MENTORING – FOCUSING ON LEARNING

Learning is the fundamental process and the primary purpose of mentoring. One of the principal reasons that mentoring relationships fail is that the learning process is not tended to and the focus on learning goals is not maintained.

The role of experience is a primary force in understanding the parallel journeys of the mentor and mentee and the learning relationship. It is grounded in a web of connection and interrelationship that is explored through the vehicle of personal ecology – forces that affect how we learn. The notions of challenge, support and vision along with learning style play a critical role in facilitating the learning process.

The shift in best mentoring practice is consistent with what we know about adult learning (Knowles, 1980):

- Adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning.
- The role of the facilitator is to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes conditions necessary for learning to take place.
- Adult learners have a need to be self-directing.
- Readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know.
- Life's reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others enrich the learning process.
- Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application.
- Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn.

Elements in the Learner-Centered Mentoring Paradigm

Mentoring Element	Changing Paradigm	Adult Learning Principle
Mentee role	From: Passive receiver To: Active partner	Adults learn best when they are involved in diagnosing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their own learning.
Mentor role	From: Authority To: Facilitator	The role of the facilitator is to create and maintain a supportive climate that promotes the conditions necessary for learning to take place.
Learning process	From: Mentor directed and responsible for mentee's learning To: Self-directed and mentee responsible for own learning	Adult learners have a need to be self-directing.
Length of relationship	From: Calendar focus To: Goal determined	Readiness for learning increases when there is a specific need to know.
Mentoring relationship	From: One life = one mentor; one mentor = one mentee To: Multiple mentors over a lifetime and multiple models for mentoring: individual, group, peer models	Life's reservoir of experience is a primary learning resource; the life experiences of others add enrichment to the learning process.
Setting	From: Face-to-face To: Multiple and varied venues and opportunities	Adult learners have an inherent need for immediacy of application.
Focus	From: Product oriented: knowledge transfer and acquisition To: Process oriented: Critical reflection and application	Adults respond best to learning when they are internally motivated to learn.

Facilitation – A basic Mentor's Competence

In addition to their expertise and experience, mentors need to be familiar with specific process skills in order to facilitate the learning process effectively. Facilitation is a relatively new concept, rooted in principles of adult learning that are largely attributable to the work of Malcolm Knowles (1980). Although frequently labeled as a soft skill, facilitation is a requisite process skill for those who mentor adults. *Facilitation* is difficult to define. *Enable* is the word that probably comes closest to describing the dynamic interactive process involved in facilitating adult learning.

According to Malcolm Knowles (1980), a facilitator must:

- Establish a climate conducive to learning.
- Involve learners in planning how and what they will learn.
- Encourage learners to formulate their own learning objectives.
- Encourage learners to identify and utilize a variety of resources to accomplish their objectives.
- Help learners implement and evaluate their learning.

Mentors facilitate learning in many ways, all the while listening, empowering, coaching, challenging, teaching, collaborating, aiding, assisting, supporting, expediting, easing, simplifying, advancing, and encouraging. "Facilitators of learning see themselves as resources for learning, rather than as didactic instructors who have all the answers" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 63).

There is an inherent flow to the facilitation process. For some learners, this movement takes more time than others. Their lived experience, ecology, and circumstances initially require more support and direction. For others, less support is required because there is more readiness and comfort with the process of facilitation.

Strategies for Facilitating Learning

There are specific things mentors can do to facilitate mentee learning. The five strategies listed below are particularly useful:

1. Asking Questions

Asking questions causes an individual to reflect and thereby encourages learning. Asking questions that require thoughtful is helpful in getting mentees to articulate their own thinking and identifying questions to stimulate thoughtful reflection. The questions can open up a learning conversation or shut it down. Ethical questioning is a must (staying within the bounds of role-appropriate questions). Without it, it is easy to exceed limits of appropriateness and fairness.

What You Can Do:

- Ask questions that support and challenge—for example: "That's a nice way of describing the culture. How would you apply some of that thinking to the staff?"
- Ask questions to stimulate reflection—for example: "Could you tell me a little more about what you mean by . . . "
- Allow time for thoughtful reflection—for example: "It sounds as if we've only begun to scratch the surface. Let's think about this some more and discuss it further in our next conversation."

2. Reformulating Statements

Mentors who rephrase what they have heard clarify their own understanding and encourage the mentee to hear what it is they have articulated. This offers an opportunity for further clarification.

What You Can Do:

- Paraphrase what you heard—for example: "I think what I heard you saying was…"
- Continue the process of rephrasing and paraphrasing until you are dear and the mentee is no longer adding new information—for example: "My understanding is…"

3. Summarizing

Summarizing reinforces the learning, is a reminder of what has transpired, and allows checking out assumptions in the process.

What You Can Do:

- Share the content of what you have heard, learned, or accomplished—for example: "We've spent our time today… During that time we… As a result, we achieved the following outcomes…"
- Leave judgments and opinions out when you summarize.
- Deal with the facts of the situation, not the emotions.

4. Listening for the Silence

Silence provides an opportunity for learning. Some individuals need time to think quietly. Silence can also indicate confusion, boredom, or even physical discomfort.

What You Can Do:

- Don't be afraid of silence.
- Encourage silence.
- Use the silence as an opportunity for reflection—for example: "I notice that whenever we started to talk about . . . you get kind of quiet. I'm wondering what that is about."

5. Listening Reflectively

So often we hear but do not really listen. When you listen reflectively, you hear the silence, observe nonverbal responses, and hold up a mirror for the mentee.

What You Can Do:

- Be authentic—for example: "What I'd like to see is . . ."
- Clarify—for example: "What do you mean by . . . ?"
- Provide feedback—for example: "You did a great job with that. I like the way you . . . I also thought that . . . Next time you might try.

Points of Connection – First steps in Mentoring Relationship

What to Do	How to Do It
Invest time and effort in setting the climate for learning.	Determine mentee learning style and learning needs.
Be sensitive to the day-to-day needs of your mentee.	Spend time connecting with your mentee. Ask enough questions to give you sufficient insight into your mentee's work context.
Identify and use multiple venues for communication.	Explore all available options: e-mail, videoconfer-ence, new Web-based technologies, telephone, mail, and emerging technology—and use more than one. Look for opportunities to connect face-to-face, even at a long distance.
Set a regular contact schedule, but be flexible.	Agree on a mutually convenient contact schedule, and make sure it works for you and your mentee. If you need to renegotiate a scheduled appointment, use that situation as an opportunity for connection and interaction.
Check on the effectiveness of communication.	Ask questions: Are we connecting? Is the means we are using working for us? Is it convenient?
Make sure that connection results in meaningful learning.	Is learning going on? Is the mentee making progress?
Share information and resources—but never as a substitute for personal interaction.	Set the stage to share information. Then share the information and follow up once the information is shared.

WIFI d.o.o., Ilica 242, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska **Tel:** +385 1 4553 020 **Fax: +385** 1 4553 029 **E-Mail:** info@wificroatia.hr
Internet: www.wificroatia.hr Bankovni račun: Zagrebačka banka d.d. **IBAN:** HR8923600001102091137
Direktorica: Carmen Tariba, **OIB:** 88194267671 **Trgovački sud:** Zagreb **MBS:** 2386046
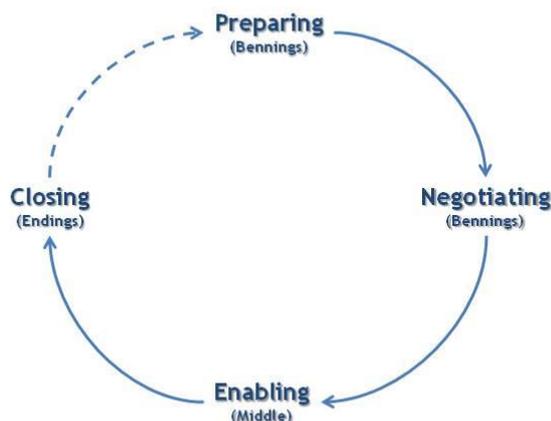
Phases through the Mentoring Process

Mentoring relationships progress through four predictable phases: preparing, negotiating, enabling, and coming to closure. These phases build on one another to form a developmental sequence, which varies in length from one relationship to another.

Preparing (Beginnings), negotiating (Middle), enabling (Middle), and coming to closure (Endings) are part of every mentoring relationship, formal and informal. Awareness of the phases is a key factor in successful mentoring relationships. When they are taken for granted or skipped over, they can have a negative impact on the relationship. Simply being aware of them provides significant signposts.

Movement through the four phases follows a fluid yet predictable cycle, and usually has some overlap between phases . Thus, during the enabling phase, when mentoring partners are most likely to face potential obstacles (perhaps a geographical move), they may need to renegotiate aspects of their mentoring partnership agreement in order to move forward and maintain the relationship.

Mentoring Phases

WIFI d.o.o., Ilica 242, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska   **Tel:** +385 1 4553 020   **Fax: +385** 1 4553 029   **E-Mail:** info@wificroatia.hr
Internet: www.wificroatia.hr Bankovni račun: Zagrebačka banka d.d.   **IBAN:** HR8923600001102091137
Direktorica: Carmen Tariba,   **OIB:** 88194267671   **Trgovački sud:** Zagreb   **MBS:** 2386046

Mentoring skills and competences

It is not unusual to be knowledgeable about specific skills and still not feel comfortable using them. A person who has received training in managing conflict, for instance, is not necessarily proficient at or comfortable in using those skills. Moreover, the extent to which this person feels comfortable affects whether he or she uses the skill.

Mentors who facilitate effective learning relationships are comfortable using an assortment of related process skills. The process tool kit for mentors facilitating effective learning relationships consists of twelve generic skills.

Brokering Relationships

Brokering relationships means skillfully making the right contacts and laying the groundwork for mentees to connect with other people who can be resources to them and provide resources they can use and experiences to further their achievement of learning objectives. In order to broker connections, mentors need to be skilled networkers and have a stable of diverse contacts from whom to draw expertise, resources, and information.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Too frequently we put great energy into starting a relationship and assume that because of these initial efforts, it will continue to develop on its momentum. In fact, the processes of building and maintaining relationships require tending, patience over time, and persistence. Some people are better at building than maintaining. Mentors need to be adept at both.

Coaching

Coaching and mentoring frequently get confused. As each construct has evolved over time, they have gotten increasingly harder to differentiate. Coaching is always a part of mentoring, but coaching does not always involve mentoring. Coaching within the context of a mentoring relationship has to do with the skill of helping an individual fill a particular knowledge gap by learning how to do things more effectively.

Communicating

Effective communication is critical to successful mentoring, just as it is in any other relationship. A person can make the best speech in the world, but if no one is listening, what good is it? So it is with mentoring. Facilitating a learning relationship is based on effective communication. Communication is not just centered on sharing knowledge; it depends on many other factors as well, including building enough trust to encourage open communication, being authentic, listening effectively, checking for understanding, and articulating clearly and unambiguously. It also means being able to pick up on what is behind the words being said by another person (the nonverbal cues).

Encouraging

Encouraging in a mentoring relationship takes many forms. It can encompass cheerleading, confidence building, gently pushing at the right time and in an appropriate manner, motivating, and inspiring.

Facilitating

Facilitating is the means by which mentors enable learning. The key elements are establishing a hospitable climate for learning and promoting self-directed learning. The learner is involved in planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning.

Goal Setting

Completion of learning goals is the raison deter of the mentoring process. Skill in being able to assist a mentee in crystallizing, clarifying, and setting realistic goals is essential.

Guiding

Mentors are guides. They clear a path and prepare the mentee for what it is they are about to see and learn. By role modeling, mentors provide an opportunity for mentees to reflect on what they see. Guides also help maintain focus and help the sojourner reach their destination in safety.

Managing Conflict

Inevitably conflict occurs within any relationship. Managing conflict involves managing a conversation about differing points of view. It does not mean eliminating them. Rather, it is about inviting dialogue to understand varying points of view.

Problem Solving

Problem solving means engaging the learner in the solution of the problem. Mentors do not solve problems for mentees. They provide assistance in the problem-solving process. The goal is to guide that process rather than provide the answer. Mentors must have comfort with problem-solving strategies.

Providing and Receiving Feedback

Feedback is an enabling mechanism throughout the mentoring relationship. Mentors need to know how to provide constructive feedback and assist their mentees in asking for feedback.

Reflecting

Reflection is a significant tool for facilitating the growth and development of mentee and mentor. It is the springboard to action and further learning. Being comfortable with the process skill of reflection means being able to step back, evaluate process, assess, and

articulate learning and consider the implication of that learning for future action. Being skillful at reflecting on learning enables a mentor to model that skill for a mentee.

Eight Mentoring/Coaching competence categories by European Mentoring and Coaching Council (www.emccouncil.org)

1. **Understanding Self**
   Demonstrates awareness of own values, beliefs and behaviors, recognizes how these affect their practice and uses this self-awareness to manage their effectiveness in meeting the client's, and where relevant, the sponsor's objectives.

2. **Commitment to Self-Development**
   Explore and improve the standard of their practice and maintain the reputation of the profession.

3. **Managing the Contract**
   Establishes and maintains the expectations and boundaries of the mentoring contract with the client and, where appropriate, with sponsors.

4. **Building the relationship**
   Skillfully builds and maintains an effective relationship with the client, and where appropriate, with the sponsor.

5. **Enabling Insight and Learning**
   Works with the client and sponsor to bring about insight and learning.

6. **Outcome and Action Orientation**
   Demonstrates approach and uses the skills in supporting the client to make desired changes.

7. **Use of Models and Techniques**
   Applies models and tools, techniques and ideas beyond the core communication skills in order to bring about insight and learning.

8. **Evaluation**
   Gathers information on the effectiveness of own practice and contributes to establishing a culture of evaluation of outcomes.

WIFI d.o.o., Ilica 242, 10000 Zagreb, Hrvatska   **Tel:** +385 1 4553 020   **Fax: +385** 1 4553 029   **E-Mail:** info@wificroatia.hr
Internet: www.wificroatia.hr Bankovni račun: Zagrebačka banka d.d.   **IBAN:** HR8923600001102091137
Direktorica: Carmen Tariba,   **OIB:** 88194267671   **Trgovački sud:** Zagreb   **MBS:** 2386046