



WHITE PAPER

Critical success factors for designing mentoring programmes

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Introduction

Successful mentoring programmes that live up to the expectations of management, stakeholders and participants must satisfy a number of critical success factors:

- Clear purpose
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Clear communication to all stakeholders
- Adequate preparation and training of mentors and mentees
- Adequate support and supervision

The following presents these critical success factors, explains what they entail and describes the potential negative effect of sidestepping these areas when designing your mentoring programme.

Clear purpose

– linked to the business agenda and strategic intent, and communicated to all stakeholders



A clear purpose describing why your mentoring programme exists and what it aims to achieve is critical for making decisions when designing the mentoring programme. As Lewis Carroll once said: *“If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there”*.

However, for many different reasons and with good intentions, purpose statements are often very broad and trying to encompass maybe too many agendas at the same time. This will make it difficult for the programme managers to do a good job, for the mentors and mentees to understand what is expected of them and for the organisation at large to understand how they may benefit from the mentoring programme.

The purpose of your mentoring programme will be founded in the beliefs and value system of your organisation and – hopefully – in your strategic business needs. It may not be directly measurable, but the purpose shows the direction for what you wish to achieve through the mentoring programme and at the same time reflects what you wish to achieve for the organisation and the business.

A clear purpose will help to:

- Position the mentoring programme in the organisation and clearly communicate the importance of the programme in relation to daily work, business challenges and long-term strategy.
- Describe clear criteria for who to select as mentors and mentees and which stakeholders to involve in the selection process.
- Clarify what is important and how to prioritise when participants and their direct managers are balancing time and resources.
- Integrate the participants' learning goals with their individual development plans and align these with their direct managers.
- Evaluate the performance and results of the mentoring programme.
- Ensure the commitment and support of top management.

If the purpose of the mentoring programme is not clear and clearly communicated, you may encounter any or all of the following issues:

- It will be difficult to gain support from stakeholders – who may even work against the programme.
- It will be difficult to achieve adequate resources – from these stakeholders – to achieve relevant results.
- Participants will be unclear about why they are in the programme, what they can gain and may lose motivation and focus.
- The mix of mentees may be too heterogeneous or expectations too diverse for the group to build a strong, cohesive network of participants – and the same may apply to the mix of mentors.
- It will be difficult to measure and document the value and success of the programme.
- Without the commitment and continuous visible support of top management (or highly placed sponsors) the programme will not receive the needed attention from participants or support from stakeholders.

Depending on the corporate culture, the leadership skills and values, the skills and motivation of the mentors and mentees, and the capacity and resources of HR these difficulties may have a larger or smaller impact on your mentoring programme.

Clear roles and responsibilities

The direct stakeholders in most mentoring programmes are:

- Mentees
- Mentors
- Mentees' direct managers
- Mentors' direct managers
- Top management
- HR
- The programme manager



To ensure that these stakeholders all support the programme in the best possible way, they must all understand their roles and responsibilities in the programme. This includes:

- Mentees and mentors – what is expected of them regarding participation in training and learning events, number of meetings in their mentor/mentee pairs, and a general code of conduct within the programme.
- Mentees' direct managers – what is expected of them regarding exploring and aligning individual learning goals with the mentees in the mentoring programme and concerning supporting mentees during the programme as well as giving feedback on mentees' learning and progress.
- Mentors' direct managers – the above may also be relevant for mentors' direct managers.
- Top management – what is expected of them regarding showing their support, communicating their support and being good role models in relation to the programme purpose.
- HR – what is expected of the HR community in general in order to support the participants and their direct managers from their part of the organisation and to support the programme management.
- The programme manager – their actual tasks within the programme should be clear and regarding all stakeholders.

If these roles and responsibilities are not clearly communicated and accepted, you may encounter any or all of the following issues:

- Participants will be uncertain of their individual role and their partner's role, which may become a barrier to a productive mentor/mentee relationship.
- When mentors and mentees do not participate in the training and learning events, they are not equally well prepared for their roles, resulting in different levels of understanding and skills, which may also hinder a productive relationship.
- Fewer meetings in the mentor/mentee pairs may result in a number of disjointed meetings and less learning – i.e. no continuous learning process.
- Direct managers may take no interest in the mentoring programme – because they feel too cautious about interfering with a confidential learning process, and do not understand how to do this.
- Participants feel “alone” and do not know where to go for support or answers to their questions – and this may apply to all stakeholders.

Clear roles and responsibilities avoid confusion and help participants' and stakeholders' to use the resources efficiently.

You may also need to identify and handle other potential stakeholders to ensure the success of your mentoring programme.

Clear communication to all stakeholders

Clear and continuous communication to all stakeholders is important to:

- Ensure full support for the mentoring programme in the organisation
- Motivate potential mentees and mentors to participate
- Align expectations for what the mentoring programme can and cannot achieve and for whom
- Avoid misinterpretations and negative feelings about the mentoring programme



The communication should include the following as a minimum:

- Why the mentoring approach has been chosen – the expected benefits for the organisation and the business in the short and long term.
- The specific purpose of the mentoring programme and how this links to other organisational priorities and initiatives.
- The target groups for the mentoring programmes – clear criteria for who can/will/should be mentees and mentors in this specific programme.
- The potential benefits and learning outcomes for both mentees and mentors.
- How mentees and mentors will be nominated/chosen/invited to join the programme.
- The role of direct managers and the HR community.
- The mentoring programme framework, i.e. timing and activities and the expected time investment from both mentees and mentors.
- Information on how the success of the programme will be evaluated and measured.

To prepare a communication plan, the first step for the programme manager will be to complete a stakeholder analysis to gain an understanding of the position of the stakeholders. Then the programme manager can plan how to communicate the information and whether communication is enough or whether

training is also needed to achieve the right level of understanding and support for the mentoring programme.

Adequate preparation and training

- of mentors and mentees, HR and other stakeholders

Preparation and training of mentors and mentees ensure a solid, mutual foundation for establishing a productive learning collaboration and close, safe relationship. Preparation and training – and continuous learning events during the mentoring programme – will help to:

- Clarify mutual expectations and build strong relationships.
- Provide guidelines for how to collaborate and ensure learning.
- Identify mutual learning opportunities – focusing on mentee and mentor learning.
- Ensure a connected learning process where each mentor/mentee meeting builds on the previous meeting and provides a focus for the next meeting.
- Provide mentors and mentees with the same set of tools to make mentoring easier, ensure progress and increase the learning outcomes.
- Share and learn from each other – also among the mentees, as well as among the mentors separately.



If contents and level of preparation and training do not fit the programme purpose and the needs of the mentors and mentees, you may encounter any or all of the following issues:

- Mentors are uncertain of how to act as mentors and fall back on their preferred collaboration/leadership style with the risk of limiting the learning for the mentees as well as for themselves.
- Mentees are uncertain of which type of help mentors can and should give – making it less comfortable for mentees to voice their expectations and any dissatisfaction.
- Many different approaches to what mentoring is and what mentors are supposed to do, resulting in very diverse experiences for the mentees and the risk of less outcome for the participants as well as for the organisation.
- Missed learning opportunities – mentor/mentee pairs are only scratching the surface in their learning collaboration.

However, other stakeholders may also need preparation and/or training to be adequately prepared for – and motivated for – their role in the mentoring programme. This can mean transferring knowledge as well as training skills and providing these stakeholders with new tools for their roles.

The direct managers, especially of mentees, have a very important role regarding supporting a mentee's learning process, giving feedback and providing stretch opportunities for experimenting and practising new skills.

The HR community must be ready to support the mentoring programme and the participants from their part of the organisation.

This requires the following knowledge and skills:

- Understanding the purpose and business background for implementing the mentoring programme – the short-term and long-term perspective
- Understanding how mentoring links with other organisational priorities and initiatives incl. performance management and individual development plans
- Understanding the mentoring approach chosen by the organisation
- Coaching and feedback skills for supporting the participants.

In addition, the HR community needs the following knowledge and skills:

- Knowledge and understanding of the key tools for implementing the mentoring programme
- Insight into the learning process of mentoring and the dynamics of the mentoring relationship
- Supervision skills for supporting the participants
- Stakeholder management and understanding of organisational politics.

Ensuring that direct managers and the HR community are adequately prepared and competent for their roles increases the organisational benefits of mentoring in the form of:

- Integrating the mentee's learning into daily work and retaining a focus on learning topics that are also beneficial for the organisation
- Supporting mentees in achieving their learning and their career goals while retaining them in the organisation

Adequate support and supervision

The purpose of support and supervision is to keep the mentoring process on track, handle issues that may pop up and support achievement of results for participants as well as for the organisation. Continuous support and supervision show the participants that the mentoring programme is an important development activity, and that the organisation is genuinely interested in supporting their learning process, helping the participants to grow and learn. Support and supervision activities include:



- Monitoring the progress of the pairs and their perception of their collaboration, relationship and learning – ensuring the mentor/mentee match is working.
- Tracking participation in learning events, observing the participants at the learning events and contacting individual mentors or mentees when required.
- Tracking the number of meetings in each pair and stepping in when needed.
- Evaluation at specific points in the programme with questionnaires and inviting individuals to comment on their experiences and learning processes.
- Individual support for and coaching of mentors and mentees when necessary to help participants to benefit more from the programme.
- Providing participants with opportunities for group/peer supervision – both for mentors and for mentees – to share and learn from each other and give each other feedback.
- Providing participants with tools for giving each other feedback and evaluating their collaboration.

If support and supervision is lacking, you may experience any or all of the following issues:

- Problems or conflicts within a mentor/mentee pair that could have been avoided remain hidden – with implications that are not evident until the end of the programme.
- Mentor/mentee pairs may lose focus and drift apart when no one shows an interest in their progress.
- Confidentiality and trust issues may become barriers for opening up for mentee's real topics.
- Mentors may have trouble knowing when their pre-existing knowledge of the organisation and organisational politics is useful or counterproductive.
- Mentors may need to discuss how to separate their own values, ambitions and career needs from those of their mentees – to avoid mentors transferring their own ambitions onto the mentees.

Inskip and Proctor (2001) defines support and supervision as focused on these three areas:

Formative – helping mentors and mentees to learn how to be good mentors and mentees.

Normative – providing boundaries for what mentoring is and is not and setting ground rules for confidentiality and roles.

Restorative – providing a safe place for mentors and mentees, separately, to unload, share uncertainties, build self-confidence and understand that they are not alone.

When these three areas are integrated into the role and responsibilities of the programme management team and into the design of the mentoring programme, you will have a solid foundation for ensuring a successful outcome of the programme.

How can KMP+ House of Mentoring Help?

Partnering with KMP+ House of Mentoring for designing and implementing your mentoring programmes will give you access to knowledge, experience and tools to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of mentoring in your organisation.



INCREASE THE IMPACT

With the methodology, e-learning and online toolboxes from KMP+ House of Mentoring to guide the design and delivery of your mentoring programmes.

ENGAGE THE LEARNERS – MENTEES AND MENTORS

With e-learning, online toolboxes and training events that are interactive, provides networking and reflection and is built on action-learning principles – whether delivered online or in person.

GAIN NEW KNOWLEDGE

With 20 years of delivering mentoring, we provide expert knowledge and full awareness of pitfalls and success criteria to help you establish professional, high performing mentoring programmes.



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KMP+ House of Mentoring is a consulting house established in the year 2000, focused on enhancing leadership and talent development through professional mentoring programmes. We design and deliver state-of-the-art mentoring programmes based on research and good practice and are continuously seeking to increase our knowledge of how to ensure optimal outcome of development initiatives – for the participants as well as for the organisation. Together with the client, we ensure that development activities are relevant and meaningful to the individual as well as to the organisation as well as connected to strategic objectives.

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