

# IMPLEMENTING QUALITY ASSUARANCE IN MENTORING

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Mentoring is not a new concept; it has its roots in ancient Greece. And throughout the millennia, mentoring — providing guidance and counsel to a younger individual — has occurred spontaneously as informal relationships: a supervisor at work who takes an interest in a young person’s upward mobility; a teacher who takes extra time with a struggling or promising student; an older family member who provides a shoulder to lean on when needed or, in our case, manager – mentor who needs qualified staff in her organisation. In recent years, as growing numbers of people have recognized the tremendous power of mentoring, formal mentoring programmes have been cropping up throughout the public and private sectors. Being such an important help for schools, community organisations and businesses we launched a formal mentoring initiatives. It is an exciting venture to build a new mentoring programme in your organisation, which will result in better opportunities for young people and better employees for your organisation (teachers and administrative staff).

## **Roles of Mentors**

As had been the tradition in Romania, student teachers on their practicum would also be under the supervision of a designated teacher. There has been a lot of debate recently on the roles of these mentors, as we came to call them. The majority of these can be classified as:

1. **Model** – to inspire, to demonstrate;
2. **Acculturator** – to show mentee the ropes, to help mentee get used to the particular professional culture;
3. **Sponsor** – to open doors, to introduce mentee to the right people;
4. **Support** – to be there; to provide safe opportunities for the mentee to let off steam/release emotions;
5. **Educator** – to act as a sounding board – for articulation of ideas, to consciously create appropriate opportunities for the mentee.

(Roles of mentors – Fullerton and Malderez 1998).

While any, or any combination, of the roles above would seem to us to justify the term 'mentor', most mentors will be involved – to a greater or lesser degree – in all five roles. Many of these roles will be relevant to any profession.

We were lucky to have two mentors and a mentor-trainer in our organisation as we nonetheless believe that it is crucial that mentors have expert mentoring skills. We could easily start a formal mentoring programme for our teachers, trainers and administrative staff. The overall programme aims relevant to the work of mentors were:

- to make it possible for mentees to practice teaching or any other job in a sheltered way so that they would emerge as confident and competent professionals
- to facilitate and develop in mentees the self-awareness and interpersonal skills that would enable them to function better in the world of work
- to develop in mentees the kind of professional perspective which enables them to locate their job in the wider context of the community
- to develop in the mentees powers of self-evaluation and a capacity for autonomous learning which together would enable them to complete their training as efficiently as possible, as well as go on to develop themselves professionally.

## **Organisations and mentoring**

Many factors will help you determine whether to embark on a mentoring programme. You will want to do some research to ensure that your investment in such a programme will be cost-effective. Adopting an internal mentoring system needs a coordinator who will select, match, screen, evaluate the whole program. The results could be valuable in terms of quality assurance, career exploitation, life skills development and academic success, providing better teachers or trainers and skillful administrative staff for your organisation. No matter what type of mentoring programme you build, your stakeholders will include your advisory group, your management team, mentors and mentees. Depending on the nature of the mentoring your programme offers, stakeholders could also include organisations with which you partner, such as sister organisations, language schools, community groups, the media and the general public.

For mentoring relationships in your programme to flourish and endure, your staff will need to be in touch with mentors and mentees on an ongoing basis. That way, they can assess how well each relationship is progressing and offer guidance and advice along the way. Regular contact between programme staff and mentors and mentees can help avoid conflict, get relationships back on track and help you accomplish your programme goals. At the very least, you will need a programme coordinator. Choose someone with strong leadership abilities and management skills who can manage a wide range of responsibilities, including:

- Managing the overall program;
- Developing consistent procedures for recruiting and referring young people;
- Overseeing development and implementation of all promotional and educational efforts;
- Cultivating and maintaining all necessary external contacts and relationships for implementing and maintaining the mentor program (e.g., with partner organizations);
- Recruiting, screening, training and supervising mentors;
- Matching mentor pairs;
- Developing and maintaining all records, policies and procedures;
- Coordinating mentoring activities;
- Checking in regularly with mentors and offering ongoing support;
- Developing a plan to recognize program participants;
- Developing a plan to evaluate the program, including soliciting participant feedback;
- Tracking program statistics, including budgetary costs, hours and so forth;
- Documenting development of the mentor programme.

In addition to selecting a management team, you will need to establish policies and procedures that reflect your programme decisions and practices that everyone will follow. Establish policies and procedures in these areas:

- Where and when mentoring takes place;
- How mentors are oriented, trained and screened;
- How mentors and mentees are matched;
- Who supervises mentoring pairs and how often that individual is in contact with each mentor/mentee pair;
- Whom a mentor or a mentee should contact when problems arise;
- How to handle complaints;
- How to resolve problems in relationships or bring relationships to closure; and
- How to evaluate your success.

### **E-mentoring or Blended mentoring**

As ITC is something that is both in fashion and helpful we have tried to embark on a new adventure, namely E-mentoring which is also known as online mentoring, or telementoring and which connects one mentor with one mentee. The primary goal of e-mentoring is the same as that of face-to-face mentoring: that is establishing a trusting, nurturing, positive relationship between a mentor and a less experienced person. Programmes may use any of the electronic communications available, including e-mail, secure Web Sites. The major benefit of this form of mentoring is that it can overcome some challenges associated with traditional, face-to-face mentoring, especially the time constraints. Consequently, the pair communicate via the Internet but this mentoring programme needs more than reading advice and stories on the Internet; it needs at least from time to time face-to-face communication. Body language and feedback are essential which leads us to another definition which we came to call „blended mentoring”. During the summer months, e-mentoring can serve as a bridge for mentors and mentees in traditional one-to-one relationships.

Experimenting this innovative mentoring we came to the conclusion that the major benefits of this form of mentoring include:

- it may take various forms including career exploration, life skills development and academic success;

- it may help people deepen their understanding of the positive potential of online communications;
- it may be the exclusive vehicle for young people and mentors to connect or may serve as an additional communication tool for those who ordinarily meet in person;

No matter what type of mentoring programme you build, your stakeholders will include your advisory group, your management team, mentors, mentees. Depending on the nature of the mentoring your programme offers, stakeholders could also include organisations with which you partner, such as schools, community groups, the media and the general public.

### **Monitoring and Evaluating Mentoring**

There are several things to consider when developing your e-mentoring program: how are you going to manage, monitor and evaluate what is happening in your programme? With e-mentoring you should incorporate several different ways to monitor how your programme is going. Below we have outlined a few processes you should consider putting in place:

- Consistent and regular communications with staff, mentors and young people;
- Tracking system for ongoing assessment;
- Written records;
- Input from stakeholders, such as community partners and/or family members; and
- Rationale for the selecting of this particular monitoring strategy from investigating the wide range of available models.

### **Mentoring Portfolio**

You will need to develop a number of documents for managing and evaluating your programme, collected in a portfolio, including:

**Intake form** can be used as a referral form with relevant demographic and program information or an application filled out by the mentors.

**Profile** is completed by programme participants and allows them to state their reasons and goals for taking part in mentoring, as well as the qualities they would like in their mentoring partner.

**Mentor and youth participant agreements** include forms that cover the purpose of your programme; what you expect of mentors and young people, including the duration of their commitment; and give program staff permission to disclose relevant program information about young people to their mentors.

**Interaction log** tracks the hours and types of interactions between mentors and mentees.

**Attendance and participation forms** record attendance at group activities.

**Volunteer expense forms** document the nature and amount of their expenses so they can be reimbursed.

**Action plan** outlines specific programs and individual goals and document each young person's progress toward them.

**Participant records** update essential information about mentor pair contacts and participants' progress.

**Mentor and youth feedback surveys** are used by them to comment on how they feel about the program, their partners, group seminars and other activities. Use them to solicit their suggestions, as well.

**Activity chart** lists all mentor pairs and record participation in activities, meetings, special events or accomplishments.

Once we have assessed our programme, more improvements could be implemented. Mentoring programmes in our organisation have been both challenging and rewarding. Creating skilled professionals need skilled professional mentors. Just as having a good subject knowledge is not enough to be a good teacher, so being a good teacher or professional is not enough to be a good mentor. It requires additional skills and knowledge. Angi Malderez's metaphor referring to these skills is „The Mentor Iceberg” (Malderez, 1996). Having looked at what a mentor is, which the roles of a mentor are, how e-mentoring can improve the quality of a mentor/mentee relationship, we can now realise the rationale for our mentoring programme in our organisations.

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