

**GENERAL MERCHANDISING LLC'S
COLLEAGUES' PERCEPTIONS OF THE
JMTP PROGRAM AND ITS
EFFECTIVENESS: THE CASE ON HOW TO
PRODUCE EFFECTIVE LEADERS**

by

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ABSTRACT

Companies use various methods to prepare their new management recruits to take on and succeed in their jobs. Some are formal, but most involve some form of informal arrangements such as mentorship. This mentorship approach is used by General Merchandising LLC as the principal preparation program for its new management recruits. This program is the Junior Management Trainee Program (JMTP). Apart from building the management capacity of its new managers, the JMTP aims to ensure that the management procedures and managerial skills at all the elevator and terminal locations across the organization are standardized, such that transferring individual across the organization is smooth and demands little or no learning of general operations and procedures.

The JMTP has been ongoing for a fifteen years and has, generally, produced excellent results. The factors that contribute to its performance, however, have never been studied. This research seeks to understand the factors that contributed to the success of the program, with the view to streamlining the management and operation of the JMTP. The study was conducted using primary data collected from current participants in the JMTP and people who have served as mentors to new management recruits over the past three years. The survey was on the population of all people in the company who fit the foregoing description. The survey instrument was a structured questionnaire delivered electronically using Axio™, a survey software operated by Kansas State University. The data was analyzed using Stata® 12.0.

The effectiveness of the JMTP was determined through an assessment of graduates' ability to effectively operate their own grain terminal facility upon graduation. The factors

considered as explanatory variables for peoples' responses to this included their current role – whether they were management trainee or a mentor – and their demographic characteristics, as well as their perceived relationship with their mentors or mentees. The learning style of individual mentees was also determined to influence perceptions about the effectiveness of the current program in preparing them to independently run a terminal facility.

The results suggest that personality types and learning styles should be taken into consideration and used when recruiting trainee managers and assigning them in order to maximize the effectiveness of the JMTP. It is additionally important that improvements and/or changes in the program be organized in ways that accommodate the different needs of both mentees and mentors in order to achieve high capacity improvement as a result of the training program. The study results specifically point to a sequence of initiatives that may be employed to enhance the outcomes of the JMTP:

1. Implement a psychometric questionnaire for mentors and incoming JMTPs to ensure maximum compatibility between mentors and mentee to enhance learning and capacity development.
2. Use the results from this study to initiate a process of collecting relevant data on performance of new managers and the training program itself on a regular basis to ensure the continuous improvement in the JMTP.
3. Use the results to develop mentorship education programs for the company's mentors to help mentors do a better job to enhance new managers' performance.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

General Merchandising LLC has 10,000 employees that convert crops into renewable products to meet the demands of a growing global population. The 265 processing plants convert corn, oilseeds, wheat, and cocoa into products for food, animal feed, and industrial and energy use. General Merchandising LLC operates the world's premier crop origination and transportation network, connecting crop producers and markets in more than 75 countries.

One of the three divisions that make up General Merchandising LLC is Agronomy Services. Within Agronomy Services is the Grain Operations Division. It comprises all country grain elevators, terminal elevators, export grain elevators, import grain elevators, edible bean facilities, rice mills, peanut procurement and manufacturing, terminal operations, trucking operations, and all of the merchandising of these products. The Grain Operations Division decided to maintain business at current operation levels and even looked to divest of units that were not making significant contributions to overall corporate performance.

Recent strategic change, however has resulted in the company focusing on a growth strategy. The direction to the management team of the Grain Operations Division from senior management is to grow the Grain Operations Division's business both nationally and internationally. This directional change has resulted in rapid acquisition of assets around the world, leading to the need to build human resource capacity to meet the company's performance expectations. For example, in 2012 alone, General Merchandising LLC Grain Operations Division has expanded its footprint by adding more than 120 operating

greenfield and acquired locations. This resulted in expanding the workforce by over 2,500 new people.

The company's success depends on the capacity and capability of its people. As such, the Grain Operations Division has a structured management development plan for its new managers. The purpose of the Junior Management Trainee Program (JMTP) is to ensure that the management procedures and managerial skills at all the elevator and terminal locations are standardized to facilitate consistent results. The JMTP process involves placing recent management recruits – usually recent college graduates – and its employees who have worked their way up from hourly positions to management levels – in a mentoring relationship with an experienced supervisor at a particular location.

Newly recruited JMTPs are told they can expect to move up three times in the hierarchy of management during their first five years of employment. The expectation is that the location superintendent will mentor the JMTP and will show them how to effectively operate a facility. The hope is that, by working in multiple locations, the JMTPs will experience different facilities with different operations and different management styles. The program's anticipated length is broken up into three six-month periods, with each period designed to produce clear knowledge and capability outcomes. At the end of each of three six-month periods, the JMTP is evaluated by the mentor. When they have completed the program successfully, they are given the responsibility of managing their own facility. There is flexibility with the time requirements as some people can grasp the concepts quickly and get through the training process ahead of schedule, while it may take longer for others to acquire the same skills and capabilities required to manage a facility.

One of the challenges confronting the JMTP program is that General Merchandising LLC is currently not getting consistent results out of its participants. One of the principal pitfalls of the program is that the evaluation of the JMTP's preparedness at each six-month stage is subjectively determined by the mentor. There is no objective process for assessing and triangulating mentors' reports on their mentee despite the existence of evaluation guidelines for mentors. As expected, different mentors exhibit different assessment tendencies based on their expectations about skills and capabilities. Additionally, the learning that any JMTP achieves at any facility with any particular mentor may be determined solely by the operational conditions at the facility when the JMTP got there. Because some facilities are slower during different times of the year, they may not have an opportunity to learn every aspect of the business, and the mentor may not be able to assess the JMTP's learning and capabilities, even though the guidelines require such a judgment to be made about the JMTP.

Recruiting of the JMTPs is done by people within General Merchandising LLC's operations group. There are colleges that General Merchandising LLC has a proven track record with in recruiting individuals to come into the JMTP program. Most of these colleges are the land grant institutions found in the Midwest. Recruiting is done at colleges where General Merchandising LLC has nearby facilities, because over time most of the people that are recruited have the desire to someday settle close to where they grew up. This has helped General Merchandising LLC in the process of retaining good employees in the long run.

Typically, the type of person General Merchandising LLC is looking for is someone with a farm background, who is not afraid to work, and is very hands-on. The

main recruiting competition that General Merchandising LLC has is with the family farms. General Merchandising LLC can position itself and be more competitive than these family farms because these graduates are not looking to return home immediately upon graduation, but later in their lives. However, this implies that General Merchandising LLC needs to replenish the JMTP pipeline, constantly increasing the need for a well-defined training program for the sustained performance of the company.

1.1 Problem Definition

General Merchandising LLC is not achieving the expected results of the new Junior Management Training Program (JMTP) trainees at the end of their training program. The participants should be able to effectively lead, oversee, and operate a facility. The roots of the problem seem to lie within the relationship with the supervisor/mentor with whom the JMTP is placed, the subjective evaluation of the JMTP every six months, the seasonality of activities at the location, the lack of situational exposure to all the necessary events and operations, and the challenge of having enough qualified and capable mentors to perform these mentoring activities effectively. It is imperative for General Merchandising LLC to solve this problem to get a proper return on their training investment by increasing the individuals' performance after the training program in operating these facilities to sustain growth. This is necessary to increase productivity, increase profitability, increase safety, and increase operating revenue per employee. If an appropriate solution is found, this will lay the foundation and groundwork for General Merchandising LLC to grow in a sustainable manner.

1.2 Objectives

The overall objective of this research, therefore, is to understand mentors' and JMTPs' perspectives about the JMTP program with the view to determine how those perceptions may be used to frame improvements. The specific objectives are:

1. Determine the characteristics of current JMTPs and mentors involved in the JMTP program.
2. Evaluate the perceptions of JMTPs and mentors about the JMTP program.
3. Determine the changes, if any, that JMTPs and mentors want to see to achieve General Merchandising LLC's objective of producing competent managers.
4. Use the results to frame strategies for program improvement to address some of the issues identified as weaknesses of the JMTP program.

1.3 Methodological Overview and Outline of the Thesis

The study uses a survey to gather the information from JMTPs and mentors. It employs a statistical analysis to conduct the analyses to address the above objectives. The next chapter presents the review of the literature and the third chapter provides a more detailed overview of the methodology and a description of the data. The results of the analyses are presented in Chapter 4 and the summary, conclusion, and potential strategies for action are presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Review

Most organizations recognize that their best competitive advantage is their employees, who are leading and driving the company. In an effort to cultivate the growth and development of their leaders, many companies have taken an aggressive stance in training and developing their employees. While there continues to be turnover (retirement and movement of employees) in organizations, successful organizations are constantly looking for ways to get the best results out of everyone that they employ and to retain those individuals into whom they have made training and development investment.

In 2008, U.S. organizations spent an estimated \$134 billion on employee training and development (Paradise 2009). Such investments have focused on helping organizations cope with a variety of forces affecting the workplace, including globalization, and increased emphasis on customer service and quality, labor force skill deficits, and the need to develop leadership (R. A. Noe 2010). In 2010, nearly one in five companies planned to initiate some type of mentoring or coaching to help top employees make the transition to leadership. Seventy-six percent of companies surveyed said they have used mentoring to deliver critical leadership skills. Nearly two-thirds said they find mentoring to be effective. Twelve percent found it ineffective (Kranz 2010). Learning based on training and development activities has been shown to benefit both organizations and their employees. Studies evaluating the return on investment of training and development programs have demonstrated indirect and direct improvements in organizational performance measures, including profitability, productivity, reduced costs, reputation, and operating revenue per employee (Aguinis and Kraiger 2009). One approach to training that some companies use is mentoring. It tends to be useful because it brings existing knowledge resources in the

company to the service of the company in improving the capacity of others. The next subsection evaluates the literature on mentoring and performance.

2.2 Successful Mentoring Relationship

A mentoring relationship involves matching a less experienced employee (mentee) with an experienced employee (mentor). The goal is that the mentor will teach the mentee what they know, give them feedback on what they are learning, and help the mentee to reflect upon past experiences and how they can learn from them. This model is based upon an effective relationship. Lankau and Scandura (2002) analyzed the influence of mentoring on two types of personal learning (personal skill development and relational job learning) in relationship to role ambiguity, job satisfaction, and intentions to leave the organization. They found that those with a mentor had significantly greater relational job learning than those without, looked to the mentor for career support, helped fight role ambiguity, and that personal skill development fully mediated the relationship between role modeling and job satisfaction.

Trust is foundational in perceptions for both the mentor and the mentee to have a successful relationship and have an influence on the interpersonal dynamics (Gubbins and MacCurtain 2008). Trust is essential to create an effective learning environment, and will affect the ability of the protégé to be able to learn. There must be a shared concern for each other that opens up the social exchange to motivate each other to enhance the protégé's safety, meaningfulness, and availability.

Individual differences, including the protégés achievement and orientation, and the mentors' perceptions of their degree of similarity to their protégés were found to influence how much learning occurred. It is important that the mentee find common ground with the mentor to allow them to connect to one another quickly.

The main concern is that the barriers are not too great for the mentor to intellectually and emotionally connect to the needs of the mentee, and understand his or her abilities and aspirations.

2.3 Motivators for the Mentoring Relationship

Most organizations look to hire or promote those who are self-driven individuals, and who will take initiative in learning what they need to know. However, a mentoring relationship facilitates the process of learning for less-experienced people in the organization, even as it provides opportunities for more experienced people to share their knowledge and improve their commitment to the organization's future. Indeed, Allen and Eby (2003) and Hirschfield et al. (2006) found that in a mentoring relationship not only did the protégés learn, but the mentors did as well, indicating that the relationship benefited both parties. Individual differences, including the protégés achievement and orientation, and the mentors' perceptions of their degree of similarity to their protégés, were found to influence how much learning occurred. This type of relationship allows the protégé to go out and try new things, and then receive feedback from the mentor. All of this allows for a safe environment that will allow the protégé to feel comfortable to learn. Most mentors look at the relationship with the mentee as a rejuvenating challenge and a way to give back (Aryee et al., 1996).

In selecting mentors, Levinson et al. (1978) indicate that a mentor must be old enough to have accumulated the necessary experience to benefit the mentee. They point out that relationships in which the mentor was about 8 to 15 years older than the mentee were the most beneficial. If the relationship span is older than 20 years, the relationship takes on more of a parent-child relationship and can interfere with the learning process. If a mentor

is less than 8 years older than the mentee, the relationship becomes more like a peer relationship and minimal mentoring is accomplished.

One of the characteristics that the mentor must possess is the willingness to share experiences. The mentor must not feel threatened by the mentee and be comfortable to facilitate the mentee's growth in ways that support the organization's purpose and strategic vision. It is the responsibility of the mentor to help the mentee form the appropriate aspirations that will allow for effective success in the organization, given their experience about the organization's politics and nuances that may escape the newcomer. A confident mentor and a responsive mentee make the best pair for successful mentoring relationship (O'Neill, 2005).

2.4 Typology of Training Systems

The discussion thus far has presented mentoring as a process for enhancing the management capacity of new recruits in organizations. There are, however, numerous approaches to training managers to become more effective in organizations. In this subsection, a number of these systems are evaluated and discussed as complements to a mentorship program.

2.4.1 Instructional Systems Design (ISD) Model

The ISD model (Gagne 1992, Gagne and Medsker 1996, Goldstein 1974) allows the assessment of the mentee and clearly outlines the end goal of the process, and constructs a framework for interactions between the mentee and mentor that will allow the mentee to move through the process and hopefully meet the goals that were set forth. The process consists of five phases: analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

At the root of the model is behaviorism and constructivism. Behaviorism states that success is based upon the individuals' response to different environmental stimuli that shapes behaviors. The challenge that this creates for the employer/mentor is to figure out what stimulates the mentee. What may stimulate one person may impede another. The quest that needs to be sought is: Are there general stimulants, possibly for all people, that can be used to generally promote a desired behavior?

Constructivism is the process of giving the mentee direct experience to the environment, and thus giving them trustworthy knowledge. This allows the mentee to learn in an active environment, and to gain and test that knowledge gained in that environment. Many times the best experience is experience itself, and many organizations are teaming new hires and up-and-coming employees with seasoned people so that they may be able to walk them through situations in the workplace and gain experience.

There are some disadvantages to the ISD model, in that it is strongly instructor led. The success of the mentee is highly reliant upon the mentor in this situation, because the mentor has the primary responsibility for learning take place. The burden of responsibility, for the most part, rests upon the mentor, because the mentee is in the passive situation where they are learning and should not need to challenge or conflict with the mentor. The mentor has the responsibility of recognizing what needs to be taught to the mentee, determine how to best teach what is needed, and to be able to access what was grasped by the mentee during training.

2.4.2 Synthetic Learning Environments

Synthetic learning environments refer to simulations, games, and computer based virtual worlds that place individuals in learning environments that are physically and/or socially similar to their work environment. It was found that the experiences and feedback

that learners receive mimic real-life conditions, but without the negative repercussions, thus allowing for a safe learning environment (Verzat, Byrne and Fayolle 2009). There is the benefit to set up a perceived situation, and see how the employee will respond to the situation of a challenging problem. The benefit of synthetic learning is that you can set up a situational learning environment, and responses have been positive as the person becomes drawn into the situation.

2.4.3 Blended Learning Methods

Blended learning methods combine face-to-face instruction with online technology-based learning. It was found that blended learning was more effective than classroom instruction alone, for both declarative knowledge and procedural knowledge (Sitzmann, et al. 2006). The effectiveness of the blended learning methods is due to the increased psychological engagement of the learner, and their ability control the process, as well as providing them with a safe environment to learn (Noe, Tews and McConnell Dachner 2010). It also allows the learner to use short time periods to devote to learning opportunities that do not involve other people, allows the learner shorter training periods, and allows a focus on the action items that are being presented.

2.4.4 Dialogical Approaches

An important factor to consider is the importance of interpersonal dialogue to facilitate learners' action-focused reflection and subsequent knowledge and skill acquisition (Burke, Meredith and Scheuer 2007). Social interaction is an important part of learning. One benefit of social interaction is that one can ask the learner what they have learned, how does it apply, why does it matter, and why is it significant? It is impossible for one to train a person on every single topic that they will encounter, but to develop critical thinking processes that can be applied in different situations is possible. This is an effective

way to teach people how to anticipate the action they need to take in a situation and how to deal effectively in future scenarios.

2.4.5 Job Experiences

Job experiences refer to a person's relationships, problems, demands, task, and other job features that they experience (Noe, Tews and McConnell Dachner 2010). Many learning theorists believe that when a person is put in an environment, they will be challenged to learn and attempt to succeed in the environment. It allows the learner to focus their energy learning in the situation, and there is a benefit from a company's perspective because the learner is directly learning how to do a task that they would normally do in a given situation. However, a person can be stretched too much, where learning is inhibited and negative outcomes are produced. There must be a balance so that the learner does not overload and can cope with the demands and concerns about psychological safety that come with challenging job experiences. Access to feedback will help mentees enter challenging developmental experiences with a learning orientation (Noe, Tews and McConnell Dachner 2010).

2.5 Technology

Approximately 20 percent of learning occurs online, and this is expected to increase in the future (Paradise and Patel 2009). Many companies are turning to online and mobile teaching technologies, as they become more apparent in the work environment, as a means to choose what content to choose from, how it is conveyed, and what needs to be learned. Online learning was more effective than classroom instruction when learners were provided with control over the content, sequence, and pace in long courses, and when the learners were able to practice the content and receive feedback. However, it appears that neither method itself is inherently effective (or psychologically engaging) (Noe, Tews and

McConnell Dachner 2010). When presenting training that is done online, some of the concerns are that too much content is covered at one time, that the content is too complex, or that the content may not be presented well or communicated well. One of the shortcomings of online training is that one does the training themselves and someone will have to assess whether the trainee actually understood and received the knowledge, and not just assume that they got the full benefit of the training.

2.6 Job Rotation

Job rotation is considered to be a lateral transfer of an employee between jobs in an organization. Rotation is a form of career development that is more common for employees in early career than those in later career (Champion, Cheraskin and Stevens 1994). Early career employees are more interested in the prospect of learning more and look at it as a way to leverage and grow their skills. However, in the same study it was noted that those that were later in their career did not in all cases see job rotation as a benefit. When looking at job rotation, doing the job at a different location gives the person an opportunity to solidify what they have learned in the past and to continue to build upon the past successes. It was also found that job rotation was done with those that were performing well (Champion, Cheraskin and Stevens 1994), because they had a recent track record of success and that they could build upon it in the eyes of upper management. One of the benefits of job rotation is that it creates a new environment with new challenges, and an employee will be less likely to become stagnant because of the challenges that they are given. The reality of today's workplace is that learning occurs through a wide variety of formal and informal activities, including formal courses, informal job experiences, self-directed learning, and social interactions with others (Torraco 1999).

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This section discusses the models and data that were used. This involves a discussion of the survey instrument that was used for the collection of data, as well as a justification of the variables for which information was collected. The section also discusses the statistical analysis tool that was used in evaluating the results from the survey.

3.1 Survey

An online survey, executed by Axio®, was used to gather the information for this study. The survey used a structured questionnaire to gather information from a population of employees in the Grain Division of the company. Because the survey focused on identifying perceptions about the JMTP program, the majority of the questions were structured as Likert-type questions that covered agreement scales or opinion scales. The majority of the scales were five points: (1) Completely Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neither Disagree/Agree; (4) Agree; and (5) Completely Agree.

The first part of the questionnaire covered the principal demographic questions and also identified whether the respondent was a JMTP or a mentor. Their answer allowed for branching to occur, whereby they received specific questions related to their role in the JMTP. The second part of the questionnaire solicited information about respondents' perceptions about their inherent characteristics such as being hands-on learners, being problem solvers and enjoying challenging people when working with them. The third segment encompassed questions that solicited information about respondents' perceptions about the program including their perceptions about their mentor (or mentee) and speculating on the effectiveness of the JMTP in influencing the success of managers in operating terminals. The final segment of the survey sought to gather information from respondents on their perceptions about changes (if any) that should be made to the JMTP

program to enhance its effectiveness in contributing to its success. JMTPs were served a special section of the survey to identify their experience at different locations and operations during their mentorship process with the view of determining if rotations around the company's operations influenced any of the perceptions they might have about the program as a whole.

3.2 Survey Focus

The focus of the survey was to determine the perceptions of JMTPs and mentors about the current program, what characteristics make a JMTP successful from the JMTPs perspective, as well as the mentors perspective, the effects of the relationship between the mentor and the JMTP, how the mentor's attitude affects the JMTP, JMTPs' skills before entering the program, and the commitment mentors made to the mentoring program.

Despite the researcher having influence on the respondents, it was obvious that respondent fatigue needed to be considered as the survey was developed. As a result, the focus of the survey and the study was constrained to JMTP and mentor perceptions about the program, themselves, and each other in very specific areas as described above. There are, of course, numerous aspects about the company's management systems and operating protocols that affect performance of the JMTP, as well as numerous outside factors that may influence perceptions of its effectiveness. However, despite their importance, these questions were going to make the survey extensive and cumbersome for respondents. This cumbersomeness was expected to increase respondent fatigue and contribute to poor response rate. Thus, it is important to note that the researcher was cognizant of the complexity of the problem but chose to simplify the survey to allow for the development of some fundamental insights about the JMTP, and position management to identify specific areas where future efforts may be focused to yield superior outcomes.

3.3 Data Collection

The data used in this study was collected in the fall of 2012. Respondents' invitations to the Axio® website commenced on November 12 and terminated on November 16, 2012. During this window, all those who were invited could enter the site and use their unique identification embedded in their email invitation to access the survey. After the termination date, all access to the survey was suspended. A short period was used to force immediate action and reduce procrastination by respondents. Additionally, while the period that the survey was open, respondents received emails every other day reminding them to complete the questionnaire if they had not already done so.

All responses were self-reported and completely anonymous. All 222 qualifying employees in the Grain Operations Division of General Merchandising LLC were invited to participate in the survey and the response rate was about 82 percent. Although this response rate is significantly higher than often seen in all types of surveys, and especially online surveys, the response rate for the survey was not 100 percent because some respondents were busy and away from their desks procuring products and servicing customers and never made it back before the survey was closed.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The results of the analyses are presented in this this chapter. The presentation is divided into two parts. The first part presents and discusses the descriptive statistics about the respondents' characteristics and demographics. The second part presents and discusses summaries of the respondents' perceptions of successes and their antecedents in the JMTP program, as well as the individual perspectives of the JMTP and the mentors.

4.1 Overview (Demographics)

Table 4.1 shows the distribution of survey respondents by their role in the JMTP program. There are three roles identified: current JMTP program participants; current mentors; and previous mentors who are not mentoring anyone. The table shows that about 53.3 percent of respondents were JMTPs, 40.7 percent were current or previous mentors, while about 6 percent were neither JMTPs nor mentors. The nearly 6 percent of respondents who answered that they were neither JMTPs nor mentors could not complete the remaining segments of the survey because they were directed to the end of the survey.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Survey Respondents by Role

Classification	Frequency	Percent
JMTP	98	53.26
Current Mentor	49	26.63
Previous Mentor	26	14.13
None	11	5.98
Total	184	100

Table 4.2 shows the summary statistics of the basic demographic characteristics of the respondents. It shows that less than half (42.7 percent) are married and nearly all are male (96.6 percent). This high male percentage is not uncommon in this particular industry. The average age of respondents is just below 30 years and about 55 percent of

them have a farm background. There are a few non-responses to the demographic variables with the largest of four non-responses observed for the marital status and farm background variables.

Table 4.2: Summary Statistics of Selected Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Age	182	29.39	8.47	22	61
Marital Status	178	0.43	0.50	0	1
Gender	179	0.97	0.18	0	1
Farm Background	178	0.55	0.50	0	1

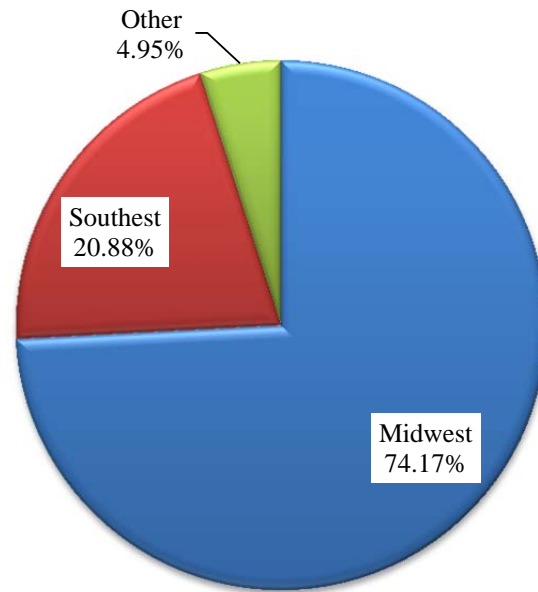
A breakdown of the above table into the different roles shows that the average of JMTPs ages is about 24.6 years, with a standard deviation of only 2.6 years. This group of respondents is usually recruited after completing college. This explains the relatively low average age for the JMTPs as well that the small standard deviation. However, the upper end of the age range is 40 years, a result of internal promotion of long-serving hourly workers with proven leadership capability into management ranks.

The average age of respondents currently mentoring a JMTP at the time of the survey was 35.2 years old, with a standard deviation of 9.1 years, with a range of 24 years to 61 years. This was similar to the average age of those who had mentored a JMTP in the past. The average age for this group was 35.7 years old, with a standard deviation of 11.1 years and ranged from 24 to 58 years. To become a mentor of a JMTP, an individual has to be a manager, have the knowledge base and experience of the industry, and be a willing candidate to mentor other colleagues. Thus, mentors have some years of experience in the business, explaining why they are relatively older than JMTPs.

The results show that none of the respondents had less than a High School or General Education Diploma and about 79 percent have a bachelor's degree. This would be consistent with the hiring practices of the division. The focus over the past several years has been to recruit, hire and promote people with college education into management. There are some instances where a highly-performing hourly employee may be promoted into management, but that is the exception rather than the rule. Less than 9 percent of respondents have an associate's degree and only 12 percent have a high school or GED. It is observed that among JMTPs, 92 (93.9 percent) of the 98 respondents have bachelor's degrees. This contrasts with only 58.9 percent of mentors who have bachelor's degrees.

There is significant diversity among respondents among their home states. The data shows that respondents' home states covered nearly 50 percent of the U.S. states. These states were grouped into three: Midwest, Southeast and Other. The Midwest encompassed the states that fall between Ohio in the east and North Dakota in the west, and North Dakota in the north to Kansas in the south. The proportion of respondents indicating the Midwest as their home state was about 74.2 percent. Within this group of respondents, Illinois had the largest representation with about 29 percent of total respondents, Indiana had 12.09 percent and Missouri had 8.0 percent. The reason for this heavy distribution is the geographical location of the facilities that are, for the most part, in or near agricultural areas that produce grain. Traditionally, when General Merchandising LLC recruits college applicants to fill JMTP positions, they are recruited from colleges that are near the physical assets. The majority of college applicants eventually want to end up back in the area that they grew up in, and this is another contributing factor to the heavy distribution of the population in the Midwest.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Region (184)



4.2 Perceptions about JMTPs Success and Its Antecedents

Respondents were asked their perceptions of the effectiveness of the JMTP program. Figure 4.2 and 4.3 show the results of the perceptions of the mentors. This shows that the majority of mentors believe that the program is effective overall, but it still indicates that there is room for improvement. About 71 percent of mentors agreed that the JMTP program was an effective program compared to 66 percent of JMTPs. A small percentage of both groups of respondents indicated that the program is ineffective.

Figure 4.2: Mentors' Perception about Junior Management Training Program's Effectiveness

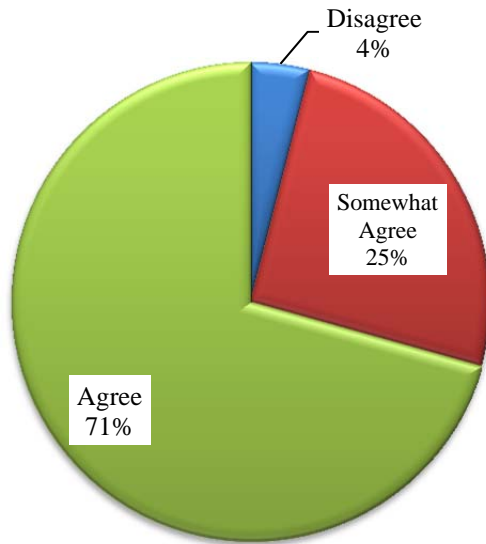
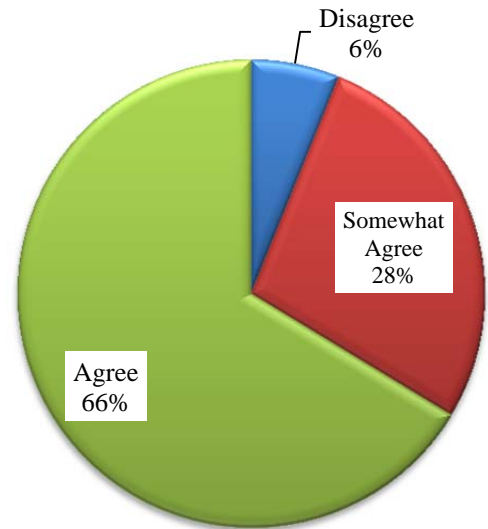


Figure 4.3: JMTPs Perceptions about the Junior Management Training Program's Effectiveness



Program effectiveness is defined as the ability of the program's graduates to successfully operate their own facility. JMTP participants' responses to their perceptions about their ability to run a facility was correlated with their demographic characteristics (Table 4.3). The results show that the correlation between perceptions about the ability of JMTPs to come out of the program able to successfully operate a facility was positively and statistically significantly correlated with all demographic characteristics except age, with which it was negatively but statistically significantly correlated. The correlations between success and age and marital status were both significant at the 1 percent level. However, the correlations between an individual's perceptions of themselves as a do-it-yourselfer and an entrepreneur were both significant at the 5 percent level. The foregoing would suggest that the older an individual when they enter the program, the lower the likelihood that they would find the program effective in helping them successfully operate a facility.

Recognizing that most of the older participants are long-time employees who have been promoted from hourly wage into management, it is plausible to assume that they enter the program with significant knowledge about operations and, hence, have lower value of any mentorship that comes with their promotion. This contrasts with recruits who have no knowledge about operations, are fresh out of college and therefore impressionable about their exposure to operations through the mentorship relationship.

Table 4.3: Correlation Between Ability to Successfully Operate a Plant and JMTP Participants' Demographics and Other Perceptions

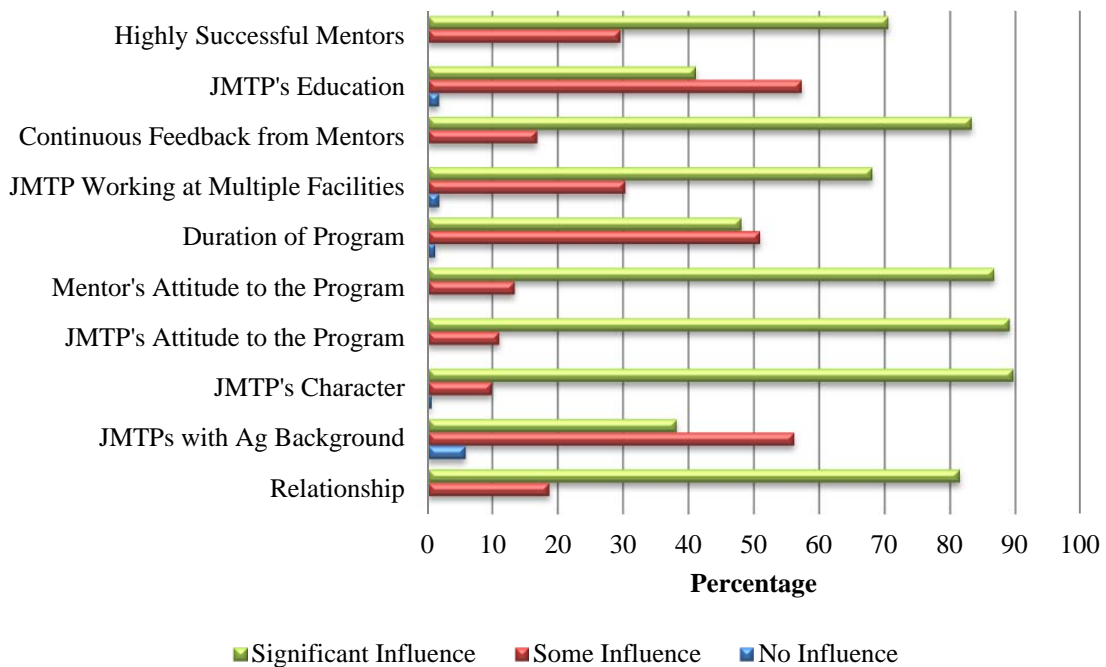
Success	Correlation Coefficient	Significance Level
Success	1.000	
Age	-0.305	***
Married	0.329	***
Do It Yourself	0.219	**
Entrepreneur	0.258	**
Own Attitude	0.233	**
Mentor's Feedback	0.232	**

Table 4.3 also shows that thinking of themselves as entrepreneurs has a positive and statistically significant correlation with their perception of being able to come out of the program and successfully operate a facility. This correlation was significant at the 5 percent level. Similar correlations with the same significance were observed for the respondent's attitude and the mentor providing regular and effective feedback to the program participant.

All of the respondents were asked to what extent they believed that certain factors influence the future performance and success of the JMTPs, and the responses are in Figure 4.4. Overall, the perceptions of all respondents show that the variables with the highest level of influence on future success are the mentor's attitude toward the program, the

JMTP’s attitude to the program, the relationship between the mentor and the mentee, mentors providing feedback to the mentee, and the JMTPs character. Each of these variables score at least 80 percent in the frequency distribution. This would seem to indicate the perception that part of the responsibility of the success is upon the JMTP as well as the mentor. Some areas that are not that important when it comes to the influence and the future performance and success are the JMTP’s education, the duration of the program, and the background of the JMTP and whether or not they have a background in agriculture. This may be a result of the overwhelming similarity among respondents with respect to education and background. Interestingly, the frequency distribution between mentors and mentees for these variables and their perceived influence on the future performance of program participants were similar.

Figure 4.4: Extent to Which Respondents Believe Factors Influence Future Performance and Success of JMTPs (N=173)

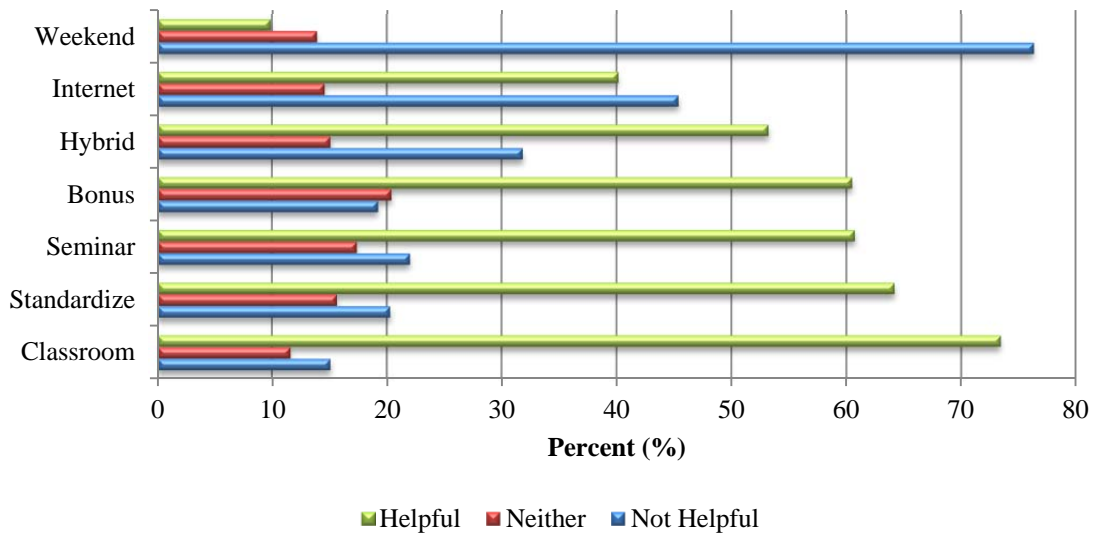


The highest factor identified among the JMTP respondents was the JMTP's character (90.82 percent). Contrarily, the variable receiving the highest frequency among mentors was the mentor's attitude towards the program (93.33 percent). It is interesting that both groups say that the most important factor **did** depend upon them. That would lead to the belief that, overall, the majority of respondents have a strong sense of accountability about and towards the program.

4.3 Perceptions About Alternative Delivery Methods

Currently, the majority of the training is done with the JMTP being mentored by the mentor through working together and daily interactions. There is some presentations to all JMTPs about company procedures and safety and similar standards of operations which are common across the whole division. Respondents were asked about their perceptions regarding alternative delivery methods in the JMTP program to enhance its effectiveness in graduating excellent performers. They were given a number of delivery options to rank according to the options helpfulness to achieve the desired objective. Figure 4.5 shows the perception of all respondents and as to what types of training may be beneficial.

Figure 4.5: Perceptions about Alternative Training Delivery Mechanisms



Respondents agreed that training on the weekend would not be effective as a method of training. Classroom training had the highest perceived effectiveness among all respondents as being the most effective method of training. 73 percent thought the classroom method of training was the most helpful when compared to others. Among all respondents, there was not one dominant method, as most of them fell at or below as helpful at 60 percent. One method to note, was that when all of the respondents were asked if providing achievement bonuses or recognition to mentors whose protégés achieve outstanding performance in their first year after the program would be an effective method, only 60 percent thought that it would be helpful. This frequency was even lower among mentors. The best explanation of this perception is that mentors see their participation in the program as part of their job. As such, they seek no motivation in order to do their job beyond their compensation. This is a very positive testament about the program and the mentors who play such an important role in it.

The distributions were similar between mentors and JMTPs in all cases with the exception of internet delivery. While about 30 percent of JMTPs indicated that internet

delivery would help them come out of the program and be more successful, about 50 percent of mentors indicated the internet delivery would contribute to the program's effectiveness in graduate success. This was counterintuitive given that the mentors are older and were expected to be more averse to technology. However, a consideration of the reality of the training environment may suggest that the two groups see the technology differently. The mentors may see it as an opportunity to expose trainees to more resources and knowledge while the trainees may see it as forcing them to learn on their own, thereby preventing them from gaining from the experience and knowledge of their mentors.

The respondents were asked if they believed the JMTP program needed to be changed from its current format as a management and leadership training program. Figure 4.6 shows that while nearly two-thirds of respondents (65.9 percent) indicated that there is no need to change the program, more than a third had the opposite opinion. A slightly larger proportion of JMTPs (36.2 percent) indicated a need for change compared to only 31.5 percent of mentors taking this view. The differences between the two groups was, however, not very different. There seem to a strong minority of program participants who believe that making some changes to the program would be beneficial. This suggests an opportunity for program managers to engage this group to explore the changes that could enhance the performance of the program and make it even better for both mentors and junior managers.

Figure 4.6: Perceptions about Format (N=167)

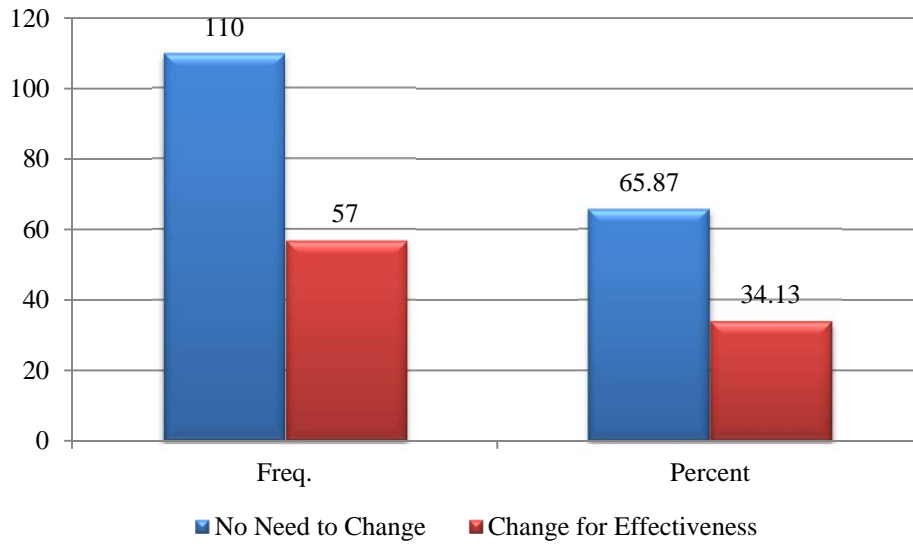
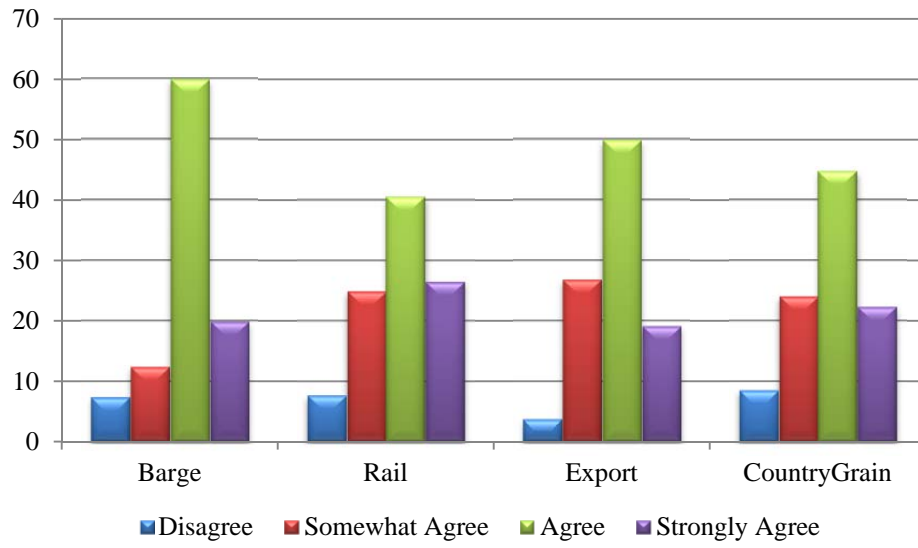


Figure 4.7 presents the distribution of JMTPs' perceptions about the program vis-à-vis the location of work. Four locations rose to the surface as the most popular for location among junior managers: barge, rail, export and country grain terminal facilities. Overall, among these top locations, there did not seem to be any major difference in the effectiveness of the program when comparing different location types. This implies that location of training did not seem to influence perceptions about program effectiveness. However, JMTPs at barge facilities tend to have a stronger perception about the program's effectiveness, with 80 percent of JMTPs located at barge facilities indicating agreement or strong agreement with the statement that the barge facility was effective in providing the desired training outcomes. The lowest perceptions seem to be among those located at country grain terminals.

Figure 4.7: Distribution of GTOM Respondents by their Perceptions about the Effectiveness Working at Different Location Types (N=98)



CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The overall objective of this research was to determine what could be done to allow GENERAL MERCHANDISING LLC to achieve the expected results of the new Junior Management Training Program (JMTP) trainees at the end of their training program, where they should be able to effectively lead, oversee, and operate a facility. This research gives the perceptions of both the mentors' and the mentees' perceptions about the program. It also provides some indications about the demographic and other characteristics of respondents that correlate with their perceptions about the program's ability to produce graduates who are able to independently operate a facility.

The results indicate that overall there is a strong agreement that the program is effective in producing graduates able to independently and successfully operate a facility. However, when asked if the program's format could benefit from change, about a third of respondents indicated in the affirmative. This response provides an opportunity for management to explore the types of changes that could make this program even more effective in its management and leadership training mission.

The results also indicated that the older an individual is prior to entering the program, the higher the probability that such an individual would perceive the program as ineffective. This is not surprising outcome since older participants in the program are also people with management and operational experience given the nature of recruitment for the program. This may lead to the suggestion that when hourly employees are promoted to management, they may need to enter a different program in order to get the most out of the training they undergo. It is important to know that the focus of the JMTP

is on exposing new recruits to the company's operating procedures, management principles and operating activities. For an employee who has been with the company for a given number of years and risen through the ranks to deserve promotion to management, it is plausible that they will be familiar with all these procedures, principles and activities. Conceiving of new programs for this class of employees, who also tend to be older, may not only help make them better managers, but release resources that are currently invested in them to focus on those who might need such resources the most.

It was also clear that respondents who saw themselves as entrepreneurs and as do-it-yourselfers were more likely to see the program as successful. This may be because such individuals tend to be more engaged in their own education and training, incessantly searching for opportunities to better themselves in spite of their environment and making the most of every opportunity they have. It may be helpful, therefore, for the whole program to focus recruitment on people who exhibit these characteristics. It may be beneficial to include in the recruitment process processes that allow recruiters to discover people with these characteristics and place emphasis on bringing them into the program.

The attitude of the JMTP towards the program before they entered the program correlated with perceptions about the program's effectiveness. This is something that the organization can significantly influence through preparation and acclimatization. New recruits may be provided a series of immersion experiences and training modules to engage them and prepare them to enter the JMTP program. By allowing them the time and space to understand what the program is about and what is expected of them, and putting systems in place to measure how well they have understood the program, their role and the program's expectations of them, they would be positioned to develop the

appropriate attitude towards the program. Indeed, it may make sense to develop transparent metrics that allow the managers of recruits to know when they are ready to enter the program. This would mean establishing some form of JMTP candidacy preparation program and only advancing those who are ready.

The mentor's attitude was also found to be important, suggesting some preparation of mentors for participating in the program too. Mentor training may involve providing them with the tools and knowledge to effectively mentor. These include training about building rapport, appreciating the potential of the mentee and taking time to understand the mentee's strengths and weaknesses. These capacity building activities would position the mentor to enhance his own comfort in entering the relationship, see it positively instead of as a burden they has to bear. By seeing it as a learning opportunity for the mentor and develop an expectation to have future managers who would have learned their trade from him should help build positive attitudes among mentors. But, this cannot be taken for granted. Management must aggressively put systems in place to enable mentors get the knowledge, skills and competences they need to effectively be great mentors.

Mentor feedback was also seen as a critical component to the perception about program effectiveness. This is also something that the organization can enhance immensely. For example, by codifying the feedback process, all mentors would be obliged to provide written and oral feedback to their mentees in ways that can be verified. To make the process easy, it may make sense to provide a simple application that allows mentors to provide such feedback electronically without a lot of changes in their operational lives. For example, the application may reside on the mentor's computer and

the mentor may choose to complete a form or dictate comments about the mentee's performance on a regular interval – say bi-weekly – and once they complete it and click save, the file is immediately transferred to the mentee's computer. This allows management to oversee the feedback program but it also provides a means of keeping track of improvements in the mentee. Whatever process is developed, it is important that it be fluid in its operations, present minimal changes in current activities of the mentor and be transparent and secure so that people will feel safe in being candid in their feedback.

Contrary to the research, the age difference between the mentor and mentee did not show a strong correlation with perceptions about the effectiveness of the program. This indicated that respondents thought that the age difference was not an issue that would affect the outcome of the JMTP. The analysis used in this research does not allow for the disprove of this literature, which estimated an ideal age difference of between 8 and 15 years of for mentors over mentees. However, what it shows is that there may other mediating factors. For example, the relationship between the mentor and the mentee was deemed critical. This means carefully pairing mentors and mentees is critical to the program's success. Management need to develop a careful process of identifying the factors the could define good relationships between people and use these to build the mentoring pairing. There are various tools available that could help the organization develop these processes.

Typology of learning has shown, through research as well as through the information that has been gathered, that there is not one type of learning that is better than the other. People have different learning styles, and not all people learn the same

way or at the same pace. The most effective way to teach people is to provide various type of learning methods so that they use the one that is most beneficial for them. It is beneficial in this process that the person find out what their learning style is and that they pursue those types of learning processes when trying to learn.

It was discovered in the research and confirmed in the study that there is not one dominant learning method that will reach all people. The ideal situation is that there are various learning types that can be offered to the JMTPs to better educate them and help them to grasp the knowledge that will allow them to be successful and effectively operate their own facility one day. One approach that all respondents agreed they would not want as a delivery mechanism was weekend training. Management must maintain cognizance of this in any future changes to delivery mechanisms. People are busy and need to balance life and work in order to be effective employees. By constantly searching for ways to enhance their performance with minimum or no disruption on their “free time”, the organization positions itself to get most out of its employees, regardless of their tenure in the organization.

5.2 Limitations of Study

The data used in this study imposed some limitations for the data analysis that could be done. A complete sample size was used for all of the mentor and JMTPs that were still employed by GENERAL MERCHANDISING LLC. However, it was not possible to gather data from JMTPs or mentors that had left the company as well. It is possible that the data collected, if it was a complete population, would have had different results as well as different perceptions on the effectiveness of the JMTP program.

Further studies should be done to see if the perceptions of the JMTPs change after they are out of the program, as many are just in the start of the program, and their

perceptions may change as they get deeper into the program. From this study, it would be recommended that this same group be followed through the JMTP process and see if there are any significant changes in their perceptions after they complete the program, for necessary improvements. Indeed, this study could be used as a baseline study that would allow the organization to routinely gather information on not only the program and its effectiveness but the changes in roles and how those changes influence perceptions about the training program.

One area that needs to further research is to find out the learning styles among all of the JMTP's and begin to gather data to see what type of learning styles are present and most prevalent in the JMTP population. Also, there is a need to conduct a study on the possibility that different personality types of both mentors and mentees may be influential in the relationship's success. It would be beneficial to know the benefits to putting certain personalities together, because they will enhance the effectiveness of relationship as well as create an effective and safe learning environment. It may, as well, indicate that there are certain types of personalities that should not be placed together because of the likelihood of that relationship being toxic. The research and survey did not dive in and recognize the possible benefit of personality type pairing to the effectiveness of the JMTP program.

5.3 Recommendations

Based upon the research and data analysis, there are four areas that can be improved upon to improve the effectiveness of the JMTP program. First, the selection process needs to be bolstered and strengthened recruitment and selection process of JMTPs. A list of guidelines and expectations need to be created that will allow all applicants to know what the expectations are of the JMTP program. During the interview

process, a personality test may be given to begin to gather data to begin to build a case to study the benefits of having this information about the JMTP that will include learning style, personality type, level of self-confidence, and willingness to learn. If selected, this information will be used in placement of the individual and passed on to the prospective mentor so that they can utilize the information for the benefit of the mentee and being aware of the JMTPs personal make-up.

The second area that will be bolstered is the area of mentor selection. A list of guidelines and expectations will be written, and the company will make all mentors aware of the process of the JMTP program. All new mentors that are selected will go through a class that will allow them make sure that they know what to expect when mentoring a JMTP. All mentors will have a personality test that they will take to gather future information on the best placement of the JMTPs. The JMTP's personality type will be compared with the mentor's own personality type to test if the placement of the correct personalities would increase the success of the JMTP program.

Thirdly, placement will become structural in the process of placing the JMTP at a specific location. The factors that will be taken into consideration are: personality types of the JMTP as well as the mentor, age and type of learning style for the JMTP. This will allow for a more effective program based upon consistency. Within this, there will be a select group of mentors that will complete onsite visits throughout the JMTP process to make sure that each JMTP is able to effectively learn and participate in the program. This select group will be able to address any issues that may occur during the program for either parties, and will be a part of the review process to ensure that each JMTP is consistently and accurately reviewed on performance, be able to recommended when they

have learned all that they can in the current environment, and access when the colleague is ready to operate their own facility. This select group will be independent and will report to the corporate operations group for Agronomy Services. This will also allow them to see how effective each mentor is, and if they need coaching on mentoring, or even if they should be a mentor at all.

The JMTPs will be able to experience and work at different locations in an effort to expose them to different environments and allow them a more rounded learning experience. This ability to learn in different environments will be done in conjunction with the mentoring coaches and will allow only those that are ready to broaden their learning experience.

Lastly, when these recommendations are made and put into place there will be another study to compare the groups' perceptions after the recommended changes have been implemented. This is the start of a process to continually look at the effectiveness and create a method for continuous improvement going forward.

If these recommendations are followed, a more effective JMTP program overall, in all phases of the program, will allow all JMTPs to have a higher success rate to effectively equip them to operate their own facility. These recommendations will allow GENERAL MERCHANDISING LLC to effectively replenish and fill the pipeline of leaders as they continue to grow and reach out in their global footprint and strive to be a world leader in the agricultural industry.

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