



RECIPROCAL MENTORING AS A STRATEGY FOR ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE IN A VOLATILE, UNCERTAIN, COMPLEX AND AMBIGUOUS (VUCA) ENVIRONMENT: THE JOLLOF RICE ANALOGY

Bola Vero Mensah

University of Abuja.

Email: Bolamensah@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT: *In today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous global environment, organisations face increasing pressure to build resilience through varied perspectives, skills, and experiences. These varied perspectives, skills, and experiences require a diverse team that can contribute institutional knowledge, innovative approaches and digital fluency that enhance organisational resilience in a global turbulent environment. This paper introduces the Jollof rice analogy to model reciprocal mentoring as a strategic approach that transcends traditional one-way knowledge transfer. The reciprocal mentoring model encourages a synergistic learning environment by fusing the unique strengths of an intergenerational workforce, much like the classic dish of Jollof rice blends protein, rice, and spices. Based on an extensive review of scholarly literature, integrative theoretical frameworks, and diverse transnational case studies, the paper argues that structured, cross-age collaboration systematically converts intergenerational variance into strategic leverage as illustrated by leading manufacturers in Germany, Silicon Valley technology firms, and the Federal Civil Service of Nigeria. By "stirring" diverse workforces through reciprocal mentoring, organisations can bridge generational divides, leverage diversity of perspectives and enhance the adaptability needed for sustained resilience in a rapidly changing world.*

KEYWORDS: Reciprocal Mentoring, intergenerational, Knowledge Exchange, Resilience, Jollof Rice, VUCA.



INTRODUCTION

The modern workplace is undergoing intense changes. For the first time ever, four different generations—Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z—are working together in significant numbers (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2017). This mix of generations brings great opportunities but also creates some challenges because each group has different leadership styles, work habits, and career goals (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Companies need to find new ways to make the most of this generational diversity, not just manage it, if they want to succeed in today's fast-changing and uncertain world.

The VUCA framework, first used in the military and now common in management, describes the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous rapid changes organisations face. In these situations, being resilient isn't optional—it's essential. Resilience means having systems and cultures that can adapt quickly, keep innovating, and learn together. Mentoring has always been a way to support learning and career growth (Allen & Eby, 2011). However, traditional mentoring usually assumes knowledge flows one way—from experienced seniors to less experienced juniors. These older models, while valuable, risk underutilising the skills, creativity, and digital fluency of younger generations.

Reciprocal mentoring provides a more dynamic and balanced alternative. Unlike traditional mentoring, it is based on two-way exchange where the senior employees provide institutional knowledge and leadership insights, while younger employees contribute technological expertise, fresh perspectives, and cultural relevance (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012). This mentoring model is about recognising the interdependence of generations in shaping organisational futures rather than mere mentoring across age groups.

To visualise the concept, this paper employs the “Jollof rice analogy”. Jollof rice is a staple dish beloved across West Africa. Jollof rice is the product of diverse ingredients—rice, tomatoes, peppers, onions, oil, and spices—that must be combined and stirred carefully to yield a flavourful whole meal. If left unmixed, the ingredients remain separate and unappetising, but blended together, they produce a meal greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise, organisations require intentional processes like reciprocal mentoring to blend the “flavours” of generational diversity into a cohesive, resilient, and innovative workforce

This introduction sets the reader up for an in-depth exploration of reciprocal mentoring as both an emerging theoretical framework and a practical necessity in contemporary organisations. The paper proceeds by reviewing relevant literature on generational diversity, mentoring, and organisational resilience. It then outlines the research design, followed by the presentation of findings from case studies across Nigeria, the United States, and Germany, and discusses the principal outcomes and implications for research and practice. Ultimately, the Jollof rice analogy illustrates that organisational resilience in a VUCA world cannot rest on a single generation but requires the harmonious blending of all “flavours” each generation carries.



LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The VUCA World and the Demand for Resilience

The acronym VUCA—volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous—was first coined by the U.S. Army War College to describe the changing global security dynamics after the Cold War. In organisational studies, the VUCA framework has become a reference for environments marked by rapid technological change, globalisation, and evolving workforce demographics (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014). Organisations now compete both on efficiency and their abilities to adapt and innovate amidst uncertainty.

In this context, resilience refers to the capacity of organisations to absorb shocks, learn from disruptions, and keep functioning effectively. Research increasingly indicates that resilience is not just the product of a single leader, a system, or a generation; rather, it is a collective strength developed across networks and teams. One effective way to develop this resilience is through reciprocal mentoring, which emphasises two-way learning (Lengnick-Hall, Beck, & Lengnick-Hall, 2011).

Generational Diversity in the Workforce

The contemporary workforce is made up of four distinct generations;

1. **Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964):** Typically characterised by loyalty, stability, and hierarchical leadership preferences.
2. **Generation X (1965–1980):** Known for their pragmatism, independence, and adaptability.
3. **Millennials (1981–1996):** Associated with collaboration, technological agility, and desire for meaningful work.
4. **Generation Z (1997–2012):** Digital natives who are highly entrepreneurial and values-driven (Ng, Lyons, & Schweitzer, 2017).

Although generational differences can be reductive, they provide a useful way to understand the tensions in the workplace and potential synergies. For example, the strong values of duty that are embedded in Baby Boomers' socialisation might clash with the younger generations' desire for flexibility and spontaneity (Twenge et al., 2010). However, when these tensions are well managed, they can become complementary strengths.

Mentoring and Knowledge Exchange

Mentoring has generally been understood as a dyadic relationship whereby a senior, experienced person provides professional and personal development to a junior person (Allen & Eby, 2011). Benefits of mentoring include career advancement, psychosocial support and transfer of tacit knowledge. However, it has been pointed out that traditional mentoring does not leverage the insights of younger professionals, especially around things such as technology, diversity and culture (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012).

Reciprocal mentoring expands beyond the traditional concept in locating both parties as competent learner-teachers. And at the same time, the ethical basis of social exchange theory



means shared relationships are built on trust, mutual respect and reciprocity. Both parties have some form of capital and they vary: Boomers contribute institutional memory, while Gen Z introduces digital fluency and contemporary cultural insights.

The Jollof Rice Analogy as a Conceptual Lens

In the culinary landscape of West African nations, Jollof rice is perhaps the only dish which has transcended the realm of mere nutrition and become emblematic of art, harmony, and collective belonging. Its preparation serves as an excellent analogy to illustrate how firms can cultivate resilience amid volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) as described below.

Jollof rice is a culinary masterpiece that starts with a foundation of long-grain parboiled rice, but its complexity and unique identity are built upon a vibrant and aromatic base. This base is a careful blend of ripe tomatoes, red bell peppers, onions, garlic, ginger, and hot peppers, which are then combined with fragrant spices like thyme, curry, and bay leaf. The dish is crowned with a rich stock of poultry or meat, allowing all ingredients to blend together during a careful cooking process where each ingredient plays a crucial role: the rice provides structure, the peppers offer a rich aroma, and the spices deliver a unique and fiery dimension. The careful preparation is just as important as the ingredients themselves. The tomato and pepper blend is fried with spices to create a thick, fragrant sauce, into which the rice is then slowly cooked and infused with the stock. The process requires an intuitive balance and frequent stirring to achieve the perfect texture and to prevent the rice from becoming soggy or burnt. When properly cooked, the outcome is a truly transformed dish—grains of rice are infused with a vibrant red colour spicy aroma, resulting in a social dish that symbolises connection and shared identity at festivals, weddings, and other gatherings.

Conceptually, the Jollof rice analogy shows that in any organisation, no one perspective, regardless of its source, is sufficient in isolation. No matter how seasoned the leader or how digitally fluent the junior is, their respective skills won't be enough. Like the cooking of Jollof needs multiple ingredients, so does building organisational resilience. It springs from the flowing knowledge, skills, and insights from across age and rank boundaries that are freely exchanged. Reciprocal mentoring fosters an environment where learning is shared, and the dominant perspective is one that encourages adaptability, creativity, and shared ownership.

Analogies are effective tools in organisational studies because they help people understand something more abstract in relatable and tangible terms (Cornelissen, 2005). The Jollof rice analogy is a culturally relevant framework to understand reciprocal mentoring practices, especially relevant in African contexts but transferable in global contexts. The analogy works as follows:

1. Rice, a staple food which serves as the foundation of the dish, is like Baby Boomers, which represent institutional memory and continuity.
2. Tomato and Peppers, which provide depth and balance to the dish, are like Gen X, symbolising pragmatic leadership.
3. Onions and Oil: which provide the basis for the rice flavour, are like the millennials, which represent creativity, networking and technology.



4. Spices, which provide boldness and flair, are like the Gen Z which represent digital agility and fresh perspectives.

Just like these Jollof rice ingredients must be combined and stirred together to achieve harmony, so organisations must intentionally stir the different generational competencies together. If the different competencies are left alone, the result of their efforts will be fragmented, but if “mixed together” they become resilient and innovative.

Linking Reciprocal Mentoring to Organisational Resilience

Resilience is not just about understating shocks but about the capacity to respond proactively and adaptively by learning from experience, reconfiguring available resources and making necessary changes to persist and thrive in the face of adversity

Conceptual models of resilience focus on adaptive capacity, resource configuration, and learning under pressure (Carmeli & Markman, 2011). Reciprocal mentoring offers all three:

1. Adaptive capacity: the ability of a system to adjust its functions and structure in response to dynamic and uncertain environments. It is a core driver of resilience, providing the means to address challenges and **generations to learn new ways of knowing through exposure to unfamiliar frames of reference.**
2. Resource configuration: as part of adaptive capacity, systems must be able to reallocate and reorganise their resources (human, financial, material, etc.) to meet new demands. This flexibility in resource deployment is crucial to overcoming disruptions.
3. Learning under pressure: resilience requires learning from both successful and unsuccessful past experiences to inform future actions. This includes the ability to learn flexibly in various contexts fostering new knowledge and insights that support innovation and adaptation.

Overall, therefore, reciprocal mentoring is not a typical HR intervention; it is a strategic necessity. The Jollof rice analogy in organisational culture and reciprocal mentoring framework provides organisations the means for sustaining resilience in VUCA environments.

Knowledge Creation and Nonaka’s SECI Model

Knowledge transfer is fundamental to mentoring, and one of the most referenced frameworks for knowledge exchange is Nonaka’s SECI model of knowledge creation (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). The model identifies the following four stages of knowledge transfer.

1. Socialisation (tacit-to-tacit): the sharing of knowledge occurs through shared experience, stories, and observation. Individuals learn from each other through shared activities or interactions
2. Externalisation (tacit-to-explicit): knowledge is expressed through dialogue, analogies, and conceptual models.
3. Combination (explicit-to-explicit): knowledge is organised, combined, and synthesised to form new complex explicit knowledge.



4. Internalisation (explicit-to-tacit): knowledge is absorbed by individuals through reading, studying, or practising, turning it into tacit knowledge in their minds.

The SECI model is often depicted as a spiral or cycle where the knowledge gained from one mode feeds into the next, continuously generating and simplifying knowledge across different organisational levels.

Reciprocal mentoring aligns with the SECI model. For example, Baby Boomers may socialise institutional memory through their stories (tacit-to-tacit), while Gen Z externalises digital knowledge sharing new tools (tacit-to-explicit). Through dialogue, both groups can combine their thinking into shared practice (explicit-to-explicit), which then can be internalised into routine organisational practice (explicit-to-tacit).

The analogy of Jollof rice is illustrative of this reciprocal process of knowledge exchange: ingredients must be mixed, integrated, and reheated until they come together as a meal. In the same way, knowledge must flow in and out of generations until it transverses into institutional capability.

Social Capital and Communities of Practice

Reciprocal mentoring is also rooted in social capital theories and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). Social capital is the resources that exist in social networks – trust, norms and shared values – that enable cooperation (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Reciprocal mentoring builds bonding capital (trust among individuals) and bridging capital (connections across generations).

Through the repeated mentoring practice, organisations can build communities of practice in which members not only share knowledge but collaboratively create shared identities and norms. From this perspective, reciprocal mentoring is not only a developmental mechanism but an incubator of resilient communities within organisations.

Resilience Theory in African Contexts

Resilience is often focused on technological disruption and globalised shocks in the mainstream resilience literature. However, an African scholar has stressed resilience as the ability to adapt to uncertainty, scarcity, and governance (Amah, 2021). For example, in Nigeria, resilience is much less about solely technological agility and more about using cultural, relational, and community-based resources available and maintained to continue to perform under difficult circumstances.

The Jollof rice analogy is particularly apt here. The Jollof rice dish, in contrast to standard globalised frameworks of multiple village dish spaces, has the embodiment of African resilience – a dish that can move and adapt in different contexts (Senegal, Nigeria, and Ghanaian versions), different ingredients available, and different cooking methods – to deliver sustenance and unity. Similarly, reciprocal mentoring in African organisations through interdependence and mutual support may look different from the models of reciprocal mentoring in Western firms but could be contextually adapted to focus on learning and respect for elders in the community.

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Bridging Generational Theory and Organisational Learning

Generational theory has been criticised for stereotyping and oversimplifying (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). However, the concept of generational differences can be reconceptualised as different knowledge domains or differences in knowledge rather than a classification of groups within the organisational learning literature. In a reciprocal mentoring context, generational variants or differences can be transformed into learning opportunities for organisations. Specifically:

- i. Boomers' tacit knowledge (institutional memory) enhances organisations' memories.
- ii. The digital fluency of Millennials and Gen Z expands the organisation's absorptive capacity.
- iii. Gen X's moderate pragmatism serves an important bridging role between continuity (which is important for change) and change.

This is in sync with Argyris and Schön's (1978) double-loop learning architecture, where correct action (single-loop learning) and a challenge to underlying assumptions/actions (double-loop learning) occur. Reciprocal mentoring allows both older employees and younger employees to challenge their bias (such as the assumptions about loyalty, flexibility, or entitlement) to support further learning at an organisational, if not other, level.

Integrative Theoretical Proposition

Overall, these frameworks demonstrate that reciprocal mentoring is not merely a human resource practice; rather, it is a strategic learning system which:

- i. Initiates SECI cycles of knowledge creation;
- ii. Creates social capital, and communities of practice, across generations;
- iii. Embeds logics of African resilience through metaphors such as Jollof rice;
- iv. Fosters double-loop organisational learning by reframing generational prejudices.

Thus, reciprocal mentoring develops knowledge transfer, collaboration and resilience, the three conditions necessary for addressing the VUCA environment.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is more conceptual and illustrative in nature, rather than empirical and data-driven. The purpose is not to empirically quantify reciprocal mentoring but to develop a theoretical argument, based on illustrative case studies, that demonstrates the strategic value of reciprocal mentoring for organisational resilience in a VUCA world.

Research Design

The research is established as a conceptual paper that provides illustrative evidence. Conceptual papers articulate new theories by providing new frameworks, metaphors or



perspectives that shift scholars' understanding (Jaakkola, 2020). The Jollof rice analogy is a new conceptual tool for the explanation of reciprocal mentoring.

The research design is comprised of three parts:

1. **Literature Synthesis:** A critical review of the existing literature on mentoring, intergenerational collaborative work, knowledge exchanges, and organisational resilience. This review of literature includes global theories, such as SECI knowledge creation, social exchange theory, and African perspectives on resilience.
2. **Conceptual Integration:** The Jollof rice analogy is used as a culturally relevant metaphor to integrate an eclectic collection of theories into a coherent, contextually based framework.
3. **Illustrative Case studies:** Examples are used from a range of organisational contexts from Nigeria's Federal Civil Service, from technology firms in America (e.g., General Electric, PwC), and in manufacturing industries in Germany. They are illustrative examples of how reciprocal mentoring looks across cultures and sectors.

Case Study Rationale

To highlight the global relevance and adaptability of reciprocal mentoring, this paper examines three distinct contexts.

1. Nigeria public sector represents the African public sector; succession planning and generational tensions are prominent due to leadership dominated by Baby Boomers.
2. The United States showcases corporate technology firms where reverse mentoring allows the digital natives (Gen Zs') to guide senior executives in digital technologies.
3. Germany offers insights from the manufacturing sector, where formal and structured mentoring programmes capture the tacit knowledge of retiring workers.

By comparing these contexts, the paper demonstrates that reciprocal mentoring is a practice that has global relevance but can also be adapted to local contexts.

Analytical Approach

The analysis employs conceptual mapping, where the Jollof rice metaphor offers the primary analogy for the analysis, and the theories of SECI (knowledge creation), social exchange theory, and organisational learning provide ways of organizing thinking about how reciprocal mentoring operates. The results of case studies are then "mapped onto" this conceptual model to consider alignment.

Conceptual Framework Diagram (Description)

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) integrates three dimensions:

1. **Ingredients (Generations):** Each generation brings different "ingredients" (Baby Boomers = rice; Gen X = tomatoes/peppers; Millennials = oil/onions; Gen Z = spices).



2. The Stirring Process (Reciprocal Mentoring): Represents active engagement recognising tacit/explicit knowledge consistent with Nonaka's SECI cycle.
3. Final Dish (Organisational Resilience): Represents the emergent ability of organisations to thrive in a VUCA environment that is realised when disparate differences are blended together.

The framework proposes that if the stirring action is not modelled intentionally, key ingredients become dormant. Reciprocal mentoring is thus the process or the conduit for unleashing generational diversity into institutional resilience.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The results of this conceptual paper are depicted through three different case contexts of the Nigerian Federal Civil Service, American technology companies, and German manufacturing industries. Each case demonstrates how reciprocal mentoring leverages generational differences into organisational resilience.

Nigerian Federal Civil Service: Succession Challenges and Institutional Memory

The Nigerian Federal Civil Service exemplifies the potential hazards caused by generational imbalance. Senior leadership is almost exclusively populated by Baby Boomers whereas Millennials and Generation Z remain in the workforce but are absent from decision-making environments. This generational imbalance raises questions concerning succession planning, loss of institutional memory, and general displeasure amongst junior professionals (Amah, 2021).

Without reciprocal mentoring, the stakes include the following:

1. Knowledge Drain – A considerable amount of tacit knowledge, developed and nurtured over decades, will be lost with the retirement of older officers.
2. Generational Disgruntlement – Younger officers may disengage entirely or exit the service altogether for private companies or international organisations, believing they will receive more professional development.
3. Outdated systems and processes – In the absence of reciprocal mentoring, organisations risk clinging to outdated systems and processes that suppress innovation and effectiveness. Senior leaders may lack exposure to new digital approaches, and the younger generation lacks institutional wisdom, creating knowledge gaps. This erodes adaptability and renders organisations unfit to deal with today's VUCA world.

Reciprocating mentoring provides a solution. The older officers are able to share the institutional tacit knowledge, historical knowledge of governance structures, and strategic knowledge/perspectives. In turn, the younger officers add digital fluency, new policy perspectives, and innovativeness in service delivery mechanisms.

This can be likened to the analogy of Jollof rice. Baby Boomer (rice) and Gen X (tomato & pepper) officers create the steady foundation of tradition, continuity and pragmatism while Millennial and Gen Z (oil, onions, spices) officers add creativity and digital energy. Without



active stirring, the service risks become unpalatable and stale but with reciprocal mentoring, the “ingredients” blend together seamlessly into resilience.

American Technology Firms: Reverse Mentoring for Digital Agility

Global companies, such as General Electric (GE) and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), have led the way in implementing reverse mentoring programmes, whereby senior executives engage in mentorship with junior employees to learn about new technology, social media, and new culture (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012).

The findings of these cases identified a number of key takeaways:

1. **Digital Learning and Transformation:** Senior executives involved in these programmes were exposed to experimentation with tools such as collaborative platforms, data analytics, and social media engagement.
2. **Cultural Learning and Transformation:** Reverse mentoring gave leaders insight into the expectations of young consumers and young employees.
3. **Collaboration and Trust:** These programmes allowed for distance between the senior and the junior employee to be reduced and ultimately opened up each individual to one another and created a culture of transparent conversations.

Reciprocity was another important aspect – senior executives not only learnt from juniors but also mentored juniors in leadership learning, strategic thinking, and crisis management. Knowledge transfer was real-time and, fundamentally, two-way.

Using the Jollof rice analogy, the case of reverse mentoring also requires active stirring: junior employees (spices) added the bold, digital flavours, while the executives (rice and tomatoes) added structure and depth. Together, the mix created a Jollof rice digestible by a fast-changing business environment.

German Manufacturing: Capturing Tacit Knowledge

Germany's manufacturing sector, which has an ageing workforce, has created structured mentoring programmes. These programmes integrate retiring Baby Boomers with their Gen Z counterparts (Kratzer, Leenders, & Van Engelen, 2010). These mentoring initiatives focus primarily on transferring vital tacit knowledge, or experience-based knowledge, that is nearly impossible to codify. This tacit knowledge may include things like processes for solving problems on the floor in response to operational challenges, the intuition derived from years of experience handling machines, and informal relationships that facilitate cooperation.

The findings of the study suggest these mentoring programmes:

1. Help preserve productivity as they face demographic changes.
2. Reduce costs for training the apprentices as they facilitate faster experiential learning.
3. Help to preserve organisational memory which mitigates the disruption when experienced employees depart.



Reciprocal mentoring also benefits the older workers, who report greater confidence in their legacy and higher levels of digital literacy because the apprentices have exposed them to new programmes and monitoring tools.

In this case, the analogy for Jollof rice suggests that the older workers (the rice) provide the bulk of the substance in the mentoring arrangement, while the apprentices (the spices) help ensure that the Jollof rice remains relevant in a rapidly evolving technological environment. Reciprocal mentoring "stirs" together tradition with innovation to secure the continuance of the traditional identity.

Cross-Case Findings

Despite the three cases being distinctly different from one another, a number of common themes emerge, these include the following:

1. Knowledge Exchange is two-way: Reciprocal mentoring has revealed that all generations possess knowledge that is of value.
2. Conflict to Collaboration: Rather than friction, differences in leadership styles, work ethics and expectations can become sources of innovation if properly leveraged.
4. Increased resilience: Organisations are more capable of adaptation, innovation and sustaining performance under VUCA when generational strengths are acknowledged and actively harnessed.
5. Cultural Resonance Matters: The analogy of Jollof rice proves that metaphors drawn from local culture make abstract organisational processes tangible, relatable, and actionable.

DISCUSSION

The evidence from Nigeria, American tech companies, and German manufacturing is strong enough to indicate that reciprocal mentoring represents an important strategic framework for organisational resilience in a VUCA world. When organisations intentionally "stir" generational diversity, they change the line of fault into a source of innovation and collaboration. This discussion section builds on the findings, critiques the potential limits, and consequently highlights the contribution of the Jollof rice as a conceptual lens.

Reciprocal Mentoring as Knowledge Integration

A significant insight is gained that reciprocal mentoring is a way to enhance knowledge integration, which is a fundamental aspect of organisational resilience. In all three cases, the organisations were able to tap into older workers' tacit knowledge while also utilising the digital fluency and cultural relevance of younger generations. This process corresponds with Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) SECI model of knowledge creation, where mentoring relationships pull through socialisation, externalisation, combination, and internalisation. In the case of German manufacturing, Baby Boomers helped socialise tacit knowledge to Gen Zers through some apprenticeship-style mentoring, while Gen Zers started to externalise new digital knowledge they have interpreted for their seniors. This iterative process somewhat resembles the maze-



like process of taking ingredients and combining them into one meal, alluding to the Jollof rice metaphor.

Resilience Through Generational Collaboration

The cross-case analysis also corroborates the assertion that reciprocal mentoring enhances organisational resilience. Lengnick-Hall, Beck and Lengnick-Hall (2011) identify adaptive capacity, resource reconfiguration, and learning under pressure as the key components of reciprocal mentoring, as illustrated in the 3 cases presented earlier.

1. Adaptive Capacity – Namely, leaders adapt to technological disruption more effectively when they are mentored by younger workers, as in the case of PwC's reverse mentoring model.
2. Resource Reconfiguration – For example, in Nigeria's Civil Service, latent resources (i.e., digital capabilities of millennials) blend with the institutional knowledge of senior officers to create organisational value (Amah, 2021).
3. Learning Under Pressure – For example, German industries demonstrated their productivity momentum during structural demographic shifts by ensuring cross-generational learning relationships (Kratzer, Leenders, & Van Engelen, 2010).

Thus, reciprocal mentoring is more than developmental; it is strategic, as it equips organisations to flourish in volatility and uncertainty.

The Jollof rice Analogy as a Cultural Framework

The use of Jollof rice as an analogy is not only a rhetorical device; it serves as a culturally pertinent conceptual framework for understanding organisational learning. Cornelissen (2005) identifies that both metaphors and analogies assist scholars and practitioners in translating abstract theory into actionable practice. Jollof rice is specifically powerful because:

1. It represents unity through diversity, where ingredients from multiple origins coexist in one dish.
2. It represents adaptability through differing recipes across countries yet the dish remains recognisably Jollof rice.
3. It conveys the importance of safeguards and processes—if the lid of the cooking pot is not removed and stirred, the contents of the dish can be ruined. Similarly, without some active efforts at integration, organisations may similarly run the risk of failing to integrate generations of talent.

In situating the framework through an African culinary metaphor, this paper reflects local and global theories of resilience and mentoring in a way that can be contextually relevant for African organisations, while not irrelevant for global ones.

Addressing Critiques of Generational Theory

Generational frameworks have been critiqued for reinforcing stereotypes and reducing complexity (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Nevertheless, reciprocal mentoring resolves this issue, as generational distinctions are lessened in favour of knowledge domains. Baby Boomers



do not reference “rigid”; they hold institutional memory; Millennials (and others) do not represent “entitled”; they represent digital integrators. This shows resonance with Argyris and Schön’s (1978) double-loop learning, where basic assumptions are challenged and reframed. Thus, through reciprocal mentoring, stereotypes yield to respect and anything authentic develops.

Implications for Theory

Theoretically, this research contributes to the fields of mentoring and resilience in three ways:

1. It frames reciprocal mentoring as a means of knowledge integration within the SECI cycle.
2. It identifies resilience as an outcome of purposeful intergenerational “stirring” rather than generational homogeneity.
3. It makes the Jollof rice analogy a new conceptual metaphor, expanding organisational studies with an African epistemological conception of resilience.

Limitations and Considerations

Despite the cases highlighting the potential of reciprocal mentoring, there will always be barriers to **Mentoring Across Ranks** (MAR), including resistance to two-way mentoring in hierarchical cultures, particularly in contexts where age is closely associated with authority (as in Nigeria). Furthermore, reciprocal mentoring relies on available infrastructure and organisation (e.g., training, facilitation, time), which may not be readily available. And without this design, programmes can easily turn into tokenism. These limitations emphasise the need for careful adaptation and not just on-board models from other contexts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The implications of this research suggest that reciprocal mentoring is more than a human resources practice; it is a strategic necessity to build resilience in organisations under VUCA conditions. The implications that follow are directed at both academic research and management practice.

Implications for Research

1. **Theory of Mentoring Advancement:** The results suggest that mentoring should be theorised as space for knowledge integration as part of organisational learning cycles (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), not merely as a developmental dyad. Future research could extend these findings by examining how reciprocal mentoring aligns with theories of knowledge creation such as SECI, and double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978).
2. **Contextualisation of Organisational Resilience:** While resilience research has generally been created from a Western corporate base (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011), the introduction of the Jollof rice analogy accentuates the merit of exploring African cultural metaphors in management scholarship. Future research could build on this and compare the



perception of collaboration and resilience stemming from culturally derived metaphors (e.g., Jollof rice, sushi, paella).

3. **Combining Generational Theory and Practice:** Generational research is often viewed as generalising (Costanza & Finkelstein, 2015). Reciprocal mentoring presents an applied framework for researchers to move beyond stereotypical theories and to assess how different cohorts contributed to several distinct forms of knowledge. Future research could empirically assess how cognitive outcomes of reciprocal mentoring, such as rates of innovation, employee retention or resilience, are affected across the full range of complexity and diversity of industries.

Implications for Practice

1. **Human Resource Strategy:** Reciprocal mentoring should be a standard part of leadership and succession planning. The same way Jollof rice needs stirring, organisations need to build a structured mentoring environment that creates knowledge transfer across ages and generations. HR managers can set goals, create monitoring processes, and delineate evaluation criteria to track the outcomes.
2. **Policy and Governance:** Reciprocal mentoring should be seen as an option that can help ameliorate succession crises, thereby improving or creating an institutional memory for the public service. Policymakers could fall back on reciprocal mentoring to advance civil service reforms to enable senior officers to guide and mentor their younger counterparts while learning aspects of digital governance. This would increase continuity, enhance retention, and create generational trust.
3. **Organisational Culture:** Reciprocal mentoring experience is value-based and creates cultures of respect, trust, and inclusivity. When younger employees believe that their expertise is appreciated and older workers feel their experience is acknowledged, organisations enhance employees' morale, diminish generational conflict, and potentiate collaboration. This can be viewed as the cultural equivalent of a well-prepared Jollof dish, wherein the flavour is dependent upon the balance of essential ingredients.
4. **Leadership Development:** In preparing younger employees to move into jobs characterised by strategic thinking and adopting a thinking style associated with senior management, reciprocal mentoring expands the pipeline for leaders from diverse generational backgrounds. It also allows older leaders to remain digitally sharp and agile. In a VUCA world, leadership must not only adapt but also collaborate and be willing to embrace a different perspective than their generational worldview.
5. **Global Applicability with Local Contextualisation:** Reciprocal mentoring is universally applicable, yet its application should be contextually adapted to the cultural space. In top-down cultures, organisations may have to sensitise their top-tier leaders to the notion they can learn from junior employees. In egalitarian cultures, the option may focus on sharing knowledge about the work under discussion while valuing experience.



Summary of Practical Value

In the real world, reciprocal mentoring is a lot like cooking Jollof rice over low flames: there is a pleasant combination of ingredients (generational diversity) that needs to be permuted (the mentoring processes) in order to generate a rich and flavourful product (sustainable organisation). Cooking Jollof rice without stirring means the rice will burn or not get cooked properly; similarly, without reciprocal mentoring, the organisation will continue to be fragmented, conflictual, and declining.

Practical Template for Implementing Reciprocal Mentoring – A 6-Month Plan

The proposed reciprocal mentoring model seeks to institute knowledge exchange between junior and senior personnel through a structured six-month program. Based on the dual goal of enhancing digital and innovation agility among senior personnel while at the same time building the strategic and leadership potential of junior personnel (Chaudhuri & Ghosh, 2012), the model emphasises equity of contribution. Each monthly meeting is thematically structured so that organisational memory and experiential wisdom are complemented with contemporary digital and generational insights.

Month 1: Organisational history & lessons (senior) ↔ Online collaboration platforms demo (junior).

Month 2: Crisis leadership case (senior) ↔ Social media and brand analytics (junior).

Month 3: Career architecture and succession (senior) ↔ Work-life design and Gen Z expectations (junior).

Month 4: Stakeholder mapping and negotiation (senior) ↔ Application of AI/analytics methods for decision-making (junior).

Month 5: Strategic decision framing (senior) ↔ Modern communication (short-form, memes) (junior).

Month 6: Conflict resolution clinic (senior) ↔ Emerging consumer trends (junior).

Indicators of success: Joint presentation; skill self-rating pre-text and post-text; reports from the supervisor; senior adopts at least one tool or process; junior adopts at least one leadership behaviour.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that reciprocal mentoring is a strategic necessity for organisational resilience in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world. Reciprocal mentoring allows Baby Boomers to balance generational knowledge exchange with Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z, so reciprocal mentoring enables generations to effectively turn generational conflicts into opportunities for collaboration within increasingly diverse workplaces and organisations.

Literature synthesis, theoretical integration, and relevant case studies drawn from different cultural contexts (Nigerian firms, American technology firms, and German manufacturing



firms) demonstrated that reciprocal mentoring effectively transfers generational knowledge, integrates knowledge, builds adaptive capacity, and maintains organisational performance in a VUCA environment.

The Jollof rice analogy has been shown to be useful in illustrating how the reciprocal mentoring process works. Much like the recipe for Jollof rice requires a starting point of whole ingredients (i.e., rice, tomatoes, onion, oil, spice) that need blending and stirring (with the ingredients coming together to become Jollof rice), generational strengths need to be blended and stirred deliberately as part of the reciprocal mentoring process. Jollof rice ingredients remain distinct and separate until stirred. When they are stirred in a particular way, they bond to produce a healthy, nutritious, and resilient dish. Similarly, reciprocal mentoring fosters deliberate exchange and sharing between multiple generations, transforming individual strengths into collective knowledge that drives innovation, adaptability, and resilience.

In summary, organisational sustainability cannot rely on the perspective of one generation. Resilience arises from blending experience, pragmatism, creativity, and digital savviness. Once organisations foster collaborative generational cultures that promote reciprocal mentoring, they are better positioned to resist or reverse disruption.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study contributes conceptually to the mentoring, resilience and generational diversity literature, it has also provided for several possible research avenues:

1. **Empirical Testing of the Jollof rice Analogy:** Future studies could also test the proposed analogy through surveys, interviews, or case studies to investigate whether culturally embedded analogies (like Jollof rice) improve understanding and uptake of mentoring practices within organisations across African, Asian, and Western contexts.
2. **Examining Outcomes of Reciprocal Mentoring:** Scholars should study reciprocal mentoring to empirically explore what organisational outcomes might be associated with reciprocal mentoring, including innovation capacity, retention rates, levels of intergenerational trust, and resilience indexes. Longitudinal studies would especially be valuable to understand how mentoring experiences might change over time.
3. **Comparative Cultures Study:** Since mentoring is core to the cultural context of an organisation, it would also be interesting to study the ways that reciprocal mentoring takes place across geographical contexts. For instance, is the Jollof rice metaphor more salient in African contexts, compared to other food metaphors (e.g., paella, sushi, or stew) elsewhere?
4. **Digital Platforms and Reciprocal Mentoring:** With the proliferation of hybrid and remote work, it is also worth researching how technology platforms facilitate or impede reciprocal mentoring practices. Do virtual mentoring programmes afford the same capacity for tacit knowledge exchange compared to in-person mentoring?
5. **Policy-Engaged Research:** In public sectors like Nigeria's civil service, reciprocal mentoring could be tried as a modality of succession planning. Future research could



evaluate how policies can institutionalise and sustain special practices of reciprocal mentoring for national development.

By exploring these paths, researchers can develop and contribute to the theoretical and practical aspects of reciprocal mentoring to ensure it remains an effective strategy for enhancing resilience in organisations around the globe.

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