

UNDERSTANDING MENTORSHIP AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRUCTURE TO IMPLEMENT AND MANAGE A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM TO SUPPORT EXTENSIONISTS TOWARDS PROFESSIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the world individuals, organisations, institutions and businesses reconsider the implementation of a mentorship program to be supportive and to promote the professionalism of the employees. There are numerous definitions for mentorship or mentoring but all of them emphasise three elements namely:

- *A reference to individual people, the mentor and protégé interacting with one another;*
- *The involvement of some kind of supportive action; and*
- *Promoting professional and personal development of the protégé.*

The South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) included the appointment of mentors to support Candidate Natural Scientists as a pre-requisite for professional registration. This affects every agricultural extension worker in South Africa. Mentors and protégé's demonstrate specific qualities and characteristics, which are the building blocks, of a successful mentoring relationship. There are obstacles that could influence the mentoring relationship negatively. However the

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mentor, protégé and the organisation benefits significantly from a successful mentorship program and specifically with regard to professionalism. The structuring, implementation and management of a mentorship program is essential for organisations and individuals who wish to survive.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mentorship is a word of fashion today and in many instances it is being visualised as a magic stick that can bring about change by swinging the stick and uttering a few magic words. In business today coaching and mentorship are buzzwords, the trends of the moment (Stout-Roston, 2007) .

Mentorship can differ however depending on the profession involved and the workplace practices where it is implemented.

The concept, mentorship has been with us for many years. It has been noted in the Greek mythology, when Odysseus, the Greek poet, took his son Telemachus to his friend Mentor and requested him to guide, coach and raise him in life skills while he would be away from home for a long time (Adams & Scott, 1997). Throughout the ages numerous examples of mentors and mentee's or protégés have been recorded. The Bible for instance is full of examples of mentors and protégés. The majority of people today can probably recall a time when someone acted as a mentor for him/her and where he/she today acts as a mentor for someone else.

Transformation and therefore change, not only in South Africa, but in the world as a whole is presently taking place at such an enormous pace that one sometimes feels totally lost. Therefore more individuals and organisations are considering the implementation of mentorship programs to support their employees in many facets of live. The South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) wisely includes the appointment of mentors to support Candidate Natural Scientist as a prerequisite for registration (SACNASP, 2007).

In the agricultural sector in South Africa and more specifically in respect of land reform programmes there is an outcry by land reform beneficiaries to be supported by mentors (Hooglander, 2005:5; Zvomuya, 2005 and Hofstätter, 2005).

More and more organisations/institutions are busy to develop and structure mentorship programs. Where an organisation or an individual identifies the need to implement a mentorship program the following questions need to be answered:

- *What is mentorship or mentoring?*
- *What do we want to achieve with a mentorship program?*
- *How are we going to structure, implement and manage a mentorship program to be beneficial for the protégé, mentor and the organisation?*

The objectives of the paper are the following:

- *To get a clear understanding of mentorship or mentoring*
- *To determine possible achievements of a mentorship program and*
- *To propose a structure, to implement and manage a mentorship program effectively.*

2. MENTORING OR MENTORSHIP

There are numerous definitions of mentorship the definition depending on the profession involved and the workplace practices where it is implemented. According to Murray (1991:5):

“Mentoring is a structure and series of processes designed to create effective mentoring relationships, guide the desired behaviour change of those involved, and evaluate the results for the protégés, the mentors and the organisation with the primary purpose of systematically developing the skills and leadership abilities of the less experienced members of the organisation”.

According to Adams (1998) mentoring is defined as a process of an integrated approach to advising, coaching and nurturing, focused on creating a viable relationship to enhance individual career/personal/**professional** growth and development.

Another definition of mentoring offered by Anderson and Shannon (as cited by Colwell (1998) is:

“A nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels,

and befriends a less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter's **professional** and/or personal development".

A more simplified but descriptive definition of mentoring is proposed by Oberholzer (as cited by de Beer, 2005) namely:

"Mentoring is simply someone who helps someone else to learn something the learner would otherwise have learned less well, more slowly, or not at all".

Mentoring is also defined as "a method of teaching and learning that occurs amongst all types of individuals across all kinds of knowledge bases and settings. In the workplace mentoring normally consists of teaching, giving feedback, coaching on the job, counselling through change, and structuring ongoing contact over a designated time period (www.gcllearning.com).

Finally mentorship is career guidance and individual development process by which competencies (professionalism) and insights are carried over by chosen people (mentors) to other people (protégés).

An analyses of these definitions emphasises three elements namely:

- A reference to individual people, one person interacting with another person (mentor and protégé);
- The involvement of some kind of supportive action – i.e. guidance, support, advice, learning, coaching and counselling; and
- Promoting **professional** and personal development.

Mentoring brings individuals together on a one – to – one basis, bypassing bureaucracy and institutions. It brings people together, real people talking to real people. Mentoring therefore implies someone older (or somehow more experienced) working with someone younger and by definition, less experienced (De Klerk, 2005; Erasmus-Kritzinger, 2005).

Further analyses emphasise two main role players in the process namely the mentor and protégé.

2.1 The mentor and a protégé, who are they?

According to several authors and researchers (Murray, 1991; Adams, 1998; Holliday, 2001; Edward & Keane, 2001; Young & Wright, 2001; Primary Agriculture Education and Training Authority, 2003; de Beer, 2005; de Klerk, 2005; Erasmus-Kritzinger, 2005; South African Cane Grower's Association, 2005) a mentor and protégé demonstrate specific qualities (attributes) and characteristics (traits). These qualities and characteristics are summarised as follows:

The mentor is:

- A person who guides another (the protégé) to avenues of success;
- A person who will ask the question: "How can I help you so that you can become what you want to be?"
- Someone who understands the role and will meet the protégé's needs;
- Knowledgeable and respected;
- A person who listens and is a problem solver;
- Being able to take on the role as guide namely guiding the protégé through the hurdles towards success;
- Someone who is sensitive and understands the needs of the protégé; and
- Someone with excellent interpersonal communication skills.

The mentor is someone who exposes the following specific characteristics:

- Is people orientated with good people skills;
- A good motivator – to inspires the protégé;

- An effective teacher who is able to, not only teach the “skills of the trade” but also manages the learning process of the protégé;
- An achiever who sets career goals, continuously evaluates these goals and strives to reach them; and
- Respects others and specifically shows regard for another’s well being.

Qualities essential in an effective mentor are:

- A desire to help;
- Positive experiences;
- A good reputation to develop others;
- Time and energy;
- Up-to-date knowledge;
- A positive learning attitude;
- Effective managerial skills;
- A questioning outlook;
- Active listening abilities;
- Persistence;
- Non-autocratic approach;
- Honesty; and
- Patience.

The protégé is the person who is being mentored.

The protégé must:

- Respect and trust the mentor to establish a caring relationship;
- Understand that the relationship is mutual in terms of both persons gaining from the opportunity;
- Be willing to enter into a mentoring relationship;
- Listen to advice and respond appropriately; and
- Be committed and willing to learn.

The protégé should expose the following characteristics:

- An eagerness to learn new skills/knowledge and to develop existing skills and abilities;
- The ability to work as a team player;
- Must be willing to put time and effort into the relationship (patience);
- Must be willing to travel from a “safe harbour” into the seas of uncertainty (i.e. take some risk);
- Reflect a positive attitude (A bright and hopeful attitude can help a protégé to succeed);
- Commitment; and
- Self-confidence.

The above qualities and characteristics of mentors and protégés are the building blocks of successful mentoring relationships.

2.2 The mentoring relationship

The successful outcomes of mentorship programs, depend heavily on the development of a mentoring relationships between the mentors and the protégés. According to Erasmus-Kritzinger (2005) the following questions can help to evaluate the quality of mentorship programs:

- The nature of contact and communication between mentor and protégé?
- Were the discussions between mentor and protégé relevant?
- Did both parties act in a professional manner?
- Did a specific objective gain prominence?
- Were ideas converted into actions?
- Were set objectives achieved?

- Has the protégé become more independent?

There is however no single formula for good mentoring. Table 1 is proposed as a framework to summarise what has been discussed.

Table 1: A mentoring relationship framework

Mentor	Mentoring relationship	Protégé
Responsibilities	Essential elements	Responsibilities
Skills, knowledge and experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance • Counselling • Coaching • Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Respect • Partnership-building • Self-esteem • Time 	Latent abilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take responsibilities • Willingness to learn • Personal development plan
Obstacles confronting the mentor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor's style • Insufficient time • Protégé with hidden agenda • Protégé with inappropriate attitude 	Outcomes of a successful relationship: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerated development. • Competent employee. • Professional status. 	Obstacles confronting the protégé: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer jealousy • Accused of holding on coat tails of others • Overstepping professional boundaries • Mentor falling from favour
Benefits for the mentor: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved job satisfaction • Increased peer recognition and admiration • Individual growth • Increased access to organisational • Information • Improved networking • Personal satisfaction, • developing the protégé's professional skills and knowledge 	Benefits for the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved induction and reduced personnel turnover. • Stable corporate culture • Leadership and managerial development. • Improved communication • Improved professionalism 	Benefits for the protégé: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier induction for new comer • Improved self-confidence • Learn to cope with organisation structure • Career advice and advancement • Acquisition of new knowledge and skills • Accelerated career progress and job satisfaction • Acquisition of wisdom and insight • Becoming a professional

(Derived from de Beer, 2005 and adapted by Terblanché, 2007)

What need further discussion are the obstacles that might still hinder the relationship, even if all the essential elements are provided in the relationship.

Obstacles that could confront a mentor are the following

- The mentor's style does not meet the protégé's needs and frustration may occur;
- Insufficient time and too high expectations by the protégé;
- A protégé with a hidden agenda; and
- An inappropriate attitude by the protégé expecting too much from the mentor and demanding more time and attention than is actually needed.

Obstacles that could confront the protégé are the following:

- Peer and/or professional jealousy from colleagues who do not have a mentor;
- Being accused of "holding onto the coat tails of another";
- One party overstepping professional boundaries expecting the relationship to become more "personal". (particularly in cross-gender relationships);
- The mentor falling from favour when others disapprove the activities of the mentor.

The essential elements of the relationship are critically important namely:

- Respect;
- Trust = communication + availability + predictability + loyalty. Trust is a two-way street; both mentor and protégé are responsible to built trust;

- Partnership-building and in particular:
 - The maintenance of good communication,
 - Fixing obvious problems,
 - Accurate prognoses of how decisions could effect goals,
 - Discussion progress, and
 - Monitoring changes;
- Building self-esteem of the protégé (People have the desire to believe that they are worthwhile and valuable); and
- Time schedules (i.e. setting aside specific time slots and not changing them).

2.3 The outcomes of mentorship programmes

Effective mentorship can be regarded as a career development option for individuals in an organisation. Another option could be to structure mentored learning for staff members or even individuals within a community.

Well structured and managed mentorship program provides clear benefits for the protégé, the mentor and the organisation as indicated in Table 1. The most important outcome however is that it promotes **professionalism** within the organisation, the protégé becomes a **professional** the mentor being responsible for the development of professional skills of the protégé (Tabbron, Macaulay, & Cook, 1997 and De Beer, 2005).

3. THE STRUCTURING, IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT OF A MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

The first step for an organisation will be to structure the mentorship program to implement and manage it.

The following steps could be followed:

- a) Establish a mentorship task group to investigate and propose a mentorship structure. (Do not hesitate to use outside knowledgeable individuals);

- b) Develop a planned mentoring program that includes the purpose, goals/objectives, assessing and organisation policy, screening of participants (mentors and protégés), monitoring and evaluation and a modifying program to adapt the program timeously;
- c) Develop curricula (training material) to train prospective mentors and protégés;
- d) Ensure that the formal mentoring program is well structured with a clear rationale, measurable goals/objectives and outcomes and mechanisms of assessments; and
- e) Ensure that all the role players understand and buy-in on the structured mentorship program (de Beer, 2005).

Figure 1 is a possible example of a management structure for a mentorship program in an Agricultural Department.

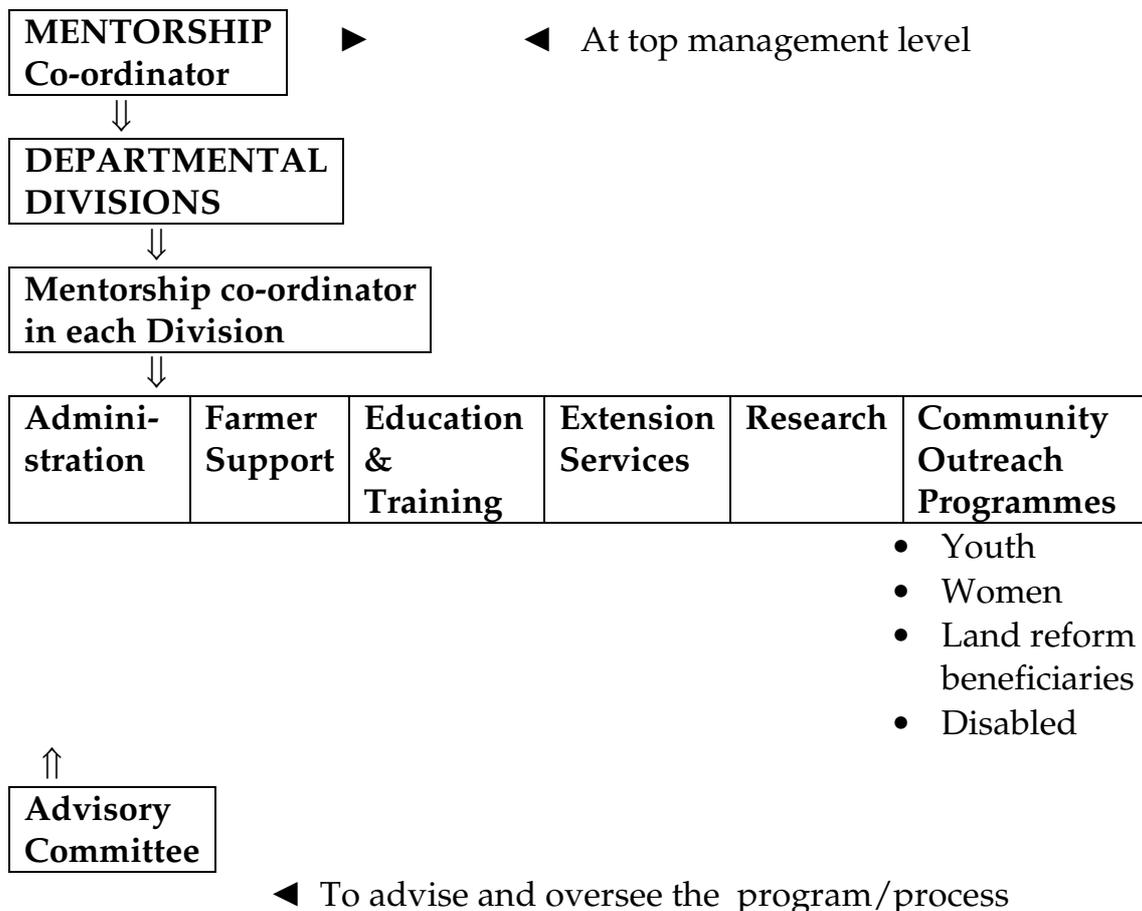


Figure 1: Management structure for a mentorship program

The structure could equally be implemented at regional or greater municipal levels. A task team could investigate the best option for an organisation. It should not be necessary to create new posts, but some restructuring may be necessary.

Central to the success of such programmes is co-ordination. Full-time program co-ordinators need to be identified, as well as representation from different divisions to assist the program co-ordinators.

An Advisory Committee needs to be established to advise and oversee the programmes. This committee should consist of members of the organisation as well as representatives from the client base (Organised Agriculture, Workers Unions and other specialists in the field of mentorship).

Mentorship co-ordinators are responsible to create conditions and support for the development of a successful mentorship relationship and to ensure the effective management of the program.

5. SUMMARY

- Make sure that the organisation has a clear understanding of the meaning and implications of a mentorship program.
- The organisation needs clear goals/objectives and specific anticipated outcomes for the mentorship program.
- It is absolutely necessary to structure a mentorship program and to implement and manage it for the benefit of the protégé, the mentor and the organisation.
- A most important outcome of a mentorship program is the fact that it will develop the protégé's professional skills and knowledge.

Finally, mentorship according to Steinmann (2006) is to "Invest in future giants" and nowhere in life will one get a better example of a perfect mentor than in nature itself, namely the lioness.

The lioness is the perfect example of how she raises her cubs to become "future giants" namely she:

- Clearly understands her conflicting role as mother who cares and nurses while fully accepting her responsibility to successfully hunt to ensure the survival of the pride;
- Is patient and spends time with her cubs to ensure their safety and to nurse them;
- Carefully plans and introduces the cubs to the activities of the pride; and
- Trains the cubs systematically to hunt and encourages the young adults to hunt for themselves. Their success as hunters is part of the success and survival of the pride.

Most organisations can be compared with a pride of lions. If they want to survive (and remain sustainable) they need to ensure and provide the relevant manpower (specialists as well as competent managers) to deliver a **professional service**. There are only two possibilities:

- Appoint people from outside the organisation or
- Develop talented individuals within the organisation and by doing so make provision for a group of competent (**professional**) employees ready to develop the organisation.

Organisations who wish to survive need to identify leaders with the same heart as that of a lioness. They need to act as mentors of individuals, the “future giants” (**professionals**) of the organisation.

“Mentors are masters, recognised by their institutions or profession, as holding a position that protégés should strive towards achieving” (Edwards & Keane, 2001).

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INTERNET SOURCES

www.higher-skills.org.uk/Mentoring
www.gclearning.com