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**MENTORING
AS AN IN-HOUSE PROGRAM
IN ROMANIAN NON-PROFIT ESTABLISHMENTS
SOME CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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Abstract: Current economic challenges rise for most non-profit establishments worldwide issues related to maintaining product or services quality standards in the context of dwindling resources. This article argues that along with the need to tackle financial constraints, the need to retain and develop personnel with in-house resources is both a challenge and opportunity with a say in the future of any organization. Consequently, the focus of the paper is on briefly outlining the stages need to be undertaken in order to start running an in-house mentoring program. Thus, by listing the positions to be involved in such a program, the instruments needed for every stage of the process, the article identifies some of the most common challenges and opportunities ensuing from initiatives aimed at developing mentoring programs as an in-house service of non-profit establishments.

Key words: human resource development, mentoring, coaching, non-profit establishments

1. MENTORING - COACHING: DEFINITIONS, DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

According to Murray M. (2001), *“Mentoring is a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or more experienced person with a less skilled or less experienced one, with the mutually agreed goal of having the less skilled person grow and develop specific competencies”*. [1]

In Army’s view, mentoring is *“a process used to develop the thinking skills and frames of reference for sequential and progressive leader development”*. [2]

Thus, as the definitions above highlight, mentoring is about setting models as frames of reference in the ongoing process of organizational learning.

The role of mentoring is to address the needs of the newly hired people within an organization, or to identify and support the talented people in moving up the career ladder. In this respect, research [3] highlights that about 35% of the new employees who do not benefit from a mentoring program leave the company within the first year, compared to a ratio of 16% in companies where mentoring programs exist. Inherently, the higher the turnover, the higher is the cost per employee.

As for coaching, this is used as a support tool for appraisals, work planning and performance reviews. In this respect, a coach’s role is to *“work with clients to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness in their lives and careers through focused learning”*. [4]

In terms of the differences between mentoring and coaching [5], these can be summarized as follows.

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First of all, mentoring programs are focused on providing individuals with role models in order to support their personal and professional development as part of organizations. On the other hand, coaching is efficiency and performance oriented. Hence, while with the former feedback is of an informal nature, with the latter feedback is formalized and documented as part of the performance assessment process.

Second, the rewards granted by mentoring and coaching programs are different in nature. The level of trust granted to the mentee by the mentor as learning progress is made is actually the reinforcement tool that contributes to the stability and continuity of the relationship between the two. Improved performance results are the tangible outcome of coaching and they are subject to the formal reward and sanction system of the organization.

Third, given the different focus of the two, the interactions in mentoring relations are more flexible and based on conversation and trust. By contrast, the coaching relationship unfolds in accordance with a pre-established agenda that includes measurable performance goals whose degree of accomplishment is assessed in every meeting of the coacher and the coached person. In this respect it is worth reminding that the mentor-mentee relationship is a matter of “chemistry” and is based on the freedom of choices concerning its continuation or termination. As for the coaching relation, this is established *a priori* and focuses on the professional integration of an employee.

The major similarity between mentoring and coaching is that they are both a “moral investment” into the human capital of an organization. Moreover, they both require people acting as coaches or as mentors to be well trained from a professional point of view, but to also have very good interpersonal skills. Last but not least, they are directed, either directly as in the case of coaching, or indirectly towards maintaining and improving organization performance.

2. MENTORING: AN AS IS ANALYSIS

In terms of the status of mentoring programs abroad, I conducted a research based on open sources available via the Internet and identified three major trends.

The first trend is aligned to Murray’s definition of mentoring provided in the first part of this paper and is represented by companies like IBM, Global Mentoring Solutions, Royal Bank of Scotland, Wise Mentor Capital Mentoring that offer mentoring programs based on the experience they have gained in fields of activity like IT, taxes, labor health and security, work legislation, or making a business case for financing company development and alignment to its strategy. It is obvious that such a trend is characteristic of organizations that have not only learnt from their own experience, but have also developed their capability to provide mentoring programs to companies working in similar fields of activity.

The second trend with mentoring programs can be identified in the education field (e.g. Manchester University, Greenwich University, Canterbury University, etc.), in the case of those companies that aim at integrating new employees (e.g. Sony) or at developing the skills and promoting their most talented personnel, or in companies like Automotive Youth Education System (AYES) that encourage the development of mentoring relationships between their employees and future university graduates that may someday become prospective workforce. In this respect, it is worth underlining the institutionalization of the mentoring relationship and, hence, its acknowledgement as an important one for employees’ career.

The newest and most challenging trend is that of companies offering mentoring services but from the position of a facilitator and not that of a mentor. Partially, this kind of service resembles the one sold by companies that have acknowledged expertise in a particular field. The major difference between this latest trend and the one already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter lies between the types of skills the mentoring relation aims at developing. In the case of companies

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with an impressive portfolio in their field of activity, the mentor is a person who transfers his/her knowledge in a particular field to an apprentice hired by another company that pays for such a service. Companies offering mentoring programs to people who are to act as mentors within their own organizations emphasize that their mentors actually act as facilitators. Such companies offering this type of service are quite few and an example in this respect is *Performance by Design* [6]. However, when looking at the sites of these companies, it becomes obvious that their customers willing to pay for in-house mentoring services are scarce if non-existent. Such a conclusion only underlines that, so far, mentoring seems to be more of an internal and specialization related matter, rather than a discipline of its own that can be mastered just like any other field of activity.

This conclusion is even more prevalent when analyzing the status of mentoring in Romanian private and non-profit establishments.

In terms of the for-profit companies from Romania, the private companies, especially multinational ones emphasize mentoring as described by the second trend identified by this paper. The situation with non-profit organization is more challenging, though. The most prevalent field in Romanian non-profit establishments where mentoring programs seem to exist is the educational field, especially the academic one. From this point of view, the mentoring programs and the mentors are mostly viewed as a liaison between undergraduates/graduates and companies where they have to do their internships. Even though university organization charts available via Internet point out the existence of offices dedicated to this role, the results are hard to assess and would require a nation-wide investigation, which is not the goal of this paper. However, the latest legislative initiatives in the field and the current status of education in Romania indicate that mentoring programs do not actually work as intended and a lot of work must be done.

As for other non-profit organizations the information is quite scarce and, based on word-of-mouth information I believe its scarcity is not the result of information that is not releasable to the public, but the consequence of the inexistence of institutionalized, formalized mentoring programs. As a result, the focus of this paper is on briefly discussing the challenges and opportunities arising from an acknowledged mentoring program that should be in place in every non-profit organization.

3. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES UNDERLYING AN INSTITUTIONALIZED MENTORING PROGRAM

The challenges and opportunities underlying an institutionalized mentoring program can be better identified through the description of the stages and information flow characteristic of any such initiative. Their identification is made indirectly through the description of the prerequisites that have to be met for every stage of the process displayed in the figure below.

STAGE 1: ORGANIZATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Any organizational intervention is based on a thorough and adequate analysis of its mission, strategic goals, needs and opportunities. Consequently, a clear vision of what the future must be like for a non-profit establishment is mandatory and can only be shaped starting from its "AS IS" status. It is only if these prerequisites are met that a mentoring program can be initiated, developed and implemented.

Positions involved:

- Non-profit organization top manager
- Human Resources Management representative or Human Resource Management Development Officer
- Specialists with expertise in mentoring programs

Instrument suggested: PESTEL analysis (**Political Future; Socio Cultural Future; Economic Future; Technological Future; Environmental Future; Legal Future**)

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Results:

- The identification of organizational needs in terms of its personnel personal and professional development based on the conclusions of the PESTEL analysis.
- The establishment of the mentoring program based on the stages described in Figure 1
- The establishment of the schedule for the mentoring program

The initiation of this stage is one of the major challenges for any mentoring program especially in times of economic insecurity when for most people future may seem gloom and without too many opportunities. Therefore, while a difficult stage to initiate; this could also be an important signal at the level of an organization's employees that the establishment takes real interest in their welfare and future.

Another challenge at this stage is raised by the necessity to find the consultants that must set the course for the program. Even though this may come quite costly for the establishment, the long-term benefits will pay off. The alternatives to hiring consultants is to hire a person with a background in human resource management, and more specifically in professional development, or to assign this responsibility to someone in the HR department.

STAGE 2: MENTORS' IDENTIFICATION

This stage requires to run recruitment and selection processes in order to identify the persons willing to be part of the mentoring program. Mentioned should be made that volunteering should be the principle based on which the poll of mentors is created. Therefore, for this stage to be actually implemented and to allow for the process to continue, the package of non-financial rewards must be very well known by all employees. An alternative to this would be resorting to former employees of the establishment who still take an interest in its activities and who may be interested in volunteering to pass on their knowledge to their younger colleagues. Regardless of the solution chosen, the skills and competences that mentors must have should be well formulated so that confusions, misunderstandings or poor results are avoided.

Positions involved:

- HR Department representative
- Consultants (if the decision is made from the very beginning to hire specialized personnel to help build the program)/HRD specialist

Instruments:

- Mentor's profile

STAGE 3: MENTORS' ORIENTATION COURSE

Once the mentors are shortlisted, an orientation course for them is absolutely necessary. This should focus on the following:

- Developing a preliminary work agenda with the prospective mentee.
- Establishing the times when the mentoring activity will be analysed with the HR Officer.
- Improving communication techniques like active listening and giving and receiving feedback.
- Improving time management skills.
- Understanding the role and responsibilities of a mentor.

Positions involved:

- Mentors shortlisted
- Consultants/ HRD specialist

Instruments:

- Mentor's orientation course

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STAGE 4: MENTEES' IDENTIFICATION

The identification of mentees depends on their status within the organization.

For the newly employed personnel, the mentoring program is not an alternative, but a mandatory step for their integration. Therefore, in their case, a careful analysis of their skills and personality is required so that the building of the mentor-mentee relationship should not be hampered by possible misalignments.

For the employees who have been with the organization for more than three years, joining the mentoring program must be a volunteer act. Moreover, it is only those who are viewed as the most promising members of the organization that should be part of such a program, especially if they are to be promoted in managing positions.

Positions involved:

- Consultants/ HRD specialist
- HR Department representative
- Mentee's manager

Instruments:

- Mentee's profile
- Mentee's professional development needs evaluation

STAGE 5: ANALYSIS OF MENTEES' PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This stage involves the establishment of the competences a mentee needs for his personal and professional development in the organization in accordance with the latter's needs, the mentee's personal and professional development plan, as well as the activities required to undertake the plan and their deadlines for completing.

Positions involved:

- Consultants/ HRD specialist
- HR Department representative
- Mentor

Instruments:

- Mentee's profile
- Mentee's professional development needs evaluation

STAGE 6: MENTEES' ORIENTATION COURSE

The mentees' orientation course must be focus on issues like: career planning techniques, active listening, giving and receiving feedback, etc.

Positions involved:

- Consultants/ HRD specialist
- Mentees

Instruments:

Mentees' orientation course

STAGE 7: MENTOR-MENTEE COMPATIBILITY ASSESSMENT

The mentor-mentee compatibility assessment is made by taking into account the choices and plans of the mentee, the assessment done by his/her manager, as well the results of the personality test taken upon employment.

Positions involved:

- Consultants/ HRD specialist

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- Company's/Contracting psychologist
- Instruments:**
- Myers-Briggs personality test
- Mentee's profile
- Mentees' personal and professional development plan

STAGE 8: MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP NEGOTIATION

A long-term fruitful relationship between a mentor and mentee must start from its clear negotiation. Therefore, the aim of this stage is to allow the two establish jointly the professional development plan and the steps to be taken for the next twelve months in order to put it into practice.

Positions involved:

- Consultants/ HRD specialist
- HR Department representative
- Mentee's manager
- Mentor
- Mentee

Instruments:

- Mentor-mentee written agreement

STAGE 9: MENTEES' PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Mentees' personal and professional development plan implementation will be done as agreed in stage 8.

Positions involved:

- Mentor
- Mentee

STAGE 10: MENTOR-MENTEE REGULAR MEETINGS

The regular meetings between mentor and mentee will take place in accordance with the agreement signed in stage 8. The conclusions of the meetings will be drawn by the mentor and forwarded in a report to the mentee's manager, as well as to the consultants/ HRD specialist.

Positions involved:

- Consultants/ HRD specialist
- Mentee's manager
- Mentor
- Mentee

Instrument:

- Report on meeting's conclusions

STAGE 11: MENTOR-MENTEE JOB ROTATION

One month before the mentoring program is over, the mentee will take over the job responsibilities of the mentor.

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STAGE 12: MENTEE'S PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

At the end of the job rotation period, the mentee's performance will be assessed based on the performance criteria established by the mentor, the HR department representative and by the mentoring program's manager.

Positions involved:

- HR department representative
- Mentor
- mentoring program's manager

Instrument

Performance evaluation criteria

4. CONCLUSIONS

When comparing the definitions of mentoring and its benefits with the stages that need to be followed in a formal mentoring program it becomes obvious that there are inherent difficulties. One of the most important is that of answering in unequivocal terms to the question: "Why do we need after all a mentoring program?". When an organization has a clear vision of its future and makes sure that its human capital is at the core of fulfilling it, then the answer to the above question goes beyond the mere adoption of fashionable arguments.

Mentoring should be a state of mind. But for it to become so, it first needs to be formalized if not at the level of organizational documents, then at the level of the collective behavior of people. For this to actually happen, it is obvious that the culture of the organization should be one focused on learning and continuous feedback.

Last but not the least, mentoring is commitment and for it to work commitment of top management is mandatory. Thus, it is only when the role models can be found at this level that formal initiatives can actually become a state of mind and a collective way of behaving.

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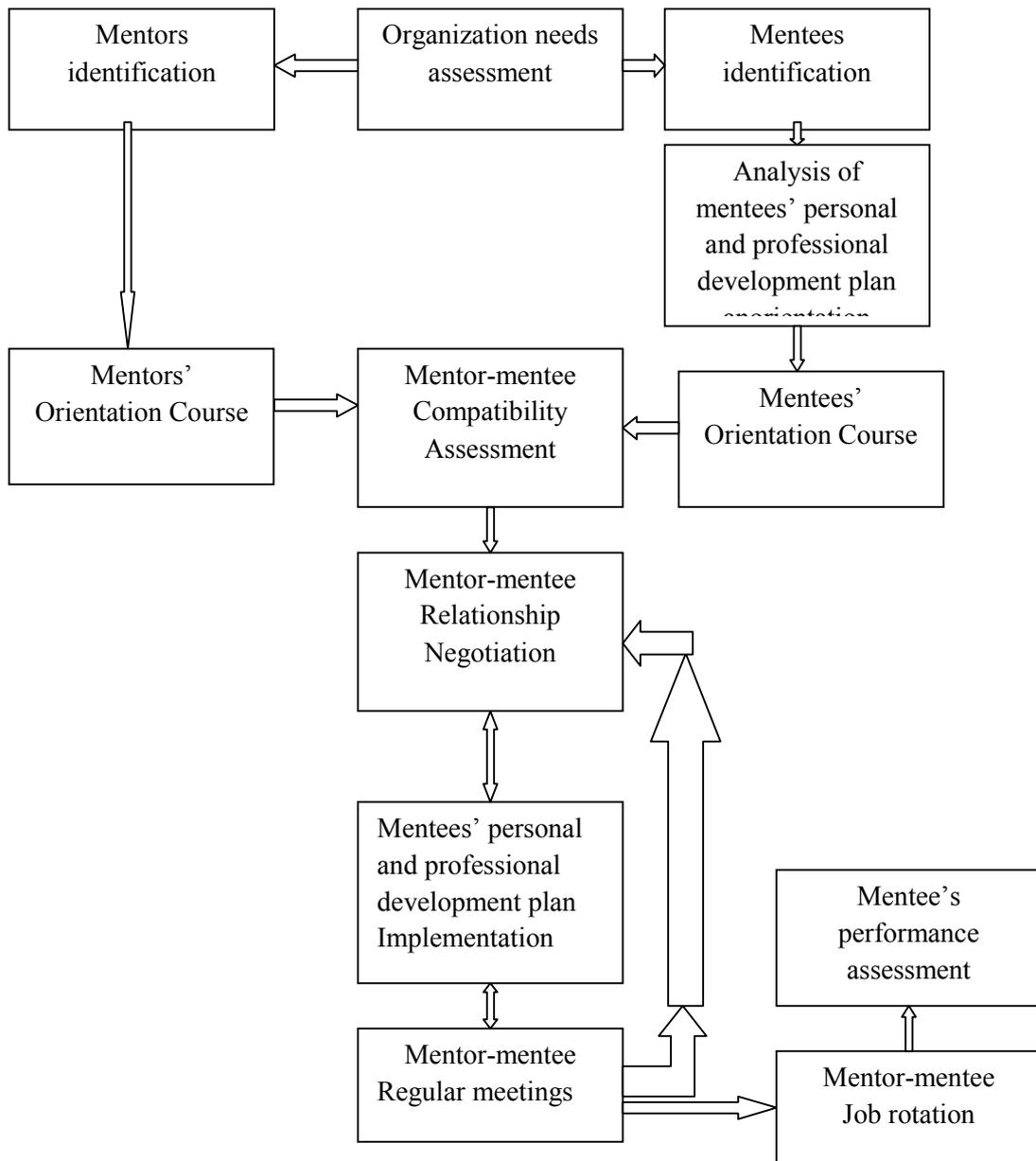


Figure 1: Mentoring program stages

Adapted based on the process described by
 Tammy D. Allen, Lisa M. Finkelstein, Mark L. Poteet (2009) *Designing Workplace
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