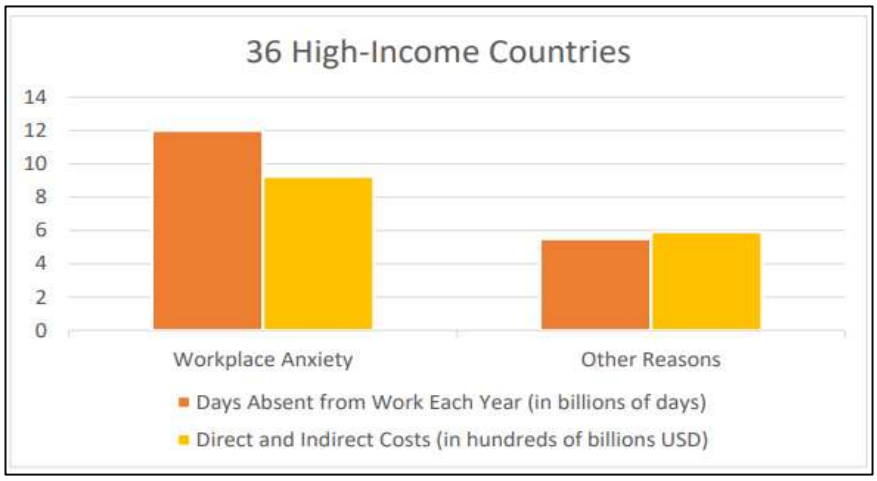
work in assuring the success of employees. Employees who notice value and meaning in their duties are more likely to be positively motivated and satisfied (Sunny et al., 2025). This is a critical organisational concern in service-oriented businesses like insurance, wherein employees are supposed to meet strict sales percentages and maintain customer contact all the time. These duties usually lead to employees undergoing long periods of stress, tension, and emotional exhaustion, which may cause diminished work engagement, organisational commitment, and performance. Hence, organisations are currently emphasising the meaningfulness of work as a psychological resource which helps workers to see their work as significant, purposeful, and influential. Workers who engage in meaningful work are more committed to the organisation as well as resilient, satisfied, and perform better in spite of workplace stresses. This helps workers cope with the negative impacts of workplace stress due to the improved sense of purpose and psychological satisfaction in the workers (Seçgin, 2025).

In these circumstances, workplace mentorship is a vital cornerstone of professional development within the insurance industry, helping individuals overcome barriers and advance their careers, while at the same time ensuring that the industry continues to thrive with a diverse and skilled leadership pipeline. Workplace mentoring encourages employees to receive mentorship on their career goals, emotional support, constructive criticism, and professional development from experienced professionals in the workplace. It also allows employees to acquire technical skills, make better decisions, and feel confident while handling tough customers (Gichungu et al., 2024). As Guangdong Province is one of the most prominent insurance markets in China, the analysis of the contribution of workplace mentoring towards meaningful work in the situation of workplace anxiety becomes highly relevant from an academic as well as a practical perspective. Hence, the current research aimed to examine the contribution of workplace mentoring in enhancing the meaningfulness of work while diminishing workplace anxiety.

2.BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

There is an unparalleled level of tension among employees worldwide, who are experiencing elevated levels of exhaustion and poor mental health. The pandemic had a significant impact on employees' mental health, who were already under pressure. They were required to manage not only increased work responsibilities and job uncertainty, but also health anxieties and COVID-19 restrictions. The consequences of these stressors are now readily evident, particularly in Asia, where exhaustion rates exceed the global average. According to AON (2024), employees in Asia are suffering from "considerable mental health stress", where 82% of them are at a medium to high risk of facing problems associated with mental well-being. The study also revealed that 35% of Asian employees are at high risk for mental health issues, whereas 47% are at medium risk. The overall costs of occupational mental health disorders give insurance companies and risk managers discernible grounds for concern about such problems. Depression and anxiety result in the loss of about 12 billion workdays per year across the globe, amounting to US$1 trillion in reduced productivity (AON, 2024).

Figure 1.1: Global Costs Due to Absenteeism



(Source: Nelson, 2022)

Workplace anxiety has been connected to higher absenteeism rates among employees, especially those working in service-based industries such as insurance, because employees are pressured to meet their sales targets, are always dealing with

customers, and are under stress to perform well. Employees who suffer from constant anxiety often feel psychologically and emotionally drained. This usually demotivates them to work and leads to frequent absences. This is especially noteworthy in insurance companies as absenteeism interferes with the provision of customer service and burdens other employees (Gan et al., 2023). According to the Mental Health Foundation, mentoring is a practical method that assists in promoting mental health at work. Mentoring can be an effective way to create the type of human connection necessary for positive mental health. Workplace human connection helps to combat loneliness, develop friendships, and increase engagement. Specifically, insurance sectors' mentoring programmes that have diversity, equality, and inclusiveness as objectives ensure a climate of acceptance and empathic listening, making it possible for employees to heal workplace anxiety in both physical and virtual work settings. In such an environment, employees are motivated to raise concerns relating to discrimination and microaggressions (Wikström et al., 2023). Therefore, HR programmes combining personal development with psychological assistance are essential for maintaining productivity. Hence, workplace mentoring has become an extremely important organisational practice for promoting employee development, improving workplace relationships, and helping employees find more sense in their jobs.

3.PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this study was to examine how mentoring at work would result in meaningful work output amongst employees who were suffering from workplace anxiety in the insurance industry in the Guangdong Province of China. The specific objective of the study was to establish whether mentoring at work would help employees develop a sense of meaningfulness in their work while coping with workplace anxiety. With the exponential rate of digitisation, increasing levels of competition, and high-performance expectations being experienced by the Chinese insurance industry, the employees are subjected to psychological anxiety that can adversely impact their well-being and motivation at work. The current study examined employees within insurance organisations located in Guangdong Province, where mentoring has become increasingly recognised as a means of HR development in the workplace. It sought to investigate how mentoring programmes can help employees feel that their work is important in spite of the workplace anxiety they feel. In addition, the study aimed to provide empirical information on the effectiveness of workplace mentoring as an organisational practice. The study sought to make contributions to the existing knowledge about organisational behaviour and HR management through an investigation into the connection between workplace mentoring and meaningful work amongst those individuals experiencing workplace anxiety. This research will help in the creation of effective mentoring programmes in insurance companies to promote meaningful work and employee resilience in the exponentially developing Chinese insurance industry.

4.LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace anxiety has grown into an increasingly recognised occupational health issue in China, even though the issue is not well known or recognised in comparison to Western countries. According to a previous study, the anxiety levels of workers in China are relatively higher due to the heavy workload, elevated performance expectations, and fast organisational changes. In addition, it was revealed that there is a considerable percentage of workers in Asia who suffer from a medium to high level of psychological distress, including in China (Wang et al., 2023). Similarly, Wikström et al. (2023) discovered that job stress is common amongst Chinese workers, especially those who have hefty work schedules and lack career growth prospects. The researchers recommended that organisational policies be adopted to improve the work environment and well-being of the workers, as workload and poor organisational support significantly impact their psychological well-being (Wikström et al., 2023). However, although conducted outside China, Gémes et al. (2022) arrived at similar results by showing that work overload, job control, and adverse working environments were major causes of anxiety and depression among workers in Europe and Australia. It clearly showed that the issue of workplace anxiety is dependent on organisational and psychosocial factors, irrespective of the geographical locations of the employees (Gémes et al, 2022). Furthermore, Wang and Li (2022) demonstrated the consequences of workplace anxiety that led to emotional exhaustion, unsatisfactory job performance, and a lack of engagement among the Chinese workforce. Workers suffering from workplace anxiety usually experience physical symptoms, such as tiredness, muscular pain, and eye strain, in addition to psychological effects like stress and tension (Wang & Li, 2022). The results established that those employees who were under continuous pressure had high levels of emotional exhaustion that eventually affected their performance at work. The results stated that job anxiety acts as a critical psychological factor between organisational demands and negative effects on employees.

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Figure 1.2: Asia Mental Health Index: China



(Source: AON, 2024)

In these challenging circumstances, workplace mentoring plays an important part in the modern corporate environment. A previous study by Nelson (2022) investigated and claimed that this mentoring can be useful not only for the protégé and mentor but also for the organisation. Mentoring improves job satisfaction, enhances financial status and lessens both turnover and intentions to quit. From the perspective of insurance professionals, these mentoring programmes can serve as a tool of socialisation and adaptation of the sales staff. Moreover, with the growth in early retirement of employees, mentoring programmes may retain critical knowledge within the organisation, creating a competitive benefit for recruitment (Nelson, 2022). However, Zhang et al. (2024) argued that mentoring is indeed an activity that requires commitment, as its benefits may not be realised immediately. Sometimes, other professional responsibilities may get in the way and prevent meetings from taking place, thus making it challenging for mentors and mentees to connect personally. Hence, mentoring remains a practice that has not been fully embraced or known to many Chinese organisations, especially those in the insurance industry. The organisations tend to concentrate more on short-term results than on funding for the professional development of their employees (Zhang et al., 2024). While there have been numerous studies on the positive impact of mentoring on work performance in organisations, there is remarkably little information available on how mentoring programmes help create meaningful work for employees who suffer from workplace anxiety in the insurance industry in China. The insufficient number of mentoring programmes and their awareness in Chinese insurance companies makes it essential to comprehend their effect on helping create meaningful work.

George Homans' Social Exchange Theory (SET), which was developed in 1958, suggests that the development and sustainability of social relations happen due to the exchange of resources, support and benefits between people. SET assumes that people consider social relations based on a comparison of the advantages and disadvantages they have in these relations. If the perceived advantages, such as trust, respect, advice, or recognition, are more elevated than the perceived disadvantages, then individuals are more willing to maintain healthy and lasting relations. If there are fewer advantages than disadvantages, then such a relation is not likely to last long. According to SET, the behaviour of humans is primarily controlled by the expectations of the return of advantages when positive acts lead to positive reactions from other people (Homans, 1958). The application of SET is suitable in the current research as workplace mentoring affects mutual trust and support, whereby the mentor offers advice while employees become more involved and more satisfied at work, despite the anxiety involved in it. Kakyo et al. (2025) used SET to explore the nature of mentoring relationships that are founded on mutual support and trust exchange, as well as organisational commitment. The study asserted that a fair mentoring experience will enable people to reciprocate and join future mentoring programmes as they witness more benefits than disadvantages. With perceived organisational support and negotiated exchange orientation as SET, the results demonstrated that suitable mentoring relationships increase the possibility for employees to participate in the process. This supports the idea that reciprocal mentor-mentee relationships result in good psychological outcomes, and can lead to meaningful work and reduced workplace anxiety (Kakyo et al., 2025).

5. RESEARCH QUESTION

- How does workplace mentoring enhance the sense of meaningful work among employees experiencing anxiety?

6.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

The researcher used a quantitative research design to explore the contribution of workplace mentoring to meaningful work among employees experiencing workplace anxiety. This design allowed the researcher to analyse the relationship between the research variables. The collected data were analysed using SPSS Statistics version 28.0. Moreover, the study used descriptive statistics to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and questionnaire responses. Statistical significance was established at a p-value of less than 0.05, showing a statistically significant relationship between the variables. The use of structured questionnaire items and appropriate statistical techniques confirmed the reliability, validity, and credibility of the study findings.

6.2 Sampling

This research used the convenience sampling method to conduct the research. According to the Rao-soft sample size calculator, a sample size of 249 respondents was required for the research. However, the researcher distributed 500 questionnaires to the target respondents to ensure that the sample size had enough valid responses. A 60% response rate was achieved, which implies that there were 300 valid responses. Hence, the final sample size for the study was 300.

6.3 Data and Measurement

The researchers used the survey method to collect the primary data from the selected employees of the 59 insurance firms of China. The researcher performed the survey procedure by handing out pre-structured survey questionnaires to the selected employees who had been working for their companies for a minimum period of one year, and whose age was also a minimum of 20 years. The pre-structured survey questionnaires consisted of the demographic details of the respondents. The process of collecting the data was done through an online survey using Microsoft Teams and e-mail.

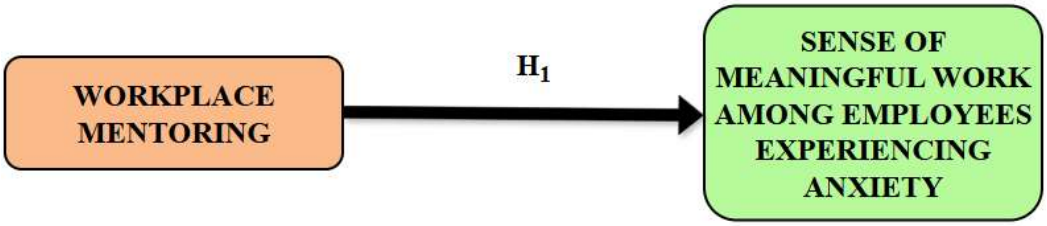
6.4 Statistical Software

The researcher utilised IBM's SPSS version 28.0 software to analyse the findings of the study, which were obtained through a survey-based quantitative approach.

6.5 Statistical Tools

The researchers employed a descriptive analysis method to comprehend the fundamental components of the quantitative data that was collected. The researcher utilised three primary instruments, the Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI), Mentoring Functions Questionnaire-9 (MFQ-9), and Work Phobia Scale (WPS), to investigate the correlation between workplace mentoring and the perception of meaningful work among employees who are affected by workplace anxiety. The evaluation of the research variables was significantly influenced by these instruments.

7.CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK



8.RESULT

The study analysed the phenomenon of mentoring in the workplace to find out if the duration and frequency of mentoring contributed to the experience of meaningful work of employees with workplace anxiety. Among the selected participants,

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employees with moderate to high levels of workplace anxiety (N = 106) were divided into two groups for further investigation. One group consisted of those employees who engaged in long-term mentoring programmes of a minimum of six months, with monthly meetings (N = 9), while the other group comprised those employees who did not engage in long-term mentoring programmes. Due to the relatively small number of employees in the long-term mentoring group, both a one-way ANOVA and an independent samples t-test were carried out. The results suggested that consistent mentoring substantially increased the levels of meaningful work reported by employees who were experiencing workplace anxiety in comparison to those who did not receive consistent mentoring. Employees who participated in long-term mentoring reported a remarkably higher mean meaningful work score, while those who received only short-term or no mentoring reported comparatively lower levels of meaningful work. Despite the disparate group sizes, the Welch's t-test revealed a substantial effect, with $t \approx 7.09$, $p < 0.001$. The difference between the two groups was statistically significant.

In addition to this, the employees were divided into three different groups: no mentoring, short-term mentoring (less than six months), and long-term mentoring (six months or more). According to the one-way ANOVA test, there is a statistically significant difference in meaningful work between all three groups tested, $F(2, 103) = 21.87$, $p < 0.001$. The post-hoc test using Tukey's HSD test established that individuals who had not participated in any mentoring had significantly lower meaningful work scores compared to those who participated in short-term and long-term mentoring programmes. Despite the lack of statistical significance between short-term and long-term mentoring programmes, long-term mentoring demonstrated significantly higher meaningful work scores. The duration and consistency of workplace mentoring resulted in an overall increase in meaningful work. More purposeful and valuable work was perceived by employees who engaged in sustained mentoring than by those with limited or no mentoring experience. The findings showed that the advantages of mentoring develop gradually, as employees' confidence, engagement, and sense of purpose are supported by continuous guidance, trust, career development, and psychosocial support, particularly among those who are experiencing workplace anxiety.

Table 1.1: Impact of Mentoring Duration and Frequency on Meaningful Work Among Anxious Employees

Group	*n*	Mean Meaningful Work Score (*M* ± *SD*)	Statistical Comparisons	p-value	Effect Size / Notes
No Sustained Mentoring (None or Short-Term)	97	4.45 ± 0.78	vs. Long-Term: Welch's $t(=13) = 7.09$	< 0.001	Cohen's $d > 1.5$ (very large effect)
Short-Term Mentoring (< 6 months, sporadic)	—	Approx. 5.20 (inferred from text)	vs. No Mentoring: Mean Diff = +0.75	= 0.0001	Tukey HSD: Significant
Long-Term Mentoring (≥ 6 months, monthly+)	9	Approx. 6.0	vs. Short-Term: Mean Diff = +0.615	= 0.075	Marginally non-significant, but trend supports H4
One-way ANOVA (3 groups)	106	—	$F(2, 103) = 21.87$	< 0.001	Overall group differences significant
Progressive Trend	—	No < Short-Term < Long-Term	Visual Pattern from Figure 1	—	Supports theory: Greater mentoring intensity → greater meaningful work
Interpretation	—	—	—	—	Long-term, frequent mentoring most effective for enhancing meaningful work in anxious employees

H1 validated the fact that long-term mentoring with regular interactions leads to meaningful work output for employees facing workplace anxiety. H1 supported the research question since it demonstrated the fact that while workplace mentoring promotes meaningful work, long-term mentoring generates more positive outcomes.

9.DISCUSSION

The results of this study established that workplace mentoring improved employees' perception of meaningful work, especially when mentoring programmes were offered for a longer period of time. Employees who felt anxious at their workplaces and had experienced long mentoring perceived meaningful work more intensely than those who experienced short or no mentoring at all. It indicates that the constant mentoring supported employees to accept the constant advice and assistance in the course of their professional careers. The results align with those presented by Kanapathipillai et al. (2024), where workplace mentoring had a favourable impact on meaningful work among employees within the insurance sector experiencing workplace anxiety. The study revealed that mentoring helped employees develop self-confidence and offered career and psychological support to help employees feel their work is meaningful (Kanapathipillai et al., 2024). Similarly, the current research has revealed that long-term mentoring contributed to improved engagement and meaningfulness of work for employees.

Additionally, the results of this research corroborate the study by Kakyo et al. (2025), which used SET to discuss the mentoring relationships. The study showed that the exchange of trust, organisational support and mentoring encourages the development of a positive attitude towards work among employees and encourages the development of mentoring relations. Such reciprocal interactions allow employees to increase their confidence, commitment, and psychological hardiness through consistent mentoring assistance. Further, the study suggested that employees who view mentoring positively tend to return a positive attitude to work and engage in their activities. This helps employees develop a feeling of purposefulness in their duties (Kakyo et al., 2025). However, the results contradict those obtained by Zhang et al. (2024), who stated in their meta-analysis that the efficiency of mentoring is dependent on organisational context, mentor competence, and proper implementation of mentoring programmes. The study demonstrated that mentoring programmes are not effective in ensuring satisfactory results for employees unless an organisation forms structured mentoring programmes and offers organisational support (Zhang et al., 2024). While the current research discovered that long-term mentoring greatly improved meaningful work, it also showed that short-term mentoring had comparably worse results, partly validating the study's conclusion that the quality and length of mentoring affect its efficacy. As a result, businesses should engage in well-structured and ongoing mentorship initiatives to maximise meaningful work among individuals suffering workplace anxiety.

10.CONCLUSION

Workplace mentoring is one of the most efficient organisational strategies which can be used to improve the meaning of employees' work under conditions of workplace anxiety. This research showed that mentoring involves not only personal development but also creating a relationship between employees and helping them to understand the value of their work in spite of difficult psychological conditions in the workplace. Continued mentoring enhances the psychological resilience of employees. The research also emphasised that the impact of mentoring is dependent on its consistency and quality, rather than its mere existence. Organisations that implement systematic and continuous mentoring programmes are better positioned to offer supportive work cultures in which workers feel appreciated, motivated, and psychologically supported. Such workplaces may lead to higher employee engagement, improved retention, and a more resilient workforce. In the case of China's insurance industry, where workers are usually expected to perform well under high pressure at their workplaces, mentoring needs to be considered as a substantial part of HR management instead of being treated as an additional development strategy. Therefore, organisations need to consider workplace mentoring as a long-term investment that guarantees meaningful work, improves employee well-being, and leads to sustainable organisational success.

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