

Mentoring: effective methods and styles

Introduction

Mentoring is an increasingly popular concept of learning, development and support. Over the last 20, its use has grown significantly and is continuing to develop within a wide range of settings. In fact 87% of businesses in the US utilized mentoring according to a SHRM Survey (1999), (Klasen and Clutterbuck 2002). Apparently, this trend is consistent throughout other parts of the world.

“In the UK the pace of growth of mentoring increased from the mid- to late 1980s and continued to increase through the 1990s.” (Clutterbuck, 2001, p9)

So what is this phenomenon, mentoring? In this article, I will analyze and explore mentoring, highlighting the issues relating to definitions of mentoring, the types of mentoring and application, the process of mentoring and the skills needed to be an effective mentor.

Defintions

Mentoring is a developmental process, which can occur both naturally and officially to allow an individual to share their experience, knowledge and skills with another individual in order to benefit the latter’s personal and/or professional development. Over the years, academics, authors and practitioners have defined mentoring in many ways, often reflecting the different types and application of mentoring, confusing the issue regarding what mentoring is as a generic model or process.

“Mentoring is one of the best methods to enhance individuals’ learning and development in all walks of life” (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002, p1)

“There is considerable confusion over what mentoring is and is not.”
(Clutterbuck, 2001, p2)

Mentoring is very broad and complex, a learning and development process that is difficult to define. It has been likened, over the years, with many arts such as coaching, consulting, advising and teaching. However it becomes clear, when analyzing these comparisons further, that mentoring does not represent only one of these arts but actually involves using all of them including other learning and developmental techniques. The arts and skills mentioned above are exercised to various extents at different points in the mentoring process to meet certain objectives. Two very good quotes, which support this, include: -

Many people confuse mentoring with related concepts such as coaching

and consulting, and there are significant variations in the practical guidelines on how to 'do' mentoring properly. (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002, p6)

Mentoring is unique in its place as a method of supporting people in learning and career development in that it does not exclude other methods, but exists alongside them, complementing them and adding value. (Lewis, 2000, p ix)

One of the main reasons behind the confusion or difficulty in defining mentoring is that there are two basic schools of thought on mentoring and how it is best applied. One is of the belief that mentoring should be structured or developmental i.e. a formal, facilitated process that can be managed and monitored. The other, is of the view that mentoring can only occur naturally or when it is just left to happen i.e. an informal process which involves individual choice like sponsoring.

These two differing schools of thought regarding mentoring and its purpose can be portrayed as the American and the European methods or sponsoring (informal) and developmental (formal). (Clutterbuck 2001)

The informal model or 'view', more associated with the roots of mentoring, emphasizes the need of a more senior, experienced and wiser person, 'the mentor', to pass down their skills, knowledge and experience to a younger, 'passive' individual appropriately named as a protégé rather than a mentee. The relationship between mentor and protégé is naturally developed often by choice of how and whom the mentor wishes to take under their wing. The pace of the relationship is controlled by the mentor and consists of a more authoritarian and influential approach.

A direct example could be taken from the Craft Guilds model from the middle Ages whereby the master craftsman, a master of his trade, would take up a young boy as his apprentice and then nurture and mould this younger individual to become like himself. This was an ideal method to bring about continuity within a trade or family business. (Murray, 2001)

In direct contrast, the view of applying a formal model of mentoring has grown over recent decades (particularly in Europe) and has been employed by organizations and large firms to develop their employees, clients and beneficiaries. Formal mentoring encourages the development and learning of less experienced/developed individuals with a view to enable them to become more independent and self-reliant, rather than being solely dependant on their mentor, to maximize their potential. It is a process designed to empower the mentee; the pace and agenda of the relationship is dictated by the mentee rather than the mentor. (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002)

As formal mentoring is more common in its application in the UK and because it has more relevance to the mentoring schemes I am involved in at work and within my community, I have decided to use this formal model

as my ideal choice of defining mentoring.

Two good definitions of formal or facilitated mentoring are:

“ 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.”

(Murray, 2001, p xiii)

“Off-line help from one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking” (Megginson and Clutterbuck in Clutterbuck, 2004, p12)

Types of Mentoring

The use of mentoring has proved invaluable in assisting career development in the ever-changing world of work. The increase in competitiveness in all fields of work and business, the need for organizations and their employees to develop continuously to meet growing demands whilst maintaining high standards and the need to employ cost-effective methods in ensuring that these objectives are met are all key contributing factors leading to organizations implementing some form of mentoring.

“Every company needs some form of career development program to produce a succession of motivated, upward moving employees.”

(Clutterbuck, 2004, p30)

Career related mentoring could be implemented by organizations and businesses in various ways to meet a range of objectives. Mentoring can be adopted to help develop a newly recruited employee (the mentee) by assigning a more experienced employee (the mentor) to share his/her skills, knowledge and experience. Mentoring is also utilized to help senior employees or supervisors make the step up to management level and similarly, to support effective management development by assisting the promotion process of line managers to senior management or executive level. Ideally then, pairing a manager (mentor) with a supervisor (mentee) and an executive/ senior manager (mentor) with a manager (mentee) would help this promotional strategy in the form of mentoring work most effectively.

“A mentor is a couple of steps down the path you wish to travel and is close enough to say, ‘I was where you are now...you can be where I am now.’”

(Forbes, Oldham College, NMN Annual Conference, 2000)

Facilitated mentoring is a significant tool that any organization can use to bring about the growth and development of all its employees and to improve productivity and the quality of service whilst reducing costs. Indeed, one of the major benefits of facilitated mentoring is that it is a cost effective device. (Murray, 2001)

“Another significant impetus behind mentoring is the cost – not in cash

terms- but in saving on expensive off-site courses which take employees away from productive activity for weeks on end.” (Clutterbuck, 2004, p31) A major benefit of implementing career related mentoring schemes over other development methods in the work environment, is that they have a greater affect across the organization. Facilitated career mentoring schemes are an interactive and ongoing feedback process where results can be monitored and measured against targets and goals, thus benefiting the development of mentees, mentors and the organization as a whole. Traditional career development methods such as training courses and technical/skills coaching are limited tools, as they tend to be a one-way development process affecting only those individuals targeted, where the benefits cannot always be measured as effectively.

Mentoring would be much less attractive and widespread if it were simply a one-dimensional activity from the mentor to the learner. All of the research and information that we have demonstrates quite strongly that all concerned gain from the relationship. (Lewis, 2000, p10)

“An organization might train Mrs Jones as a mentor to someone from another department, but she may well be a different and better manager to her own staff as a result.” (Lewis, 2000, p13)

Organizations are now applying methods to improve the standard of staff recruited by implementing schemes geared towards meeting the demands of University Graduates seeking employment – those whose studies relate to the field of work – in helping them make the transition from education into the work environment.

Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002, p37) agree that,

“More and more talented employees are interested in whether or not an organization offers mentoring” and they also state *“some City of London companies suggest that MBA students are reluctant to join an organization that does not have a mentoring scheme.*

Although the use of mentoring has historically been associated with career development i.e. helping to nurture a raw apprentice into becoming the master or helping a supervisor make the step up to become a manager, its increasing development within a formal and facilitated process has enabled its use to expand, during recent times, beyond the world of work and business.

The application of mentoring has not only increased within work but also in education and the community for the development of individuals in both a personal and professional capacity and it is one of the best methods of improving individuals’ learning and development in all walks of life. (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002)

For example, mentoring is now used in Universities, schools and other educational settings to help students raise their aspiration and achievement levels, personal and social skills and to improve levels of self

confidence. Most mentoring processes' used within educational settings involve a student to student type system known as 'peer mentoring' or in some cases 'buddying' whereby older or more experienced students support younger or less experienced students. The support is offered in various ways including helping them with their study skills, overcome bullying issues and to help them settle in and adapt to a new education environment in general.

Many kinds of mentoring processes are implemented in a variety of organizations and institutions to meet particular needs. A pairing of peers or a "buddy" arrangement at school or college for mutual support for example, serves a useful enough purpose. (Murray, 2001)

Mentoring in the community is also an effective tool and is on the increase, particularly over the last decade. A variety of mentoring schemes are implemented in the UK to tackle issues relating to society and social welfare and to provide support for a diverse range of individuals and groups who may be at risk of exclusion from society.

"In recent years mentoring has also spread beyond the world of careers and work to embrace a wide spectrum of community needs." (Clutterbuck, 2001, p2)

"Mentoring has become a central ingredient of almost of every UK policy initiative for social inclusion since the Labor Party was elected in 1997. (Colley, 2003, p2)

The support offered in these various 'community based' programs is designed to have a positive affect, sometimes on all of its participants (both mentor and mentee), and include support for individuals at risk of social exclusion, young people at risk of disaffection, for individuals needing emotional support (those suffering from domestic problems, facing rehabilitation (drugs/alcohol) or past/present offenders), and for the unemployed. A good example of community based mentoring is given below: -

"Birmingham's Beat scheme, which addresses the special needs of young people leaving prison, placed most of its youngsters into work and kept them out of court. In addition some of the mentors were long-term unemployed people who gained so much self-confidence helping the young offenders into employment that they, too, returned to full-time work." (Clutterbuck, 2001, p12)

The Mentoring Process (Mentoring Relationships)

Mentoring relationships differ in many ways, from how they are organized and delivered to how they are developed over time. Mentors and mentees, as humans, will vary in personality and character types and this will reflect in how they communicate and work with others. Similarly organizations work in different ways, adopt different cultures and have different ethics.

Clearly, every mentoring relationship is unique, just as every individual is unique. (Clutterbuck, 2004, p117)

These different attributes, characteristics and values possessed by mentors, mentees and organizations alike will affect how a mentoring relationship will be implemented and developed and will ultimately determine how successful the relationship proves to be. Thus, organizations implementing facilitated mentoring schemes should ensure that all participants are well trained and briefed and matched appropriately before they enter a mentoring relationship to ensure the relationship is successful in reaching its goals.

To minimise the problems and maximize the benefits of mentoring both the mentor and mentee must be well briefed on how the relationship may develop. (Clutterbuck, 2004, p117)

There is no one, specific method of mentoring and relationships can be developed in various ways. Some methods, styles and systematic processes have been highlighted as generic guidelines, common amongst most programmes, for how mentoring relationships should be formed and developed in facilitated scheme. Mentors can then adopt these guidelines in various ways, to suit their own styles and ways of working. (Klasen and Clutterbuck 2001)

The following guidelines are provided for a model of formal mentoring based on one by Parsloe and Wray (2000) in Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002) and it is clear that the mentoring process consists of four stages/phases: -

1. Establish learning needs and set up a Personal Development Plan
2. Start the learning process by enabling the mentee to become an independent learner
3. Evaluate the success of the relationship
4. Mentor facilitates the achievement of learning objectives

Model of Business Mentoring - Klasen and Clutterbuck (2002, p170)

The four-stage/ phase process highlighted in the above model indicates that the first stage involves identifying the development needs and objectives of the mentee upon which a Personal Development Plan (PDP) can be drawn up. It is in this initial phase (particularly during the first meeting) that mentor and mentee will get to know each other and establish an understanding of how they will work together, if they can at all! This getting to know each other is known as 'building rapport.

"The initiation phase seems to have two components – rapport-building and direction setting" (Clutterbuck, 2004, 110)

The mentor and mentee are likely to be lacking in confidence during their first meeting. They should attempt to break the ice informally to get comfortable with each other and create a rapport. (Lewis, 2000)

The first meeting offers the opportunity for mentor and mentee to gain

each other's trust and credibility and to share their feelings and expectations on what they wish to achieve from the relationship (particularly the mentee).

"Being clear about the purpose of mentoring, expectations and responsibilities is important in order to eradicate any discrepancies and thereby to prevent disappointments." (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002, p172)

The second stage/phase suggests the mentee is to be encouraged to carry out the actions in the PDP independently and so become self-reliant.

The following few meetings should begin to focus more on trying to further identify the development and learning needs of the mentee and how these can be achieved hence building on the action plan drawn up in the first meeting, developing it along the way in order to establish a more accurate and realistic Personal Development Plan for the mentee.

Meetings can be planned in advance over a period of time to suit each other's availability and comfort. A timetable of meetings is also useful to help them work towards deadlines and targets.

"It is very likely that a PDP will have been developed by the end of the second, third or, at latest, fourth meeting. The plan details the needs of the mentee, the objectives, the agreed means for achieving these and the envisaged timescales." (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002, p177)

The third stage/phase shows that the mentor should help the mentee carry out the actions by guiding them and by offering suggestions (using examples and sharing past experiences).

The following meetings (could be as many as required) should concentrate on implementing the actions set out in the action plan. The mentor should help the mentee do this by offering advice and guidance and by identifying options and possibilities the mentee may have.

The relationship will dissolve as more and more goals are achieved and when the mentee has reached a stage where they can identify and find solutions to their own problems and draw up plans of action towards meeting further objectives independently. It is at this stage the relationship will wind down and may begin to take up a new face rather like a friendship (depending on how each other feel).

The final stage/phase indicates that an evaluation of the relationship and process should be carried out.

Mentor and mentee should at this stage critically analyze their relationship and how it has developed, identifying the goals that have been achieved and those that haven't. They should reflect on the process, identifying areas where they could have done better.

Organizations should monitor the progress of relationships, as they develop, to maintain a smooth and effective process and to identify and deal with potential problems/ difficulties at an early stage. They should also evaluate the mentoring process at the end of each relationship to identify

areas of weakness and strengths within the process in order to develop and improve the process.

“The company, too, needs to monitor the stages of development to provide the external support that will head off serious problems before they occur.” (Clutterbuck, 2004, p117)

“This step takes you back to the gaps that the mentoring process was designed to fill, and the goals set for it. Both formative and summative evaluation data are useful for process improvement and reporting results.” (Murray, 2001, p80)

These guidelines provide a framework and boundaries for a facilitated mentoring process within which relationships can be formalized. They provide direction and some flexibility for organizations and participants to implement a successful process according to their own working/learning styles and techniques.

Skills of an Effective Mentor

Mentors come from all walks of life, from various groups, cultures and backgrounds and from a wide range of age groups. The type of individuals who become mentors or are selected and trained to mentor will vary, as the different skills, experience and character traits individuals possess will determine what type of mentoring process they are suitable for or feel comfortable participating in.

“The qualities that are relevant for mentors and mentees in a program aimed to help at-risk teenagers are not the same as those for people engaged in a mentoring programme aimed at people undertaking their first general manager job overseas”. (Clutterbuck, 2004, p47)

All successful business people, managers or professionals do not necessarily make effective mentors; certain individuals are more effective in the role of developing others. Whether or not an individual is suited to the role of a mentor may depend on his or her own stage of development and experience. For example, a fairly successful individual may have had a specific, or limited, background and may not have enough general experience to offer.

It is not just related experience and developmental skills that are important attributes of a mentor but other skills and attributes are necessary, including, active listening skills, good interpersonal/ communication skill (both verbal and non verbal), organizational skills and being non-judgmental. These skills enable mentors to be adaptable when working with people with different styles of working and learning.

“Good mentors will generally need a strong sense of situation and a high degree of adaptability between styles.” (Clutterbuck, 2004, p51)

Effective mentors must be interested and willing to help others; moreover, if they have had positive experiences with a mentor, in the past, then they tend to make good mentors themselves. (Mentoring and Befriending

Foundation, http://mandbf.org.uk/how_to_get_involved/370, 23/11/2006)

Conclusion

The rapid growth of mentoring within the UK has seen its use develop across all fields of work, education and society in general. It is a key component used by all kinds of individuals and organizations to bring about learning and development and is flexible enough to be adapted to meet the demands of almost any situation requiring a learning and developmental process/tool.

Mentoring Programs can be modeled to fit the specific – and constantly changing – needs of individual, organizations, employees, students, communities and educational establishments. (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002)

The information I have gathered through the various research I have undertaken for this assignment, indicates that (facilitated) mentoring is a power free, two-way mutually beneficial learning situation where the mentor provides advice, shares knowledge and experiences, and teaches using a low pressure, self-discovery approach.

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