

The Mentor's Role Within the Company

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Mentoring is an approach to business management which facilitates the utilization of human resources in the enterprise efficiently. Mentoring can be found in all shapes and sizes – ranging from formalized structures to loosely formed relationships – resulting in the retention of the most valuable employees within the firm, and providing the transfer of knowledge, skills and experience among employees. The mentoring process achieved results mainly by appointing competent, well-selected mentors. The aim of this paper is to present the role of the mentor in the enterprise. The results of a good mentor competence study are discussed and an analysis of mentor competencies – with particular emphasis on the age, gender and professional experience (measured by years of employment) – are presented. The author attempts to ascertain which competencies make the mentor fulfill his or her role in the company well. The article consists of an introduction, a brief literature review, a presentation of research results and conclusions. The conclusions of the presented analysis provide a basis for further research and the development of practical recommendations for HR managers.

Keywords: mentor, competence, mentoring in company.

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Rola mentora w przedsiębiorstwie

Mentoring jest podejściem do zarządzania przedsiębiorstwem, ułatwiającym sprawne wykorzystanie zasobów ludzkich w przedsiębiorstwie. Mentoring w firmach można odnaleźć w zróżnicowanych formach – od sformalizowanych struktur do oddolnie tworzonych relacji, w wyniku zatrzymywania najbardziej wartościowych pracowników w firmie oraz dzięki zapewnieniu transferu wiedzy, umiejętności i doświadczeń między pracownikami organizacji. Proces mentoringu jest efektywny między innymi dzięki doborze odpowiednich, kompetentnych mentorów. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest omówienie roli mentora w przedsiębiorstwie. Zaprezentowane zostały wyniki badania kompetencji mentora ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wieku, płci oraz doświadczenia zawodowego. Autorka podejmuje próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, które kompetencje sprawiają, że mentor staje się doskonałym, skutecznym mentorem. Wnioski z przedstawionej analizy stanowią podstawę do dalszych badań autorki, a także do rozwoju praktycznych zaleceń dla kadry zarządzającej HR w przedsiębiorstwach.

Słowa kluczowe: mentor, kompetencje, mentoring w przedsiębiorstwie.

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1. Introduction

Mentoring is an approach to business management which facilitates the utilization of human resources in the enterprise efficiently and rationally while maintaining resources of knowledge and skills on the appropriate level. Mentoring brings to a company a number of benefits which include: sharing knowledge and experience among employees in the enterprise; developing their skills, especially developing leadership competencies in the organization; improving knowledge of the organization for new employees; keeping the most valuable employees within the firm; expanding networks; carrying out new difficult projects; and personal development of mentees and mentors. The mentoring process – used in organizations usually when planning career paths, preparing for organizational changes or in individual job positions – achieved results mainly by appointing competent, well-selected mentors.

The aim of this paper is to present the role of the mentor in the enterprise. The results of a good mentor competence study are discussed and an analysis of mentor competencies – with particular emphasis on the age, gender and professional experience (measured by years of employment) – are presented. The author attempts to ascertain which competencies make the mentor fulfill his or her role in the company well.

2. Mentoring in Companies

Mentoring is characteristic in organizations that attach great importance to human resource development. According to the definition of the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, mentoring is voluntary assistance, independent of the chain of command, provided by one person to another, so that they can make significant progress in knowledge, job skills or way of thinking (www.emccouncil.org, 12.06.2015). The purpose of mentoring is to support the development of the individuals primarily through career functions such as the improvement of the skills of the mentee and their position in the company, the introduction of an employee to an important position, the study of reaction to a planned change and the confrontation of challenges (Luecke, 2006). In other

words, mentoring is giving the other person the individual non-linear help in transformation of knowledge, work or thinking. The essence of mentoring is to support making significant changes, and the role of the mentor is to help the mentee within the meaning of these processes (Meggison, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garrett-Harris, 2008). This process, in which one person (the mentor) is responsible for overseeing the career and development of another person, usually takes place outside the usual manager-subordinate system (Clutterbuck, 2002). Scholarly literature has shown that effective mentoring is an efficacious intervention in a company for leadership succession and employees' development (Higgins and Kram, 2001). Mentoring can be a useful tool for knowledge transfer (also for hidden knowledge) within the company, developing in participants of the mentoring process an effective way of thinking, decision-making and dealing with difficult situations.

Regarding benefits to the company there are several advantages of the mentoring process identified in the literature (Kram, 1985; Murray and Owen, 1991; Bozionelos, 2004; Sandberg, 2013; St.-Jean, Audet, 2009; Gold, Devias and Johnson, 2003):

- Increased productivity,
- Improved recruitment efforts
- “On the job” training of junior workers by senior staff,
- Transfer of “hidden knowledge” that cannot be found in books or training manuals,
- Attracting and retaining talent,
- Developing employees,
- Strengthening teamwork,
- Professional development of entrepreneurs,
- Assimilation success and business growth for entrepreneurs,
- Motivation of senior staff,
- Breaking down of barriers,
- Enhancement of services offered by the company.

Today the world is experiencing a trend to professionalize the mentoring process. Entrepreneurs recognize the value of adopting mentoring programs as a means of enhancing competitiveness (Mathews, 2006). Therefore, mentoring is supported by many organizations, such as the aforementioned European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC), Clutterbuck

Associates (ISMP), Mentoring International Association (IMA) or Management Mentors. In Poland mentoring is becoming increasingly important with organizations arising to support mentoring and associate mentors, such as the International Association of Mentors (MSM), the Polish Association of Mentoring (PSM), and the Association of Mentors (PROMENTOR).

2.1. Mentoring in Polish Companies

The author carried out research concerning the use of mentoring in the company, and the type and scope of mentoring programs used by Polish entrepreneurs. According to the latest study of mentoring in Polish SMEs (2013), small businesses in general do not apply mentoring, and they usually do not know what the mentoring process is (PARP, 2014). The author's research was conducted on a representative sample of medium and large companies in Poland (n=1000) in June 2016. The study used the CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) research method. The research tool was a questionnaire composed mostly of closed standardized questions. Interviews were conducted with HR managers or coordinators of mentoring programs. According to my research, every seventh company in Poland (within a group of medium-sized and large enterprises) currently uses mentoring. Large companies often lead the processes of mentoring – 17.7% of large enterprises and 13.7% of medium enterprises have implemented mentoring.

3. Types of Mentoring. The Roles of a Mentor in the Company

According to Klasen and Clutterbuck, mentoring is a relationship in which individuals (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002):

- shared information,
- planned career strategies,
- provided job-related feedback,
- engaged in emotional support and friendship,
- shared mutuality of needs and interests.

That means that (Garvey and Alfred, 2000):

- the mentor helps the mentee to achieve his or her aspirations,
- the mentor helps the mentee to realize his or her potential,

- the mentor also learns and develops through being a mentor.

This process may have a different formula in the organization (due to the degree of formalization of the process), it can be positioned differently in the structure of the company (according to the purpose and destiny of mentoring), and it may also take various forms (due to the type of mentoring relationship).

For example, many medium-sized and small companies have deployed informal mentoring, while large companies have often implemented (formal) mentoring programs.

Due to the formalization of the mentoring process, the so-called “informal mentoring” can now be clearly distinguished, namely a process not formalized and without appropriate organizational structures or documentation procedures. It is based on the unwritten rules of traditional mentoring – building a master-student relationship. It is the result of the mentor-mentee personal relationship, which involves a willingness of both sides to cooperate, invest time and maintain mutual trust. “Formal mentoring”, on the other hand, is a formalized process, located in the organizational structures of the company; it is based on documents, procedures and regulations. The mentor and mentee sign a contract for the purposes of mentoring, which stipulates cooperation based on a schedule of meetings and evaluations of their actions including impact on work.

For more information about formal and informal mentoring programs see Bednell, Weaver, Salas and Tindall, 2012.

Types of mentoring according to the purpose and direction of mentoring (Alfred and Garvey 2006):

- developmental mentoring – supports the mentee's learning and development,
- sponsorship mentoring – is about fast-tracking the mentee in their careers. That kind of mentoring is the most popular model in the US. In the UK it is linked to talent management programs,
- executive mentoring – the mentor helps the executive to identify their developmental needs, develop leadership skills and networks and take a long-term view on the career,
- business mentoring (entrepreneurial mentoring) – mentor is usually external to the company. Mentor can provide

personalized flexible support tailored to each business situation (Purcell and Scheyvens, 2015). Mentor using his or her experience can save a company from major errors and costly mistakes (Cull, 2006).

Forms of mentoring by type of mentoring relationship:

- Traditional mentoring (individual mentoring) – mentor and mentee are selected in pairs: one mentor and one mentee. Peer mentoring is often mentioned in the literature as a variation of traditional mentoring (Ragins and Kram, 2007; Stokes and Merrick, 2013).
- Group mentoring (one mentor and a few mentees). This mentoring model generally matches a senior leader with multiple mentees within the organization (Dixon, Sontag and Vappie, 2012).

Sometimes in the literature team mentoring is discriminated – one mentor might take on a whole group of mentees; a group of mentors might take one or more mentees; or team members might mentor each other (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002).

- Mutual mentoring – involves the assumption that different generations of employees become each other’s mentors or teachers, thus ensuring mutual substantive and organizational support in the workplace as well as a natural transfer of knowledge and experience in a given organization (Baran, 2014). It focuses on the differences of experience, understanding and attitudes as mentor and mentee learn about each other’s worlds (Alfred and Garvey, 2006). The mutu-

ality of mentoring has also been noted by Higgins et al. (Higgins, Chandler and Kram, 2007).

- Reverse mentoring (inverse relationship – mentee teaches mentor). It implies a mentoring relationship between a mentor and a mentee in which the mentor is on a lower hierarchical level than the mentee; i.e. when a more junior person possesses skills, knowledge or experience that will be helpful to a hierarchically more senior employer (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002).
- E-mentoring (on-line mentoring) – mentoring contact via the internet (e-mail, chat rooms), telephone. It is flexibly ensuring the viability of continued mentoring support for mobile workforces; mentees who have, for instance, relocated abroad can stay in touch with their home mentor (Ragins and Kram, 2007; Garvey et al., 2009; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002).

Contrasting models of mentoring were widely presented in the literature by Meggison, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garrett-Harris (Meggison et al., 2008).

Regardless of which form and what type of mentoring is implemented in the enterprise, a mentor is always an experienced individual who provides non-linear assistance to another individual with the aim of transforming their knowledge, work or thinking (Meggison and Clutterbuck, 1995; Ragins, 2011). The mentor’s main goal is to support the personal and professional development of mentees (Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002), and to

Table 1. Comparison of business mentoring and developmental mentoring

Patronage mentoring	Developmental mentoring
1. Mentor is usually external to the company.	1. Mentor has more experience in the field in which he or she teaches the mentee.
2. Mentor gives and protégé takes.	2. Mutual benefits – mutual development.
3. Mentor actively supports mentee in the business field.	3. Mentor helps mentee to work independently.
4. Mentor shares knowledge with protégé.	4. Mentor helps the mentee to enrich his or her knowledge.
5. Mentor directs mentee in acquiring experience – mentee improve business skills and knowledge.	5. Mentor helps the mentee in making discoveries, by which the latter can manage his or her own development.
6. The main aim of mentoring is to save a business form mistakes.	6. The main aim of mentoring is personal development, which can lead to professional success.

Source: the author’s work based on Meggison et al. (2008); Cull (2006); Parcell and Scheyvens (2015).

provide the assistance necessary for them to become the people that they want to be (Parsloe, 1992). Mentors create relationships with their mentees with the goal of expanding their skills, which, in turn, allows them to pursue their chosen career paths, based on leadership, learning and providing stimulation and inspiration to the mentees. Mentors are required to share their opinions and advice that are built upon their professional experience, knowledge, skills and know-how. Mentors often become involved in decision-making processes, provide advice, but do not make the final decisions themselves even if they are not happy with their mentees' choices (Baran, 2016).

Mentors may perform a variety of roles within an organization depending on the intended purpose of mentoring, its goal, the type of relationship and the needs of the mentees. Three mentor roles are the most often listed in scientific works on the subject: the specialist, the advisor, and the consultant – each at different stages of the mentee's professional career (Parsloe, 2000; Parsloe and Wray, 2002). So what is the difference between the role of mentor and other specialists or experts in the organization? The answer to this question is presented in the following table 2.

The mentor, as well as other experts in the enterprise, is responsible for the process in which they are involved, but only the mentor and coach do not take responsibility for the resulting outcome of their work. Most experts in the company have developmental expertise and share it with their protégés with the exception of the consul-

tant whose task is to provide only substantive expertise on the service. It is worth noting that in the above group of experts only the mentor and supervisor use both substantive and developmental expertise as part of their function. Comparing the kind of relationship they have with other employees, the mentor has the closest and friendliest relationship which can be informal or formal; the coaching relationship, by contrast, is usually neutral and informal; and finally the consultant and supervisor have a formal relationship, which is also top-down hierarchical.

The mentor can also play a negative role. Negative mentoring experiences in the enterprise are noted in various studies (Eby, McManus, Simon and Russell, 2000; Klasen and Clutterbuck, 2002; Megginson, Clutterbuck, Garvey, Stokes and Garrett-Harris, 2008). These problems include:

- Promotion of elitism,
- Exclusion of people on the basis of social bias,
- Manipulation,
- Excessive commitment of mentee to mentor resulting in a dependent relationship,
- Transfer of excessive obligations to mentee,
- Unethical behavior,
- No positive performance changes,
- Lack of trust between mentor and mentee,
- Sexual/racial/disability discrimination.

Sometimes the behavior of the mentor can also be seen as deceitful, sabotaging and harassing (Eby, McManus, Simon and Russell, 2000).

Table 2. Comparison of different roles in companies

Employees with different roles in the company	Responsibility		Expertise		Characteristics of relations with other employees in the company
	for the process	for the result	substantive	developmental	
Mentor					close, friendly (informal or formal)
Coach					neutral and informal
Specialist					relation via a topic, sometimes hierarchical
Advisor					relation via a topic, informal
Consultant					formal
Superior					hierarchical, official and formal

Source: the author's work based on Coachwise S.A. (2013).

Therefore, we should take into consideration what kind of mentors successfully fulfill their role within the company. Also, which competencies are key for a good mentor. An attempt to answer the above question is presented in the next section.

4. Analysis of Mentors' Competences

Defining competence as knowledge, experience and attitudes – manifested in behavior that makes it possible to carry out tasks on a set expected level and that influences the effectiveness of the employee's performance in a given job position – the author has attempted to determine the competence set necessary to complete tasks in accordance with the standards of an organization. It has been defined based on activities described using a 5-point scale (Filipowicz, 2002):

- 1 – A given competency has not been internalized. No behaviors attest to it having been internalized in the course of observed action.
- 2 – Internalizing the competency on a basic level. It is being used on an irregular basis. Support and supervision of more experienced individuals is required.
- 3 – The competency has been internalized well, which allows the individual to

independently use it in a practical manner when performing work tasks.

- 4 – The competency has been internalized very well, which allows the individual to carry out tasks in a given area to a very high standard and share their experience with others.
- 5 – The competency has been perfectly internalized. The individual has the ability to creatively use their knowledge and broaden it, as well as acquire the skills and attitudes associated with a given area of activity.

This defined competence set was used when attempting to determine what behaviors are exhibited by good mentors. The objective of studying 40 mentors and their environment (including their mentees and superiors) was to determine the scope and level of necessary competences of a good mentor within an organization. Therefore, the study involved verifying whether the mentors who took part in it possessed each of the competences (of the 15 included in the set) and, if so, on what level (rated on a 5-point scale) (for further information on the research see Baran, 2016).

The competence profile of a mentor was devised on the basis of a competence study carried out on a sample of 40 mentors (Fig. 1). Among the mentors, 70% were females and 30% were males. About 43% were in the age range of 46–60,

Figure 1. Competence set of a good mentor



Source: the author's work.

38% in the age range of 31–45, and 20% were aged over 60. About 60% of mentors had worked in the business for more than or equal to 6 years and less than 11 years, 40% had worked for more than 10 years.

According to the respondents, the following are the most important among the 15 competences that form the competence profile of a good mentor: how well information is shared (received a 4.28 grade on a 5-point scale), helping others, sharing information, sharing knowledge and assigning tasks. Other key competences of a mentor include: sharing experience, cooperation, encouraging others to be independent, conversation skills and respecting the knowledge and skills of others. Mentors wishing to perfect their skills should also be able to draw conclusions for the future. They should be able to command respect from their teams, listen to others (mentees) and take their opinion into consideration.

4.1. Gender-Based Mentor Analysis

The analyses that were carried out also included a comparison between the distribution of the analyzed competences among the male and female subjects included in the study. The results of the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test demonstrate that the only significant differences between the sexes were observed in the area of “Helping others” and “Commanding respect from the team” (Table 3).

According to this study, females scored better in both of these competences, i.e. female mentors engage more in helping others than male mentors. Female mentors are also more skilled than male mentors at building respect among the employees and mentees. No significant differences between the sexes were observed within the areas of other competences.

4.2. Age-Based Mentor Analysis

The analyses that were carried out also included calculating Spearman’s rank cor-

Table 3. Comparison between the distribution of the analyzed competences among males and females (the results of the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test)

Competencies	Females – averages	Males – averages	Statistical significance*
Commanding respect from the team	3.96	3.00	0.006
Helping others	4.27	3.38	0.017
Sharing knowledge	4.08	3.36	0.152
Cooperation	4.00	3.50	0.220
How well the information is shared	4.38	4.00	0.236
Sharing experience	4.08	3.75	0.327
Conversation skills	3.96	3.38	0.327
Assigning tasks	4.04	3.75	0.413
Listening to others	3.85	3.5	0.436
Respecting the knowledge and skills of others	3.88	3.75	0.618
Supporting the development of others	3.46	3.25	0.676
Sharing information	4.00	4.13	0.735
Encouraging others to be independent	3.96	3.75	0.765
Taking the opinions of others into consideration	3.73	3.63	0.796
Drawing conclusions for the future	3.68	3.75	1.000

* Correlations are statistically significant for $p \leq 0.05$.

Source: the author's work.

Table 4. Correlation for the “mentor’s age category” variable and each of the competences

Competences	The results of Spearman’s rank correlation	Statistical significance*
Conversation skills	0.464	0.003
Helping others	0.384	0.016
Assigning tasks	0.354	0.027
Sharing knowledge	0.323	0.045
Cooperation	0.296	0.064
How well the information is shared	0.294	0.660
Drawing conclusions for the future	0.280	0.084
Supporting the development of others	0.278	0.082
Sharing information	0.250	0.120
Commanding respect from the team	0.250	0.126
Sharing experience	0.238	0.139
Respecting the knowledge and skills of others	0.216	0.180
Taking the opinions of others into consideration	0.200	0.215
Listening to others	0.194	0.229
Encouraging others to be independent	0.068	0.676

* Correlations are statistically significant for $p \leq 0.05$.

Source: the author’s work.

relation coefficient for the “mentor’s age category”¹ variable and each of the competences. The following competences proved to be correlated with the age of mentors: helping others, sharing knowledge, conversation skills, assigning tasks (Table 4).

The direction of dependence was the same for all significant correlations, i.e. the higher the mentor’s age, the higher the competence was graded. The “Conversation skills” and “Helping others” competences were the most strongly correlated with age.

4.3. Seniority/Experience-Based Analysis

The analyses that were carried out also included calculating Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient for the “mentor’s seniority”² variable and each of the competences (Table 5).

The variable correlation analysis allowed us to observe a high and statistically significant correlation between seniority and the “Conversation skills” and “Supporting the

development of others” competences. It should be noted that a strong correlation was also present between seniority and the “Cooperation” competence. All of the correlations are positive, which means that the longer the seniority, the higher the grades that were assigned to individual competences.

5. Conclusion

The mentoring process is characteristic for organizations that attach great importance to matters of human resource development. Mentoring can be found in all shapes and sizes – ranging from formalized structures to loosely formed relationships – resulting in the retention of the most valuable employees within the firm, and providing the transfer of knowledge, skills and experience among employees. The effectiveness of the process depends largely on the competence of the mentor, because he or she is responsible for build-

Table 5. Correlation for the “mentor’s seniority” variable and each of the competences

Competences	The results of Spearman’s rank correlation	Statistical significance*
Conversation skills	0.351	0.026
Supporting the development of others	0.330	0.037
Cooperation	0.311	0.051
Assigning tasks	0.300	0.063
Respecting the knowledge and skills of others	0.293	0.066
Sharing experience	0.286	0.073
Helping others	0.280	0.084
How well the information is shared	0.277	0.083
Sharing knowledge	0.257	0.114
Sharing information	0.240	0.135
Drawing conclusions for the future	0.232	0.155
Taking the opinions of others into consideration	0.220	0.173
Commanding respect from the team	0.195	0.235
Encouraging others to be independent	0.151	0.352
Listening to others	0.148	0.363

* Correlations are statistically significant for $p \leq 0.05$.

Source: the author’s work.

ing a relationship with the mentees and their personal and professional development (Baran, 2016). High quality of that process requires a clearly defined role, competence and experience of the mentor (Parsloe, 2000).

The results of the conducted studies confirm that all of the 15 defined competences are important for the mentor to successfully fulfill their role within the organization. According to the respondents, the most important are: how well information is shared, helping others, sharing information and knowledge, assigning tasks, sharing experience and cooperation. The variable correlation analysis showed that in this group, female mentors engage more in helping others than male mentors. Female mentors are also more skilled than male mentors at building respect among the employees and mentees. Some competences proved to be correlated with the age of mentors – the higher the mentor’s age, the better the conversation skills and

the more help was afforded to others. The competence study also allowed the author to observe a strong positive correlation between seniority and conversation skills, the “supporting the development of others” competence and as well as the cooperation competence.

6. Limitations

To examine the competence of mentors the author used the 360 degrees method. Its big advantage is its ability to access opinions about the person concerned (the mentor), namely the largest group of people who can accurately assess their way of behaving (Juchnowicz, 1998; Bugalska, 2011). Thus, the information was acquired from various sources, not only from the mentor’s direct superior, but also from his or her mentees. Every mentor pointed to their manager and one of their mentees as a group of people who would take part in the research. It is therefore possible to

obtain inflated ratings in the competencies scale. The results of the study – despite the proven statistically significant correlation between the mentor’s competencies and their gender, age or seniority – have not been generalized, since only a group of 40 mentors has been examined.

7. Implications

The research results presented in this article are only a prelude to a further analysis because in the Polish literature on the subject the aspect of implementing mentoring in companies has not yet been explored. The conclusions of this analysis provide a basis for more extensive research and the development of practical recommendations for HR managers.

Footnotes

- ¹ The “mentor age” variable was measured on an ordinal scale using age categories: below 25 years old, 26–30 years old, 31–45 years old, 46–60 years old, over 60 years old.
- ² The “mentor’s seniority” variable was measured in years.

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