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The Role of Mentoring in Entrepreneurship Training PREMIO Case Study

In company foundation and development, not just in entrepreneurial training, mentoring has an important place. The relation of mentoring is a win-win one, with advantages for both parties: mentee and mentor. Mentoring transmit and/or complete competences, skills and abilities that are not acquired through the classical education system. The paper presents practical tips to construct and enforce a productive mentoring system, starting with the mentor(s) selection to the outputs and process evaluation.

Keywords: education, mentoring, entrepreneurship

1. Introduction

The mentoring process and the involved parties is defined by Eric Parsloe (The Oxford School of Coaching & Mentoring) as: „Mentoring is to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximize their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be” [1]. The relation between mentor and mentee represents a partnership of two peoples working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences, based upon respect and trust. The mentor has to guide the mentee in helping to find the right direction, to develop solutions in carries issues and boost the confidence. Through, asking questions and challenging, providing guidance and encouragement, the mentor allows the mentee to explore new ideas, opportunities, becoming more self-aware, rather than leaving it to chance.

2. Mentoring relationship: mentor - mentee

A well prepared mentoring process in the context of an organization needs a thoughtful plan. Up drawing the schedule for the mentoring program, some initially elements have to be defined. The input should include aim definitions, desired out-

comes, time of program to run, mentors number and field of expertise, criteria's of selecting the right mentors, performance indicators for program and implementation evaluation. The advantages of the mentoring process, both mentor and mentee, are summarized in table 1.

Table 1. Mentor and mentee advantages [2]

The advantages of mentoring	
for the mentor	for the mentee
a catalyst to reflect upon one's own practice	provides a point of personal contact other than usual
a way of developing personal and professional skills further	provides a source of support and guidance
opportunities to network with other professionals	provides a critical friend with whom weaknesses can be explored and addressed and achievements shared and built upon
job satisfaction and increased self-esteem	provides regular meetings in which specific issues and ideas can be discussed and developed
new opportunities for career and professional development	provides a chance to explore teaching and learning in a non-assessed and non-threatening environment

Based on the information's highlighted in table 1, it can be seen that the relationship during the mentoring process is situated on the level of equals, the benefits of this one being mutual.

The mentoring relationship can be viewed as formal and informal. The informal one develops by itself, among partners, whereas a formal mentoring concerns to assigned collaboration. Informal mentoring is very common in organizations or institutions towards the formal mentoring, that has to be based on a legal frame, consist on a program elaborated to achieve certain targets and goals for given expectations and situations. Within the mentoring, a mentee can be guided by more mentors and a mentor can lead in the same time more mentees [3].

Considering a person that intends to start a commercial activity, besides the necessary financial power and a favorable legal and economic context, she/he needs specific competences and skills, from managerial to technical field. Those needs can be covered through consultancy in different fields but also motivation, with other words mentoring. For those who act to put the basis of a new company, the main inputs in the mentoring process are defined by the mentee, while as member of an organization the issues are defined to assure its liability.

The development of activities in the real world, or, if not possible in a virtual environment, has main importance in entrepreneurial training. As in each mentor-

ing activity, the mentor has also in entrepreneurial training a high importance. That's why the mentor's selection – expertise and number – is based in practice on two possible ways: mentors selection from the mentees connections or from the members of the organization and trough mentor's networks.

In the small or medium organizations, the human resource or the individual connections are limited, so that the mentor's network is appealed. So, in the Internet, a big offer of mentoring portals provides their mentorship for different interest domains.

The European Union recognized in the Implementation of the Entrepreneurship Action Plan, which had a huge outcome of Good Practices examples. For instance PREMIO, a Transnational European project, was developed by different partners from Portugal, Romania, Estonia and Greece, targeting potential innovators and entrepreneurs from this country. To achieve this goal, the focus was set on major concepts, as mentoring and Entrepreneurship training, strengthening the relationship between mentor and mentee for the success of both of.

3. PREMIO's concept and implementation

To make the training and courses available over World Wide Web, designed using sound pedagogical principles, to help educators create effective online learning communities, a virtual environment, supported through Moodle platform, which is a free and open-licensed learning management system (LMS) package for producing internet - based courses and web sites, was created.

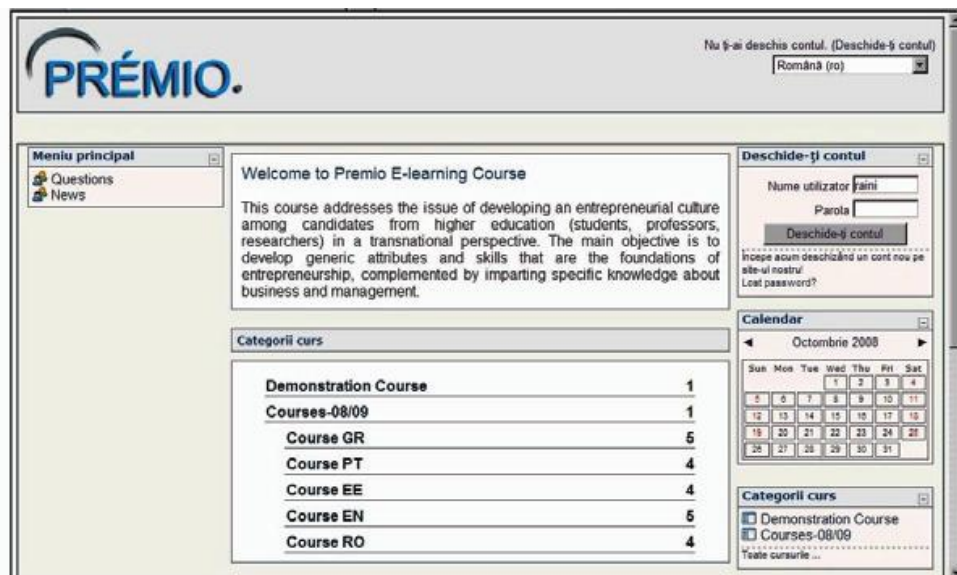


Figure 1. Courses on the platform in different languages

The platform offers an excellent tool to organize task, work and coordination between the participant and the leader of the work lines [4]. We can recognize in this structure the way of teaching in a course: the administrator is the professor that sends tasks that have to be solved and on the other site, the students are the partners who have to do their "homework".

The training courses in PREMIO are targeted to all students, researchers and teaching staff from universities that want to transform an innovative idea into a technological start-up or spin off. The addressed issue is that of increasing an entrepreneurial culture through the candidates and this, in a transnational perspective, by developing skills and attributes that form the basis of entrepreneurship.

It is necessary to maintain mentoring and training of the entrepreneur, especially after the phase of the company launching, which is known, becomes for many a battle of survival. For this, in the pre-incubator each entrepreneur must receive motivational and training counseling and afterwards, based on an obligatory use of Communication and Information Technologies, be well prepared for the global market. This has to be done following a highly personalized and specialized training plan, well preparing the entrepreneurs to manage their business in all that will mean putting the business into practice. The entrepreneurial training implemented by PREMIO, offers the unique opportunity to lever entrepreneurial training for the stated group.

In order to achieve the entrepreneurial skills, PREMIO's learning platform is founded on well-grounded technological and didactic models; the mentees receive specific know-how, such business starting and running, drafting a business plan, methods to asses and identify opportunities in business.

The path from business ideas to putting those projects in practice and on the market are followed on case studies basis. The e-platform is designed to implement the "Learning by doing" concept, in an environment that fosters exchange, knowledge acquisition and the creation process of all those involved, providing a real learning experience.

The offered courses, covers following modules:

- Business-plan: elaborating business plan's; definition of implementing a work plan; viability of enterprise project: definition of business areas; Strategies for project implementation; financial analysis; legal and administrative procedures to the company constitution
- Financing: financing strategies (types of capital, access financing sources)
- Company: characteristic of the entrepreneur; motivation and development of characteristics of the entrepreneur
- Marketing: market definition and study; product's and their positioning on the market; commercial strategy
- Innovation: innovation management; innovation in products and organization; innovation and quality; creativity.

The course's material was performed following the steps [2]:

- a compelling (e.g., powerful quote, compelling story, etc.) at the introductory page that has to create a motivation for learning (explaining the interest in the module/lesson), including also the expected completion time for the module;
- the content, designed based on a “pedagogical model guide”, that offers the context for practice (relate to a job skill or concept in the introductory page), directly linked to learning goals, providing the feedback for practice applications; the activities for each lesson, designed to be individual or in group, include forum for discussions, case analysis, problem based learning, activities for content exploitation, questionnaires, links to proceed research activities.
- for each session and topic an detailed description, indicates the skills needed to be achieved, e.g. table 2.

Table 2. Contend of the detailed description table

Session Title	Hours	Skills		Activities	Pedagogical material	
		Hard	Soft		Ex.	Self-Assesments
Division of positions according to organization's structure and subdivision's tasks	1	Skill of calculation of optimal number of positions and number of employees	Organizing / Planning	Case study: establishing own company	Examples	No.

The PREMIO project, as a frame of a mentoring program, is thought to promote the development of business plans and used to be with in the pre-incubation phase. Mentoring aims to support the trainees in developing sustainable business plans, leading to establish successful enterprises.

The mentor has a serious role to be supportive, developmental and facilitative. It is also important to note the mentoring relationships as being between equals: a mentor should have a supervisory responsibility but not authority over a mentee. Also, the definition of the mentoring relationship emphasizes that the benefits are mutual. The mentoring program developed in the PREMIO project, includes the definition of targets, the desired goals, running time for the program, establishing a timeline that allows proper preparation, planning, number and selection criteria's of mentees and mentors.

4. Conclusion

Mentoring becomes a global trend in entrepreneurship, anticipating creating common value, giving hope for better tomorrows. By building up an e-platform of entrepreneurship training and in doing so spreading seeds which may grow into thriving companies, a sustainable environment for the PREMIO's electronic platform users was developed, following the basic principles of mentoring.

Thereby a benefit for the trainee is the created added value in each portfolio, concerning entrepreneurial competence provided by the mentor. The target is that the learner has to be better prepared for good business start-up, as well as for innovation inside the companies. PREMIO fills the blank spot in reaching lifelong learning for the platform users, where investments in training and education are low.

References

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