Organizing Adult Mentoring Activities at European Level

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Abstract

Mentoring plays an important role in professional and personal development of adults because it brings motivation for learning and assures lifelong learning premises. Adult mentoring is extremely important in an organizations life. The implementation of a structured mentoring program brings the organization benefits and motivation to their staff, and therefore growth. Even if mentors are volunteers in the mentoring process, they need to be trained to act properly.

This paper presents the arguments for implementing a mentoring program in organizations. It is also presented the FORMULA Project - a good practice example of mentoring program developed in 5 European countries. The project is promoting an adult mentoring model based on training the mentors and monitoring their activity with their mentees. The mentors in FORMULA project are disadvantaged adults. Through training they will receive the necessary tools and guidance to become mentors for others. The quality of the training courses is assured by the partner’s experience. The permanent communication between partners and share of expertise are the key elements in developing a new concept of mentoring.

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Our society today tends to be increasingly characterized by differences and distances, and rarely by regular meetings between people from different cultural and social backgrounds. This often results in division and opposition, an “us and them” society even though society is founded on the relationships we develop. But it is through relationships with other people that you can change and develop. Mentoring is not just about the person being mentored, being a mentor is an experience for the mentor too. Mentoring is a double benefit, experience and learning.

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1. What is a mentor and mentoring

Mentoring has become very popular over the last few decades and come across in many different contexts; in schools and workplaces, and also one of the most popular means of trying to achieve social inclusion for socially excluded adults.

**What is a mentor?**

A *mentor* is an experienced and trusted adviser; an experienced person in an institution who trains and counsels new employees or students; origin - from the Greek Mentor, the name of the adviser of the young Telemachus in Homer's Odyssey (Concise Oxford English Dictionary).

**What is mentoring?**

*Mentoring* is a long term relationship involving the transmission of knowledge through a link preference between two people. It is an interpersonal relationship support, consisting in exchanges and learning, in which a person invests his experience, wisdom and expertise gained, to promote the development of another person who has skills to acquire or professional objectives to reach. Mentoring is seen as an asset for the diverse needs of individuals and organisations, and throughout the professional lives, because nowadays linear careers, without transition or movement, for all practical purposes, no longer exist.

2. Implementing mentoring programmes in organizations

It is generally recognised that mentoring aims at supporting a person mobilize his/her own resources, to develop personal autonomy (including vis-à-vis the mentor). It is assumed that the person who chooses to be mentored is willing to accept the support of his/her mentor in personal development and facilitate the experiences of life transitions. Mentoring promotes the research and the implementation of own solutions, involves exchanges where honest communication and openness are fundamental attitudes.

The design of a mentoring training program in an organization is based on the expressed needs of the organization and its employees and focuses on aspects like staff integration, exchange of good practices etc. The needs analysis can be done in each department or by the human resources specialists.

Mentoring is a very good tool that organizations can use to increase employee’s motivation, helps teams to bound and create a worm working environment. Mentoring can be developed as part of a formal program. As organized formal program, the mentoring has the advantage of being structured by tools that support the dyads, and ensures that more people benefit from the experience and skills of a mentor.

The most difficult part of mentoring programme is matching the mentor and the mentee. This must be carefully done in order to provide a successful mentoring experience. Activities carried out by the mentor together with its mentee during the mentoring programme will be focused on developing the mentees organizational culture, to better integrate the mentee in the organization’s community and professional development. The personal and cultural development of the mentee is what makes a mentoring program different than a coaching one.

*Mentoring benefits*

To have or to be a mentor is something that is seen as an advantage for both. Mentoring is a win-win concept. So, let’s note the specialist’s opinion about those advantages:

For the mentor and mentee:

- Shared values, vision, knowledge, practices;
- Reinvestment of shared knowledge and creative continuity (renewal practices, innovations, ..);
- Consistency in practice;
- More effective collaboration;
- Innovation, increased creativity;
Continuous learning;
Professional/personal development;
Well-being, satisfaction and quality of life at work;
Increased vitality felt.

For mentees:
Better understanding of the environment, organizational culture;
Greater access to resources and knowledge;
Expanded professional network;
Development of skills and career;
Improved ability to adapt to various situations;
Professional autonomy;
Consolidation of professional identity;
Sense of belonging;
Confidence, self-esteem;
Sense of personal effectiveness.

For mentors:
Making use of their experience;
Having contacts with youth/people, new ideas, new knowledge;
Feeling satisfaction from participating in the development of someone;
Being helpful (professionally).

As a conclusion, all those who experienced mentoring, agreed that it promotes personal growth and productivity. Mentoring means integration as well - to establish interpersonal meetings and build relationships - since this is what the society needs - good relations to be sustainable!

Conditions for a successful mentoring relationship

Having a perfect mentor and a receptive mentee is not enough for a successful mentoring. Their matching has to be carefully done, taking into account some important conditions:
Twinning based on affinity and complementary needs of the persons
Voluntary commitment and involvement of people towards each other
Regular meetings
Quality of mentoring sessions
Authenticity and honesty
Openness, trust and mutual respect
Effective communication strategies
Freedom of expression
Flexibility in approach
Preparation for meetings
Proactive strategies in the process (needs, goals, challenges, initiatives ...)
Culture and organizational practices that support the values of sharing and transfer.
The Dyad mentor-mentee is very important. To be able to create good relations in the dyad there are some important factors in the mentoring programs: clear framework for all involved; volunteering, carefully interviewing of applicants, matching, training and supervision. For example the relationship develops best when couples share similar interests.
Implementing mentoring programmes in organization helps the human resources development and motivation. The human resources is the main force for organization growth and development, and empowering adults with confidence and sense of membership is an important element for the success of the institution.

The FORMULA project (presented in the next chapter) is organizing mentoring activities in 5 European countries. The project developed local partnerships with some pilot organizations. The FORMULA Mentoring
programme was implemented to improve the chances of disadvantaged adults through education (persons with low qualifications, single parents, etc). The program result was successful. After a few Mentor training sessions the participants changed their attitudes and became more social involved in the organizations life, just because they understood they are worthy and they have something to offer others.

This is why we consider it is important that organizations implement a Mentor Training programme for their staff. It gives the staff more confidence in their own forces and self-esteem and makes them more attached to the organization. Motivated and faithful staff led to organizational growth.

3. Good practice example of a mentoring program implemented in 5 countries

The Grundtvig project “FORMULA (Facilitating Opportunities using Role Models to Underpin Learning for Adults who are socially excluded)”, 527914- LLP-1-2012-1-UK-GRUNDTVIG-GMP, is founded by the European Commission through Lifelong Learning Program. This project sets up two year cooperation (February 2013-december 2014), in a mentoring program aiming to increase the inclusion of different groups characterized by alienation as economically and socially underprivileged, low-skilled, immigrants, etc.

The partners in this program are:

- SWAPWest, Glasgow, Scotland
- Malmö University, Malmö, Sweden
- Formare Studia, Adult education provider, Iasi, Romania
- Fundación para el Desarrollo Social FDS, Zaragoza, Spain
- POE EDUCO, Adult education provider Novy Jicin, Czech Republic.

There is also an external evaluator from Portugal.

The project has two clear objectives:

- to form a more socially inclusive society during difficult economic conditions by working with adults from our most deprived areas,
- to help our adult learners to progress to the qualifications they and society need by providing robust guidance frameworks.

The Mentoring programme of the project is developed after the Nightingale mentoring model used by Malmö University for more than 25 years. The model is adapted for adult learners and is based on training the mentors and guidance and monitoring the activities with their mentee.

In the FORMULA project, a survey of 637 adult learners was carried out to determine: a) how they felt about mentoring and b) what kind of support they would expect from a mentor. The results of the survey demonstrated that majority of respondents would like to have a mentor to help them in their decisions on further education (Graphic 1) and they need advice and practical help with course choice (Graphic 2).

A report on the outcomes of the questionnaire is available on the project website: www.formulamentoring.eu, together with a draft Mentor Guide and draft Facilitator’s Handbook.

The project is currently training adult role models, who have previously returned to learning, to become mentors for those who have not yet taken this step. The idea is that these mentors will be role models for others from deprived areas and backgrounds, to encourage them to enhance their opportunities for education and eventual employment. This should result in an uptake in education by this group and an improvement in self-esteem and confidence as they realize that they can develop useful skills and knowledge.

In the Grundtvig “FORMULA” partnership, there was developed a mentoring practice through assessment of a range of theoretical models, and through insights into the social and economic context of work. The target group of the project is about 150 adults. So far there are 103 learners from different fields of work, form cleaning and maintenance to adult education and project manager are involved in the program (as presented in Graphic 1).
They were asked how they prefer/like to learn during the training course. The majority of the learners prefer *face to face meetings with the facilitator*. This engages the facilitators more in preparing their sessions, giving useful information and good examples to the learners and also guidance.

Because of the big number of learners who have expressed the wish to develop certain skills (listening, empathy, asking effective questions, challenging, providing motivation, undertaking activities with their mentees), the facilitators prepared activities for the training course in order to give them the opportunity to exercises these skills. Also the facilitators guide the mentors step-by-step in their activities with their mentees.
The project is organizing 2 trainings for different categories of Mentors:

a) The Facilitators/Trainers – adults with life experience who will be empowered with knowledge and tools in order to deliver the Mentor Training Course and guide small groups of mentors. They will perform training for the mentors and will give support in organising the mentor - mentee meetings.

b) The Mentors - disadvantaged adults who will receive the necessary tools and guidance to become mentors for others. They are the target group of the project. Every partner organisation in the project has different types of learners. These peculiarities are what make the project innovative.

The mentor training and the mentoring educational network developed in “FORMULA” project will be empowering for practitioners to improve mentoring in practice. But, the most important, the “FORMULA” Mentoring program will be an opportunity to increase the social inclusion of different disadvantaged groups, developing possibilities for a new start in their community and career.

All partners received positive feedback from stakeholders about the project materials (manuals, flyers and newsletter) and interest shown in the Mentor Training Course. For FORMARE STUDIA (Romanian partner), the main important result was that 2 stakeholders sent 16 participants to the Mentor Training Course (Technical High School Gheorghe Mârzescu, Iasi, Romania has enrolled 6 of the nonteaching staff and Theoretical High School Garabet Ibraileanu, Iasi, România enrolled 10 nonteaching staff). The management teams of the 2 stakeholders expressed their gratitude for the change that appeared to the attitude of staff during their participation on the program.

The training programme developed in the project will be certified as a European training course with the European Qualification Framework.

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