

Thinking Space Paper No.26

Setting up a mentoring programme

Dunja Buchhaupt, June 2020

Setting up a sustainable mentoring programme can sound challenging in the beginning and it might not often be intuitive knowing where to start - but do not worry, we've got your back! This paper contains simple tips and recommendations to successfully develop a mentoring programme, and it will guide you through seven essential components for building a strong and sustainable mentoring programme. Are you ready to get started? Let's do this!

1. Goals – Define how your mentoring programme will move the needle!

Before you delegate responsibilities, work on marketing material, or even start a mentoring relationship, every programme should define the main programme goals (ideally, these goals will include quantitative and qualitative components). It is important to define these goals while thinking of the target group's needs (e.g., unemployed people, migrants, entrepreneurs, women), key performance indicators to measure success (e.g., number of matches, number of mentees) and the programme's intended impact on society (e.g., creation of new jobs, establishment of new businesses, increase in people obtaining degrees). A good programme goal could, for example, be: *"In the next 12 months, we expect to match 24 unemployed young people between the age of 18-25 from the Offenbach with a mentor to help them prepare for finding a job."*

2. Mentoring Manager – There can only be one mentoring manager, and you must set them up for success!

Most successful mentoring programmes have one thing in common: A dedicated and sparkling mentoring manager with good soft skills, such as communication, patience, and empathy, to manage and lead the mentoring programme. Good organization and structure are paramount to the success of the programme. Because of this, it is of vital importance to find such a person. With the right person onboard, most of the work will come easy. The mentoring manager should be the main point of contact for mentors, mentees, and stakeholders in case any questions about the program arise. It is important to provide the mentoring manager with a sufficient number of working hours (depending on the size of the programme) in which he/she can be fully dedicated to work towards the growth and success of the programme.

3. Acquisition – Do not put all your eggs in one basket!

Successful mentoring programmes typically acquire three times more mentors than mentees. It might sound counterintuitive, but there is a good reason for this! This ratio is an important benchmark because it provides flexibility to the mentoring manager to choose the best fit for a mentee among different mentor options. To guarantee a great experience for both, the mentor and the mentee, the matching process should consider their skills, interests and goals. It's worth mentioning that having the same number of mentors and mentees does not necessarily lead to bad experiences but creating a strong bond between both might not come as natural.

Additionally, it's vital for mentoring programmes to identify strategic partners. This helps creating a mentor avatar to role-model the skills that mentors need to have in order to work with the target group. Once this is clear, it's important to start thinking where a mentor with these characteristics can be found (e.g. a mentor that should have entrepreneurial background and good communication skills could be easily found in entrepreneur networking events or start-ups).

The meaning of *not putting all your eggs in one basket* can be summarized in one-word: diversifying: Find different organisations, businesses and websites to help you acquire mentors and mentees. This will not only guarantee that you'll have a bigger pool to fetch the best talent from, but it will also help you not depend on one stakeholder, which in the end adds a risk factor to the programme. The diversity of working with partners from different organisations will not only benefit the mentees, but it will make the whole experience more enjoyable. Make sure to include your mentors and mentees through the whole process and involve them in events. A vivid network is a working network!

4. Training – Prepare your mentors and mentees!

There is one golden rule: Only those who attend a mentoring training are allowed to start a mentoring relationship. It is that simple but also that strict. Mentor and mentee trainings are facilitated by the mentoring manager and focus on three main goals: 1) To get to know the attendees and include them into the network 2) to explain them what mentoring means and what the programme expects from them and 3) to teach them important soft and hard-skills. Make sure that the training starts with an icebreaker and gets everyone involved (e.g. introductions, mentoring jenga, sufficient breaks). After the training, the group should have a shared understanding of mentoring and can agree on whether or not to participate in this programme afterwards.

5. Matching – Follow your gut!

There is always a big discussion around intuitive vs. fact-based matchmakings. A mentoring manager knows both mentors and mentees from emails, phone calls, the trainings and sometimes even other programmes or events. The mentoring manager often has a good feeling about who might work well together and who would not. It is very important to take soft-skills such as hobbies or common interests into account. There is nothing more unifying than talking about your favourite sport or pets. However, it is also very important to consider facts such as residence (proximity is a very important factor for regular meetings) or the working background. At the end, a good match is a mixture of all these components. Considering all information at hand always provides the mentoring manager with a gut feeling that he/she should follow.

6. Monitoring – Trust is good, control is better!

That's why all mentoring managers must follow up with their mentoring relationship on a constant basis. The purpose of monitoring is not to evaluate the work of a mentor or to supervise a mentee. It is more about making sure that both feel valued in the relationship and that personal and professional growth is happening. Monitoring is also a powerful tool for the mentoring manager to offer advice.

7. Closure– Grab your mentee and throw that appreciation!

A little party never killed nobody: The mentoring manager should also keep an eye on a good closure of a mentoring relationship. Some programmes give mentoring awards to their mentors after having finished a relationship. This is a nice way of saying "Thank you". However, it is also important to talk to the mentee about his/ her way of saying thank you to the mentor. This is not about fancy dinner invitations but small gestures that make the mentor know that his/her invested personal time, support and advice have been appreciated!