



MENTORING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Dr. Ileana HAMBURG, Institute for Work and Technology, FH Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Prof. Dr. BREIPOHL Winrich, Institute for Work and Technology, FH Gelsenkirchen, Germany

Abstract

Mentoring is a complex process involving not just guidance and suggestion, but also the development of autonomous skills, judgments, personal and professional mastership. Expertise, trust and the development of self-confidence over the time. It is particularly important for people with disabilities to support them to integrate into social and work society.

This article has four parts. Part one gives a very brief historical introduction on mentoring. In part 2 of this paper, we shortly describe the Diversity Coach who will train the Mentor and the mentoring process planned within the Leonardo da Vinci project (<http://www.lebenshilfe-guv.at/ibb2>) coordinated by Lebenshilfe Austria and IAT being one of the partners. The model will be transferred also to the learning partnership Clintev (www.clintev.eu) being adapted for people with communication difficulties. In part 3, we present the competences of a mentor in light of personal and professional requirements. In the last part (4), a proposal is outlined for a Web-based system supporting, the mentoring process and the training processes for the Diversity Coach and the Mentor and offering community services.

1 Introduction

Mentoring has been used in Europe for long time. Mentor was the man Odysseus entrusted his kingdom to when he went to the Trojan wars. In classical Greece, young men often lived with more experienced elders to learn not simply knowledge but, in addition, skills and attitudes. Mentoring relationship was also evident in the Guilds of mediaeval Europe and the forms of apprenticeship that evolved from them.

Mentoring is a complex process involving not just guidance and suggestion, but also the development of autonomous skills, judgments, personal and professional mastership. Expertise, trust and the development of self-confidence over the time.

Persons with special needs, i.e., with disabilities, often do not have the possibility to work in their preferred professions. As a rule, they must take any job offered or they stay unemployed. On the other hand, factors such as the demographic change increase the request of employees in some sectors, e.g., in Germany, in the care sector, nursing professions and social sector, giving also new chances to persons with special needs [4]. But the integration of persons with special needs requires a



good counseling of them and mentors "on the job" offering them a "natural support" at the work place [7]. Thus, the improvement of the careers of mentor and counselors for people with disabilities is a topic of two European projects worked by the IAT in cooperation with partners from Europe and abroad.

The career of mentors for people with disabilities does not (yet) exist in Germany and neither in the partner countries of two projects we will describe below. As mentors, the project takes into consideration employees of the companies' that will offer the future working places for disabled persons. Mentors will be trained by a Diversity Coach.

On the job (or workplace) mentoring like in IBB2 [3], has been identified as an important aspect of work-based learning. It includes the accompanying, career advancement and natural support of an employee (mentee) through an experienced colleague (mentor), in order to achieve some determined goals of mutual benefit for both, the mentee and employer. The mentors transfer their knowledge and experience to the mentees and support them continuously in their professional environment and development, including thought, social integration in the organization and optimal utilization of the mentees professional resources.

The advantages of involving companies' employees as mentors are obvious. The companies' employees know the work processes, are used to the working environment and can estimate the hazards and situations which could be challenges to disabled persons. A further advantage is the development of a trust situation between the colleagues, which later is the basis for the daily work. In that way, the mentor acts in a twofold role being colleague on the one hand, and being mentor, on the other hand. Such a procedure ensures a smooth transition of the disabled person from mentee to employee.

The mentor for the disabled person also acts in the company in the interest of his/her mentee by supporting her/him with answering questions or helping in the accomplishments of practical abandonments. To cover all the needs of such a mentor training, the model differentiates between theoretical and practical modules. The modules can be broadened or shortened for optimization with regard to the future operational area, the mentee's skills, knowledge and nature of disablement.

2 Diversity Coach and Mentoring on the job of people with disabilities

The Diversity Coach (DC) in IBB2 has to define an appropriate functional matrix to enable mentors in their dealings with citizens and individuals or groups of people in special need for support. This functional shaping demand must include various job or other outer demands in understandable, acceptable and meaningful terms. It must be in balance with the outer and inner individual settings of the mentor, the mentee, the job colleagues, the employer and other persons or features meeting in this realm.

The task for the DC is to transparently instruct and enable mentors acting for social inclusion and integration of people with special needs, for active participation of them according to their individual ability, character, temperament and talent development in line with general rights plus sustainable cultural need developments or mission statements (e.g. EUROPE 2020 visions) for keeping in awareness of the employers and employing institution's interests and musts for contributing to social cohesion and respective values in society [9].

A description of the tasks and involvements of DC, Mentor and Mentee in the mentoring process as planned in IBB2 is shown in Figure 1 and Table 2. The description is also based on the VOCA2 model (www.leonardodavinci-projekte.org/prj/7327/project_7327_en.pdf).

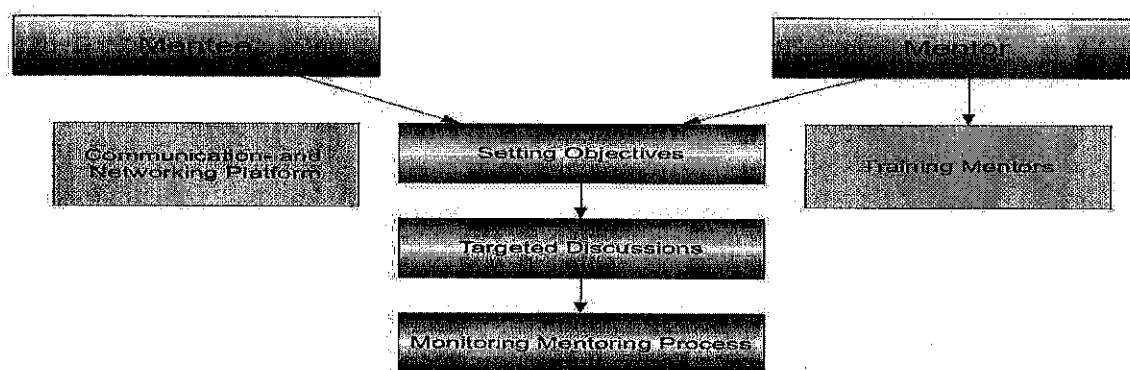


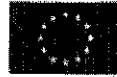
Figure 1: Mentoring process

Source: IAT, ESF

Mentoring can be established for a number of reasons [1], [2]. Mentoring has traditionally been informal and self-selected. The nature of mentoring is “friendly”, “collegially”. Mentoring also has to operate within professional and ethical frameworks. It should remain voluntary and subject to mutual agreement. Mentoring is not just about solving problems. However, problems often underlie a decision to seek mentoring.

Table 2: VOCA2 approach

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Tools</i>
Lead (Start)	Build trust Mentoring agreement Active listening Goal setting
Follow up (Intermediate)	Conversation (proactive goal setting) Power questions Action plans
Get out of the way (Completion)	Feedback



In recent years there was much debate about the difference and links between mentoring and coaching in support of people with special needs. In the VOCA2 approach, the role of a mentor should include:

- Building a positive outcome primed relationship between all involved
- Setting objectives/action plans
- Facilitating change
- Recognizing success
- Empowering/encouraging/motivating of people with special need
- Defining in writing expectations for all involved
- Record keeping and monitoring the mentoring and coaching processes

The company can have benefits from mentoring by a quick introduction of the Mentee into formal and informal company structures and demands, dissemination of technical or internal knowledge, training of social competence of the mentee and the mentor.

Mentees have the opportunity:

- to meet with a trusted person to enter into a work place quickly and to cope with initial problems to discuss and resolve emerging job problems of genuine nature and in relation to the individual needs
- to learn setting realistic goals and achieving them
- to enhance their skills and thus their future career opportunities and prospects in the future
- to build relationships or interactions allowing them to secure, maintain and advance in the job choosing a way that corresponds to the work routines and social actions of other employees
- to receive (and contribute to) natural support, meaning: booming linked to existing social supports in the work environment.

The training means for the mentors the enhancement of their leading and counseling skills, development of their role within the company, possibility to share their professional experiences with others, exchange with other mentors by using, e.g., a Web-based system to support mentoring (WBMCS see part 3 of this paper).

In connection with the work place fellows (team), the mentor has to inform and actively involve them with regard to the mentee and the various aspects of the mentoring process and its goals prior to the arrival of a mentee and constantly thereafter. Apart from knowledge transfer communication with the team must include building solidarity, empathy and preparedness to actively take over responsibilities.

Additional duties of the mentor include: informing and actively involving together with the job coach the employer on the outcome of the mentoring process and the performance of the mentees. From the very beginning onwards, it is crucial to actively engage the employer into the mission and the various aspects of the mentoring process and its goals. Apart from knowledge transfer, this must focus on



building solidarity, empathy and preparedness to take over responsibilities and eventually to consider further spin offs at the work place and beyond.

3 Competences and skills of a mentor

To be a mentor requires having:

- social competences (particularly interest, motivation, awareness, (verbal and non-verbal) communication, aptitude, empathy and engagement skills)
- professional competence (responsibility standards in knowledge and skill)
- operating competences according to ethical and professional standards and to know the boundaries when engaging with mentees.

Mentors also need to be strongly focused, principled and able to develop empathy with the perspectives of others.

In the following, we explain these competences (<http://www.soft-skills.com/sozialkompetenz/nonverbalesensibilitaet/koerpersprache.php>).

If a mentor has no special interest or motivation, no empathy, aptitude and engagement for his/her mentees or for the job, no appropriate mentoring and job outcomes are possible.

Provided all these feature are apparent, next then communication is a central issue. There are skills that enable people to verbally or averbally communicate effectively with one another. Basis to all communication aspects is active listening and overcoming any barriers to communication (<http://www.problem-solving-techniques.com/Listening-Barriers.html>).

Some key elements of active listening are to pay attention, show that you are listening, provide feedback, defer judgment, respond appropriately and respect and understand the speaker.

Barriers to communication can be solved by minimizing stress factors and avoiding noise, visual and any other sensory distraction.

On top, the mentor must assure solving other interfering conflicts/problems (<http://www.highscope.org/Content.asp?ContentId=284>). Best appears a step-wise approach in calmly stopping any hurtful actions, acknowledging the individual's feelings; gathering information, restating the problem; asking for ideas for solutions and jointly choosing a solution; and being prepared for up support.

Any mentor must have also professional COMPETENCES under 6 main aspects with special reference to the area he becomes active in. This includes:

1. Basic knowledge about sheltered work places and of legislation affecting disabled people
2. Success recognizing
3. Motivation, empowerment considering family, services, and community.
4. Mastering routine work.



5. Developing a personal technique that makes it possible to deal with the everyday routine, but also makes it possible to deal with events that are not every day routine.
6. These competences and skills will be exemplified by using concrete cases.

When working in Europe, intercultural competence in social and employment settings become more and more essential [5]. This applies to both: working in an intercultural context in one's own country (e.g., in a multicultural work place team, in organizations and policy developments) or abroad. The respective multifaceted know-how and its appropriate implementation are called intercultural competence.

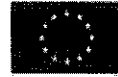
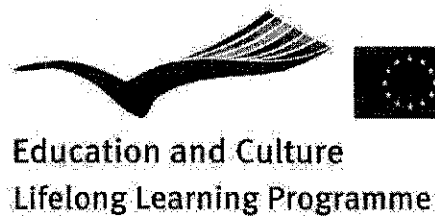
Intercultural competence does not refer to a set of methods and techniques with which one can change the own actions as culturally more appropriate. It refers to a "holistic" competence which is realized in all significant levels of mentoring process and on top pays special attention to features like language, wordings and modes of expression, traditions and family, value of tolerance, legislations, religion, gender and nutrition.

Intercultural competence does not ask to behave like someone else or imitate another culture, but to learn actively about the valuing and traditional bounds of people you are mentoring/working/learning/coaching with for effective collaboration and communication (www.uq.edu.au). One important step is to develop openness for differences, for example, understanding that culture is not static, that the cultural context is changing. The ability to operate across many types of boundaries, real and virtual ones, is helpful. A key for developing intercultural competences is to respect and understand diversity and grounds of discrimination.

Intercultural differences in learning groups/communities call particularly for intercultural competences of mentors/trainers/diversity coaches within learning processes [6]. The role of the moderator in a learning group/community with many cultures is a crucial one; she/he should observe conversations, give advice and try to be a mediator between cultures. However, the challenge of different cultures also affects the role of participants. They also need a good deal of sensitivity and awareness of participants prejudices (and also their own), to be prepared for collaborating with people from a different background.

In connection with the prevailing languages tackling interculturality in language reproducing stereotypes or showing bias against groups of people should be avoided. The use of inappropriate language has the potential to damage the credibility of the moderator/trainer and alienates the learners.

Intercultural dialog can be used not only to develop a sense of community, but can also be used as a tool for the prevention and resolution of conflicts by enhancing the respect for human rights, democracy and law.



The mentor/mentee relationship should always consist of respect, empathy, genuineness and warmth. However, cultural diversity can challenge such a relationship. Mentors can be trained to face such challenges successfully. For example, the mentor can:

- be open with the mentee and initiate conversations about the above named 7 issues related to their culture, as well as, being honest about issues related to their own. The mentor should appreciate the difficulty of sharing such beliefs and experiences with others and remember to listen without becoming defensive;
- research the mentees culture. Magazines and newspapers targeted to particular communities can provide insight into that community;
- take on the task of learning a language native to the mentee's culture, if appropriate. The mentee can teach the mentor, or the two of them can learn it together;
- participate in cultural traditions with the mentee.

4 ICT supported training and mentoring

An ICT-based system, particularly a Web-based system, to support mentoring and diversity coach training (WBMCS) allows mentors, diversity, job coaches and mentees to learn on-line, to communicate and collaborate, and to share knowledge and other different pathways to assess learning processes. WBMCS can be described as learning delivery environments in which the www is its medium of delivery (Neville et al., 2002). Social media, particularly based on Web 2.0, i.e., media which supports social interaction, can be used to develop such systems. Social media can take many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs and wikis.

The technical skills needed to use social media are rather low. Blog software, for example, can replace sophisticated and costly content management systems. It enables content providers from reporters, writers, educators to concentrate on their content without bothering too much about the underlying technicalities. It is even faster and less demanding to communicate through social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and others. Another important characteristic communication feature of such applications and "spaces" is the decreasing difference, such as the one between teachers and taught, between formal and informal learning processes, between education and knowledge acquisition/management. This gives rise to new integrated and world-wide forms of learning, e.g., in "Communities of Practice". Here, a community based on shared interests, learns in a community of equals by exchanging expertise and experience without building a hierarchy, because any of the participants is considered teacher and taught at the same time. A low-cost and easy access virtual room to accommodate formal and informal learning practices, group collaboration and the gathering and exchanging of learning materials might be realized in an e-learning environment based on the Social media tool TikiWiki CMS Groupware we use for our WBMCS prototype.



This prototype should support the following processes in a Community of Practice:

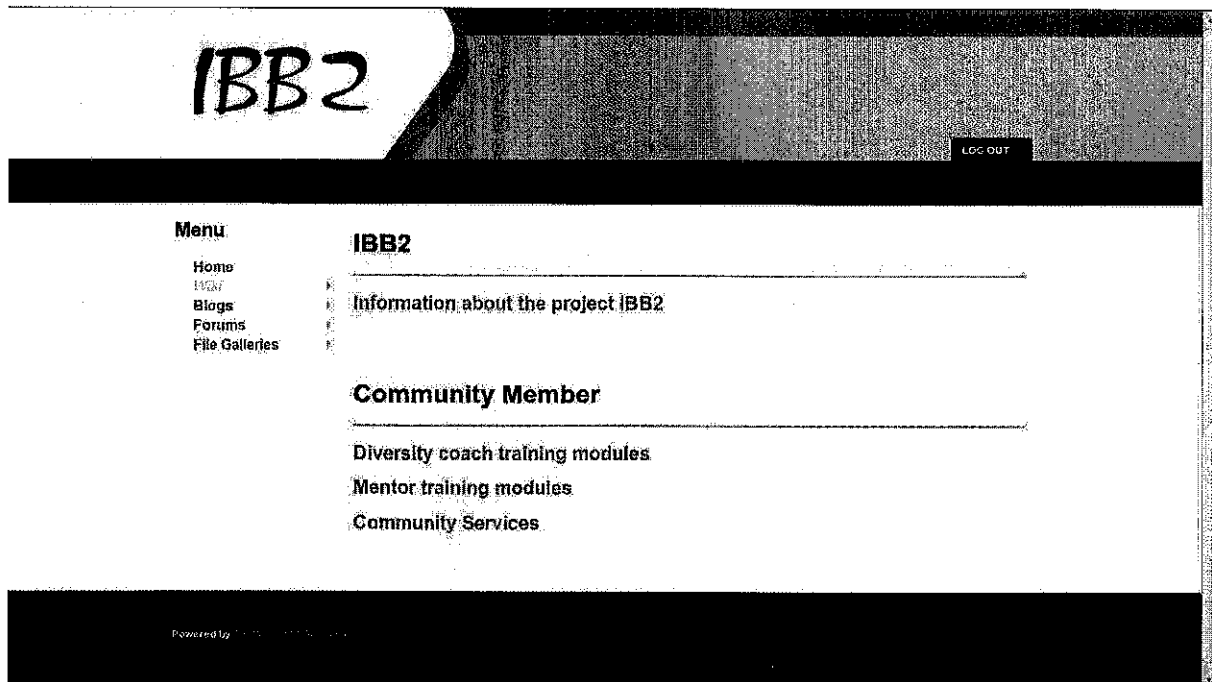
- Training of the Diversity Coach
- Training of mentors
- Mentoring process including also mentee learning

TikiWiki CMS Groupware, originally and more commonly known as TikiWiki or simply Tiki, is a free and open source wiki-based content management system written primarily in PHP and distributed under the GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL) license.

Web-based supported mentoring has a number of benefits including:

- Provision of a 24 hour access for training material and communication
- Accessible anywhere with internet availability
- Provision of a platform that does not require face-to-face communication
- Learning assessment and progress of the mentor/mentee relationship can be monitored.

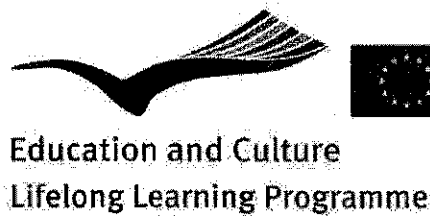
Our WBMCS prototype is developed to support these aspects.



Source: IAT www.IBB2.com

Figure 2: WBMCS prototype

Training material is available online, but in addition, a discussion forum for each module enables learners and trainers/experts to exchange and add ideas to the environment. This allows



learners to provide feedback (anonymously, if desired) to the experts. It also enables them to pose queries to which other participants or the experts can answer. All participants are able to see the initial queries and the discussion stream of answers from other participants and the instructors.

This ICT supporting approach accounts for the varying learning abilities of students and overcomes the limitations of traditional training environments which are restricted to rules in order to adequately facilitate the group. The WBMCS, when adequately designed, can reduce the limitations of the classroom and allow the learner to work at his or her own space with structured support from both, the educators and the other learners.

Experience from other projects demonstrates the need for a constant presence of the mentors in the WBMCS. A trust relationship has to be established online, if the WBMCS will be used in the project on a regular basis by the mentors and mentees. The WBMCS should support the motivation and retain students in the learning process. The WBMCS should be used in a context so that personal issues, which are not suitable for the online environment, do not become accessible for all. The WBMCS should support real mentoring and not be understood as a supervisory tool.

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Lifelong Learning Programme

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