Facilitating Mentoring Relationships Across Organizations

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ABSTRACT: (250 WORDS)

Building healthy mentoring relationships requires cultural due diligence and creative designs. When there is an organizational relationship such as school or workplace, or a familial one such as parent or guardian, certain elements of leverage are in place to sustain the relationship.

Those advantages do not exist when the pairs are in different organizations, environments, or geographies. Cultural, ethnic, generational, and gender differences may introduce the potential for poor communication and failure to meet the goals for the match. Identifying the potential pitfalls for a relationship and putting preventive actions in place is essential for success.

A body of knowledge amassed over 40 years of research and evidence based practice validates several critical success factors for healthy relationships and cost-effective processes. This brief provides details of those critical success factors, and how to implement them successfully when the partners in the pairs are in different organizations.

Critical Success Factors

Analysis of data collected from mentoring processes in hundreds of organizations, and across organizations in communities, reveals the following factors to have a critical impact on the success of the mentoring process. Most of these factors also impact the health of the pair's relationship. The culture and environment of every organization is unique. Every community has cultural and environmental qualities that demand due diligence if any results improvement intervention is to be successful (Murray, 2001, Chapter 15). Rather than prescribe a strategy that would not fit all types of processes, here are questions to be answered for each of these factors:

- **Identify the needs, goals, opportunities, and readiness of the organization**
    a. Needs – what is the problem to be solved, or gap in results to be filled? Is the problem at the work, worker, workplace, or community/societal level?
    b. Goals – what outcomes will be expected from the mentoring process?
    c. Opportunities – can opportunities be seized to improve results?
    d. Readiness – will decision makers and opinion setters support the process?
- **Planning and design**
    a. Planning – how will the mentoring process be aligned with other functions?
    b. Design – what formats, tools, media, and performance support systems are available?
- **Communication within and across organizations**
    a. Who must know about the mentoring process?
    b. What information is to be communicated?
    c. Where are the intended recipients of the information?
    d. When will the communication plan be implemented?
    e. How will the messages be delivered?

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- **Target populations of Protégés and Mentors**
  a. Protégés – where are there groups of people who could produce better results if they were more competent, confident, multi-skilled, and flexible?
  b. Mentors – how will able and willing candidates for the Mentor role be identified?
- **Matching the pairs and negotiating agreements**
  a. Matching – will pairs be matched by self-selection, nomination, or by assessed skill gaps of the Protégé and mastery of those skills by the Mentor?
  b. Agreements – each partner must have a clear understanding of the parameters of the relationship for it to be productive and healthy. How and when will they communicate? What must be kept in confidence between the pair? Can they agree to a "no fault" conclusion if the relationship ceases to be productive? Will the agreement be signed, and given to the coordination team?
- **Clarity of roles and responsibilities in an orientation**
  a. Roles –is the role of the Mentor to be career advisor, skill coach, confidant, sponsor, or buddy?
  b. Expectations – what does each partner expect of the other?
  c. Responsibilities – who contacts whom, when, and how?
- **Development plans for objectives, actions, and when to conclude**
  a. A development plan is the lynchpin of a healthy relationship.
  b. Who prepares, updates, and owns the plan?
  c. How is the boss involved?
  d. Will the development plan be made available to the coordination team?
- **Evaluation**
  a. Evaluation strategies must be put in place at the initiation of the mentoring process, and upon the matching of the pair.
  b. What systemic results will be monitored and tracked to assess return on investment?
  c. How will skill gain or experience transfer be measured?

Orientation of Matched Pairs

Participants come to a mentoring relationship with many ideas and expectations. They may also arrive with some misconceptions about what the mentoring process is and is not. Mentoring pairs are most likely to be successful when they can discuss their expectations, learn what is expected in their roles, possibly brush up on the skills most critical to their roles, and work together to build a sound relationship. An orientation session for matched pairs provides a safe environment for mentors and protégés to set parameters for their work together (Murray, McCrary, and Rickel, 2012). With the guidance of a caring coordination team the pair shortens the cycle time of building trust and confidence in each other.

An orientation session, whether in a group setting or one-on-one, is an effective way to accomplish a number of objectives:

- It ensures participants spend quality time building their relationship
- It provides a safe, relatively controlled environment for participants
- It enables the Coordination Team to clarify misconceptions about mentoring and what the process looks like in your organization
- It is an opportunity to strengthen skills that may be deficient in mentors and protégés
- It provides guidelines and privacy for negotiating their agreement
- It gives them time to draft their development plan

It is essential that mentors and protégés attend an orientation session together to build a sound foundation for their relationship. When the orientation includes some skill building for the participants, it is useful to have mentors and protégés in separate sessions for part of the time so they may practice the most relevant skills for themselves. For example, mentors must have good feedback and coaching skills, which can always be improved with more practice. Protégés may be intimidated by a strong mentor, and reluctant to ask for specific help. Providing skill practice in assertive communication can strengthen the competence and confidence of the protégé.

Managers may be invited to join part of the session, particularly when the development plan is to be discussed. Observers and others curious about the session may be briefed in a separate session, as their presence can be distracting in a group orientation designed for the pairs.

Evaluate your culture for cues about whether an on- or off-site location would be optimum for group orientations. When the matched pairs are geographically distant, explore the use of media for the orientation. Technology is available in many organizations for both audio and visual group meetings. There are many vendors of such tools that may be used when the participants are in different organizations, and perhaps different time zones.

Across Organizations – Two Examples

Having outlined the critical success factors for both a mentoring process and the relationship of the pairs, the following two case studies will present a brief description of building those relationships when the partners in the pairs are in different organizations.

Automotive Youth Education System Program Teams Students with Workplace Mentors

The problems facing the automotive industry were many. There was a growing need for entry-level automotive technicians. The declining economy caused consumers to delay buying new cars and maintain older cars longer. At the same time, the labor pool was shrinking for a number of reasons. New technology such as onboard computers requires technicians with new higher skill levels. The prevailing stereotype of *"auto mechanic"* discourages interest in the automotive field. Parents and school counselors did not recommend the field to secondary students. Many secondary automotive programs did not meet modern business requirements, and the practice equipment provided to the schools was outdated.

The strategy for solving some of these problems was a community-based program with partnerships between automotive dealerships, secondary and vocational-technical education, parents, and students (McCrary and Garcia, 1997). Students continued formal schooling and added work site experience with a Master Service Technician mentor on skills needed for modern technology. Cooperative efforts addressed the image of the service technician with parents and counselors, and improving the working environment in the dealerships**.**

Master Service Technician mentors were matched with a student intern. Together they participated in an orientation to prepare them for their separate roles and responsibilities. Work style assessment tools were used to jump-start the communication and interaction of the pair. Coordination teams were established with representatives from all participant groups – Vo-Tech instructors, dealers, students, parents/guardians, service technicians, and school counselors. The coordination teams functioned as resources for matching interns with mentors, setting parameters for scheduling, solving conflicts in communication with the cross-generational pairs, etc.

The AYES program continues to produce results and add value to automotive dealerships and the student interns. Escalating labor costs have been moderated and the labor pool increased.

Leadership in Reproductive Health

The UN Millennium Development Goals focused the attention of the world's caring people on critical needs such as reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, and combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and other diseases. Population growth in the poorest Countries around the globe is outstripping resources, resulting in malnutrition and deaths from starvation.

The Public Health Institute's International Health Program (IHP) division created a program to develop leaders in reproductive health in seven African and Asian Countries. Focusing on the severest problems at the societal level was a daunting task, requiring cultural and environmental due diligence.

A blended approach was designed to include pre-work in Country, a three week leadership institute in the United States, and post-Institute support for the Fellows who became mentors. A condition of the Fellowship was that each would identify other potential leaders in their home Countries, and take responsibility to become a mentor to at least three of them during the following three years. Funding was obtained for a limited number of participants from each of the focus Countries (Clark and Murray (2005) from two Foundations.

Mentoring relationships were created across organizations including health providers, educational institutions, the media, and non-governmental organizations. Mentors prepared a volunteer form with a profile of education, experience, and motivation for the role. Protégés submitted an application form to stipulate what skills and experience they desired in a mentor. Mentoring pairs were provided relationship support by trained "Fellows," and members of the resource team in IHP.

Local NGOs have continued the program in some Countries where they are able to obtain the minimum funds required for resources and communication.

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