

MENTORING AS ACCESS TO HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT – A CONTEMPORARY APPROACH

Professor Ph.D. **Dan POPESCU**

The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania

Assist. Ph.D. Professor **Iulia CHIVU**

The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania

Assist. Ph.D. Student **Alina CIOCÂRLAN-CHITUCEA**

The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, Romania

Ec. Ph.D. Student **Daniela-Oana POPESCU**

ABSTRACT

The starkest reality of surviving in the business domain is that competition is fierce. Further progress depends on people developing additional skills and new interests and getting more information advice and support.

Nowadays, organizations are so concerned with earning money, that they have lost their art of earning talent. Mentoring, as approach to people development, represents reciprocal relationship between two or more individuals who share mutual responsibility for helping a mentee achieve clearly defined goals.

The benefits of mentoring can have a profound impact on those whom an organization interacts with: clients, business partners and the community. It helps people build new relationships and strengthen existing ones. People become more collaborative in their performance and feel more prepared to offer themselves as mentors to others.

KEYWORDS: *mentoring, mentor, human resource development, mentee, progress*

Achieving performance within a competitive world

In a world of eroding trade barriers and spreading of information and communication technology, appearance of superior and specialized people, as members of organizations, is needed. Education and human development tend to become future economy privilege in developed countries.

Life and work have become very complex and there are many choices to be made at different stages of life, ranging from what to do after leaving school to decisions that affect family and career. Because people vary so much as personalities and in their ambitions and career choices, it is important that whatever help they get, to meet the particular needs and aspirations (Kay and Hinds, 2002).

Complaining that employers do not invest time in helping them grow and develop, young employees maintain their job only until a choicer offer comes along. For their part, employers wonder why they should spend much energy and money teaching employees who will probably are to leave the organization anyway.

There are many systems of training and in-service development, but many of these approaches have a common element: they take place in-house within the management

structure. Formal training and developing structures are intended to be supportive and helpful. People may consider difficult discussing matters of personal nature and career development intentions within a formal and public environment. Furthermore, young professionals do not agree system approach and want personal treatment, customized to their individual needs.

Mentoring is about one person helping another to achieve something that is very important to them (Kay and Hinds, 2002). Informal mentoring relationships have existed for centuries. The concept of organizational mentoring first became popular in the mid 1970s, when many considered mentoring programs just another management training fad. A decade later, organizations began to focus on mentoring as a vehicle for transferring organizational knowledge from one generation to another (Zachary, 2005). *Mentoring is a relationship in which one party (the mentor) guides the other (the mentee) through a period of change and towards an agreed objective.*

The predominant model was the mentor as “*sage on the stage*”, with the mentee’s role as a passive receiver of knowledge (Zachary, 2005). Contemporary changes induce transformation of mentoring practice from product-oriented model (which was characterized by transfer of knowledge) to a process-oriented relationship (involving knowledge acquisition, application and critical reflection).

The Mentoring Process

“*Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand*”, emphasizes a Chinese proverb as empowerment for reciprocal and collaborative relationship between mentor and mentee.

Author of the article *Five Questions Every Mentor Must Ask*, published in Harvard Business Review, Anthony Tjan, highlights importance of interior analysis, that helps an individual or a company put together a game plan for forward progress:

1. What is it that you really want to be and do? This question is about aspiration and purpose. The reason why someone is doing what they are doing should come out here. The question is also meant to get at the business goals and broader aspirations of an individual - someone wishing to be successful in business so that they can do more to help others, for example. The answer to question one should surface the driving passion of individuals - what is it they do or wish they could be great at doing?

2. What are you doing really well that is helping you get there? This question helps spotlight core strength and the person's ability to execute towards his/her goal. What is someone naturally good at doing? Detailed and standardized operations? Leading and motivating staff? Numbers? What is it that someone does better than the average people that can help her achieve her aspiration?

3. What are you not doing well that is preventing you from getting there? This is about facilitating an honest and critical assessment of the roadblocks, challenges or weaknesses in a person or company that is slowing their ability to win the game; to meet the goal from question one.

4. What will you do different tomorrow to meet those challenges? Questions two and three help determine whether people are spending the right time on the right things. Progress cannot be measured just by hard work. Someone may have a great work ethic, but if he is not focused on the right priorities, then “*you're making good time, but you're lost*”. People also have a tendency to practice and repeat what they are already good at doing. It is human nature to show off your best side and hide weaknesses.

5. How can I help / where do you need the most help? The answers to the first four questions matched against areas where a mentor has particular strengths, relationships, or learning resources - should help determine how a mentor can best help someone achieve the goal.

From *the mentor's perspective* this is a good starting point to reflect on what a mentor might need to “do or be”. And from *the mentee's perspective* is a good starting point to reflect on what to search in a mentor - and being able to communicate this to current or future mentors.

Mentoring process is not linear nor lasts forever. Team of researchers formed by Megginson D., Clutterbuck D., Garvey B., Stockes P. and Garrett-Harris R. reveal in their paperwork *Mentoring in action*, the steps a mentoring relationship should follow. Figure no.1 represents a possible way of mentoring process evolution, considering different stages of interaction between mentor and mentee.

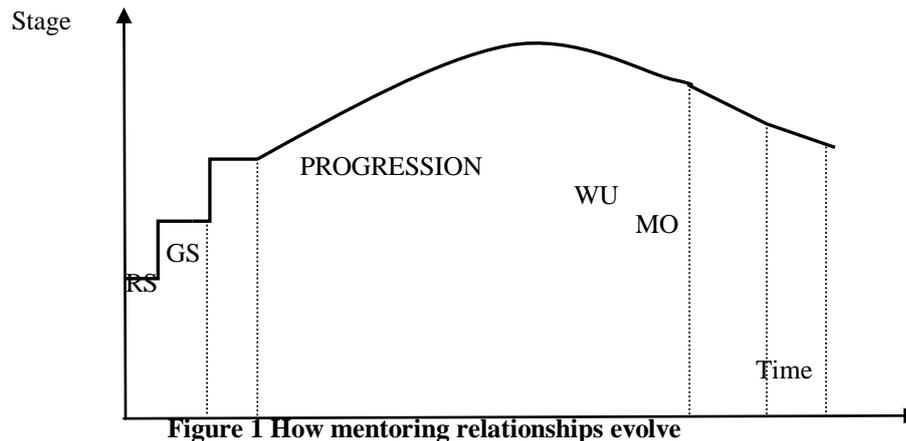


Figure 1 How mentoring relationships evolve

A. Building rapport stage – RS: mentor and mentee explore whether they are able to work together. This depends on a number of factors: their perception of values, the degree of mutual respect, expectations about roles and behaviours (for example, both expect the mentee to be proactive in managing the relationship). This level is achieved through dialogue.

B. Goal setting – GS: mentor and mentee clarify and refine what the relationship should achieve on both sides.

C. Progression – P: the core period. Mentor and mentee became more relaxed, explore issues more deeply, and experience mutual learning. The mentee takes more and more lead in managing the relationship and the mentoring process.

D. Winding up – WU: (reviewing and celebrating what has been achieved) – the mentee has achieved a large part of her or his goals and feels equipped with confidence, plans and insights to continue the journey.

E. Moving on – MO: reformulating the relationship, typically into a friendship.

Whenever the relationship comes to an end, the original objectives may have not been achieved and things cannot be continued, or they have been achieved and there are further stages for the mentee to undertake which are not within the mentor’s scope. For ending the relationship in a constructive manner, the mentor should pass on learning points to both the mentee and any other party involved in the process, so to aid any future mentoring arrangements.

What Makes a Mentor?

The role of a mentor is crucial. Based on interviews with successful professionals, Harvard Business Review indicated the following attributes of a “good mentor”:

- someone absolutely credible, whose integrity transcends the message, be it positive or negative
- tells you things you may not want to hear but leaves you the feeling that you have been heard
- interacts with you in a way that makes you want to become better
- makes you feel secure enough to take risks
- gives you the confidence to rise above your inner doubts and fears
- supports your attempts to set stretch goals for yourself
- presents opportunities and highlights challenges you might not have seen on your own

Moreover, studies (<http://imaginecup.com/Support/MentorResources.aspx>) show that, when choosing a mentor, there are a few things a candidate should consider, such as:

- **Expertise.** Is the mentor experienced in the technical area you are competing in?
- **Personality and style.** Do you like how your mentor approaches projects? Do you get along with them and respect how they resolve interpersonal issues? Do you feel he or she will serve as an effective advocate?
- **Availability.** Does the mentor have enough time to meet with you regularly and respond to your questions in a timely manner?
- **Location.** Does your mentor live near enough to your team to provide ongoing support?

Considering all these hypotheses, a comparison between a mentor and a leader can be revealed.

Comparison between *Mentor* and *Leader*

Table 1

| MENTOR | LEADER |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Enthusiasm and commitment | Passion |
| Listening and motivating | Holder of values |
| Influencing | Vision |
| Experience and qualifications | Creativity |
| Intellectual drive and knowledge | Intellectual drive and knowledge |
| Interpersonal skills - Communicator | Interpersonal skills - Communicator |

Both mentors and leader have similar qualities and objectives that define their activity: they have a purpose larger than they are and also the balanced personality and skills to put that purpose into action. A leader is a person with a passion for a cause, able to make the necessary courageous and difficult decisions and carry them into action. Enthusiasm and commitment usually define a mentor, for he is oriented to help grow one person: the mentee. On the other hand, a leader must have values that are life-giving to society. Meanwhile, mentors help mentees to perform better in their job, to learn how to deal with the professional challenges. Leaders and mentors have to be well-informed, for it is impossible to lead and contribute to other people’s development in a field they know

nothing about. Having some ideas about change, about how the future could be different define a leader, while mentors are based especially on skills as: listening, motivating, influencing and counselling. Mentors are a type of leaders, carrying educators, who love to see others succeed.

The benefits and pitfalls of mentoring

Mentoring benefits realized by individuals redound to the organization on a larger scale. A mentoring culture helps people meet adaptive challenges (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002), it facilitates new learning and organizational resiliency in face of rapid change. It contributes to organizational stability by managing knowledge and facilitating communication. If workers find work more meaningful and satisfying, retention and organizational commitment are increased, saving on the costs of rehiring. Increased confidence results in improved performance and quality of work. Individuals become more adept to risk taking. The more positive attitude contributes to increased morale and trust. Expanded perspectives trigger more global and visionary thinking.

All mentee, business and mentor enjoy benefits of mentoring.

Mentee: improved performance and productivity, career opportunity and advancement, improved knowledge and skills, greater confidence and well-being.

Playing the mentee's role involves taking into consideration the best ways to make the most of mentor's time. To be open-minded means taking advantage of the opportunity to be exposed to the new ideas. Communicating regularly with your mentor by asking questions and sharing opinions represents guidance to dealing with contemporary economic and social issues: nowadays, we tend to be more and more pressured to collect new information in a shorter time and make decisions. In these conditions, turning to a mentor may ease the human development process. Very important in maintaining a healthy relationship mentor-mentee is for both parties to create balance between mutual friendship, appreciation and respect.

Mentor: improved performance, greater satisfaction, loyalty, self-awareness, new knowledge and skills, leadership and development;

As different professionals recognize, personal satisfaction for the mentor is priceless. "I have found that each time, I participate as a mentor, I also learn new things as well," Kasey Rothenfluch, CPSM, Marketing Associate, PAE Engineers; "Mentoring allows me to be happy in the world," Beverly Prior, AIA, Beverly Prior Architects; "I am immensely proud when I see my mentees grow and succeed in their careers. Some have even gone on to become my clients," Gayla Reese, CPSM, Marketing Manager, Mason, Bruce & Gerard.

Business: staff retention and improved communication, improved morale, motivation and relationships, improved business learning.

Being aware of the **pitfalls** that might arise in the mentoring process explains why sometimes things go otherwise than expected and allows avoiding future weaknesses. Both mentor and mentee may cause problems to affect the mentoring relationship: adopting a casual approach or appearing disorganized during meetings, becoming too familiar and personally involved, manipulation by overstepping the boundaries initially established.

Conclusions

Organizations engage in mentoring for a number of business reasons, many of which relate to the need to cultivate or manage knowledge and relationships. Formal training programmes are difficult to respond to different personalities and particular needs and aspirations.

Mentoring represents an answer to present complex aspects such as: information and knowledge boom, variety of alternatives and pressure of making choices and taking decisions. It consists in giving help and support in a manner that the recipient will appreciate and value and that will empower him to move with confidence towards what he wants to achieve. Learning is the fundamental process, purpose and product of mentoring.

Unlike the traditional approach, mentor and mentee play active roles in all stages of the mentoring process. To be an exclusive one-to-one relationship, is completely confidential and can be an opportunity for achieving experience and knowledge.

Mentoring is not new, yet very useful to human resource development within organizations, in the contemporary era. It humanizes the workplace by building relationships of head, heart and soul.

References

1. Ibarra, H., "Making Partner: A Mentor's Guide to the Psychological Journey", *Harvard Business Review*, Publication Date: March 2000
2. Kay, D., Hinds, R., *A practical Guide to Mentoring*, Ed. Howtobooks, Oxford, 2002
3. DeLong, T.H., Gabarro, J.J. and Lees, R.D., "Why Mentoring Matters in a Hypercompetitive World", *Harvard Business Review*, Publication Date: January 2008
4. Johnson, G., *What makes a mentor?*, <http://www.australianmentorcentre.com.au>, Access date: 21st of September 2009
5. Megginson, D., Clutterbuck, D., Garvey, B., Stockes, P. and Garrett-Harris, R., *Mentoring in Action – a practical guide*, Second Edition, Ed. Kogan Page, London, 2006
6. Tjan, A., "Five Questions Every Mentor Must Ask", *Harvard Business Review*, Publication Date: March 2009
7. Zachary, L. J., *Creating a Mentoring Culture*, Ed. Josey Bass, San Francisco, 2005
8. *** <http://harvardbusiness.org/>, Access date: 17th of September 2009
9. *** <http://imaginecup.com/Support/MentorResources.aspx>, Access date: 17th of September 2009
10. *** <http://www.gandestebiz.ro/>, Access date: 19th of September 2009

This article is a result of the project „*Doctoral Program and PhD Students in the education research and innovation triangle*”. This project is co funded by European Social Fund through *The Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013*, coordinated by *The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies*.