

The Value of Mentoring in Organisations

By

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Imagine working in an organization where you can choose among a number of mature, well-meaning and professionally trained people, someone purposely assigned to assist you in your personal and professional development.

Today more than ever, leaders in organizations are recognizing the fact that the success of their business relies heavily on the quality of the people who run the show and that means everyone. Highly developed and empowered people who feel valued and cared for by their employers and direct bosses will ultimately contribute more and better, with the ultimate successful shift in attitude from “I have to do this job” to “I want and like to do this work and I will take pride in achieving excellence”. This is what every organization needs, this is what the Maltese economy needs.

Mentoring in organizations is one amongst other initiatives aimed at humanizing the workplace, achieving excellence through people, and strengthening the business. At the end of the day it is a win-win situation for all concerned.

Mentoring can be defined as a one-to-one supportive relationship between the mentor who is usually experienced in life and at work, and the mentee, sometimes referred to as the protégé, a person who has clearly promising potential and wants to unleash it to achieve excellence in work and life in general. The mentor will make themselves available for their mentee so that they can meet on a regular basis for mentoring sessions. The general objective of these sessions is for the mentor, using an integrative and holistic approach to facilitate the mentee’s ability to open up and discuss various issues that are related to the mentee’s personal and professional growth. Together they explore the mentee’s dreams and aspirations for the future and generate creative and alternative ways of making those dreams a reality. They explore possible obstacles in the mentee’s personal resources or the general environment that can hinder their process of growth.

The basis of this relationship is one of honesty, trust and openness. These are the foundations upon which a truly productive mentoring relationship can be built.

Structuring the mentoring process – a case in point

The Westin Dragonara Resort has recently officially launched its Mentoring Programme for which I had the privilege to offer support as the main consultant and trainer for the programme. In collaboration with the HR and training department, a group of senior managers were involved in a lengthy and intensive training programme covering skills such as; active listening and responding; giving and receiving constructive feedback; asking appropriate questions; challenging and confronting, goal-setting, strategy building and implementation, and goal evaluation. We also worked on the fundamental principles of mentoring such as having a non-judgemental and empathic attitude, trust, honesty and openness, ethical issues such as confidentiality, professional boundaries and levels of commitment. There was also an emphasis on the development of emotional intelligence competencies for the mentors as this seems to be one of the key ingredients for successful mentoring relationships.

Prospective mentees were then debriefed during specially organized information sessions, where they were given all the information about the programme and more important, the list of mentors from which they could choose. From the start of the programme it was clear that the mentees would choose their mentors. Besides being the way mentoring programmes work, it gives a clear message to the mentee that this relationship is for them and from the very onset they have the power to choose who to have it with.

The whole process is then supported by regular continuous professional development and support sessions for the mentors both as a group and individually. A policy to outline and regulate the whole programme was set up and the organisation's training manager was appointed as the programme coordinator. In the coming months we shall be evaluating some of the first results of the programme.

The benefits of mentoring for the mentee

The mentoring relationship can be very beneficial for the mentee. The following are some common benefits often reported by mentees as a result of being involved in a mentoring process.

Overcoming a feeling of isolation: the mentoring relationship often serves as an anchor for the mentee – a constant reference point and a reliable source of feedback that promotes reflection, insight and direction regarding career performance and progression and other personal or professional issues.

A source of encouragement: mentees can bring personal and professional struggles and vulnerabilities to the mentoring relationship without feeling judged or preached at. They can discuss successes and failures, strengths and weaknesses in a safe and neutral environment that helps them really understand themselves and decide on constructive ways of dealing with various issues.

A unique learning opportunity: mentees often learn a great deal from the practices and perceptions of their mentor. This new “light” helps them look at issues from different points of view and learn from someone who has a vast work and life experience.

Identifying knowledge and skills gaps: through the genuine feedback acquired from their mentor, mentees can gain insight into their own performance and functioning and identify areas where they need to change, grow and develop. In this respect, the mentor also serves as a resource for other growth opportunities that the mentee could benefit from.

The benefits of mentoring for the mentor

Although the mentoring relationship is mainly a resource for the mentee, mentors say that they derive a great deal of deep satisfaction from being a key player in the growth process of their mentee. Through their interactions and mentoring sessions, they too gain insight about themselves and are often challenged to think and reflect as they address the issues brought to the session by the mentee. Mentors often find that the mentoring relationship is an excellent way of passing on a legacy of experience, values, knowledge and skills which they

would have accumulated over the years. They also experience the joy and satisfaction of watching their mentee develop and grow both personally and professionally. Being a mentor also brings increased recognition from peers and the business community.

The benefits of mentoring for the organization

Mentoring makes it possible to harness the strengths and talents already present within the people of an organisation and making sure that these are retained and shared with others. The whole concept of knowledge sharing is a key factor in forming high performing teams. Mentoring is also an effective way of increasing the quality of job performance by tapping into and unblocking underused or unused potential. The mentoring process is also an opportunity for both mentor and mentee to synergise and develop new ideas and ways of working. This energy often gives rise to long lasting friendships often outliving the mentoring contract.

Mentoring programmes create a more self-sufficient organisation in terms of professional development of its people and as a result may need to rely much less on external providers. Mentoring also increases the sense of belonging and loyalty towards the organisation by creating a caring and supportive working environment and an organisation that is truly committed to achieving success through its people.

The mentoring relationship can serve as a haven of truth where two people, one more experienced than the other can make a meaningful connection that fosters personal and professional development in a context of trust and genuineness.