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Structured Mentoring: A New Approach That Works

Performance

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Printed in the United States of America.

Mentoring for Success

An organization's success depends in great part on its talent—and on its ability to retain that talent. To win in the marketplace, organizations need to enable employees to continually grow and mature in the business. Mentoring is one way to support continued employee development and can be a powerful tool for improving the performance of both individuals and organizations. A good mentoring program can help retain high performers, improve job performance, reduce learning time, support knowledge sharing, as well as provide corporate socialization and networking. Carefully designed and implemented mentoring programs are a critical component of a comprehensive corporate learning initiative.

Mentoring permits personal and skills development that is not possible in any type of classroom or e-learning setting. In addition to providing opportunities to acquire valuable skills and knowledge, mentoring involves the transfer of business-related social skills and political savvy within the work context. A mentor can help a protégé take calculated risks—successfully—to enable the protégé to learn and grow, while the protégé gains insights about his or her own behavior and its impact on others.

A good mentoring program provides a risk-free environment in which a person can learn valued skills that will help him or her reach his or her full potential. Mentoring can provide a unique combination of information and perspective not available with other types of training delivery (for more information about mentoring, see the sidebar *What Is Mentoring?*). Corporate workplaces are places of constant change, requiring employees to upgrade their skills, rethink ways of working, and create and leverage intellectual capital.

Structured mentoring programs can help organizations support employee development in key areas critical to business success. For example, companies can reduce unwanted attrition by providing learning environments in which strong employees can "fast track" into positions of greater responsibility, learning both the necessary skills and knowledge as well as the social context and personal networking so critical to long-term success.

This *Infoline* describes a program of structured mentoring that will help your organization drive productivity in human performance, reduce

start-up time on new projects, and reduce errors in performance for the protégé. Structured mentoring is a process in which the mentor and protégé work together using carefully defined behavioral objectives, specific opportunities to perform the activities, a means of providing feedback, and a specified performance standard. The program also provides an opportunity to learn social skills that are important to a specific job context. Structured mentoring is time limited and focuses on improvements in both career-related and psychosocial skills development rather than on content as in many other learning activities.

You will learn how to start a structured mentoring program, which includes the following:

● establishing the need in your organization

● making a case for the program

● establishing a mentoring office to help select the "right" mentors and protégés

● making plans for communication and project management

● preparing for evaluation and continuous improvement

● implementation of the process.

This issue of *Infoline* also will identify critical success factors and provide important questions for a company determining whether this type of mentoring program is right for them. Finally, a case study describes the development, prototyping, and success of a structured mentoring program.

Establish the Need

The sidebar *Key Differences* compares structured mentoring and traditional mentoring programs. These key differences are important considerations when your organization decides whether a structured mentoring program will meet its needs. To establish what kind of program your organization needs, consider the following situations for which structured mentoring programs tend to be

What Is Mentoring?

Before going into what mentoring is, the following will clear up some misconceptions about mentoring and mentoring programs.

Mentoring is not:

- an opportunity for an experienced employee or manager to tell a protégé what to do

- a one-way relationship in which all benefits accrue to the protégé

- a working relationship without difficulties or challenges

- a working relationship in which the more experienced person always has the skill sets

- a substitute for other types of learning through classrooms, e-learning, and personal networks.

Mentoring is not for everyone, and a mentoring program will not solve all your training needs. However, it is an ongoing process that provides an opportunity for a mentor to share skills; knowledge; and, most important, experience with a protégé. Mentoring differs from other types of supportive relationships often found in organizations, such as coaching. Coaching is more long-range career oriented; it involves understanding the context of the organization: politics, business, who owns the power, and how to optimize it. Mentoring is more job or performance related, which explains why a structured approach is more successful. Mentoring is tactical while coaching is strategic. Mentoring is relationship-based learning in which the mentor and protégé work toward a common goal and both benefit from the experience.

Mentoring is seldom a one-way process. Benefits for mentors include recognition for their knowledge, experience, and business savvy. In addition, they also learn from their protégés. In turn, protégés gain new experiences required for successful job performance, a sounding board for their ideas, a personal network within the company as well as within one's profession, and career guidance. According to S.F. Schultz's "Benefits of Mentoring" and F.M. Stone's *Coaching, Counseling, and Mentoring,*

many protégés also experience a greater sense of personal awareness, increased visibility in the company, and personal growth.

However, mentors and protégés are not the only ones to benefit from mentoring. The organization also gains. Organizational benefits include identification of effective and productive role models, facilitated new employee orientation, faster time to new employee productivity, and establishment of organizational socialization and personal networks that encourage employees to remain with the organization, according to M.L. Otto's "Mentoring: An Adult Developmental Perspective."

Mentoring can take several forms, from an informal relationship in which a mentor helps a protégé learn a specific task to a long-term relationship in which a mentor provides advice and support to a protégé over a period of several years. Most corporations today have some type of mentoring program; many provide guidelines for being effective mentors and protégés. There is mentoring:

- that is spontaneous and informal, as when a new employee asks the advice of a more experienced employee; as the pair works together, the experienced employee may see promise in the new employee and continue to provide support

- that is set up by management that focuses on ensuring that the protégés complete corporate activities such as obtaining performance reviews, completing skill self-assessments, or formulating personal objectives for the year; for many of these programs, follow-through by both mentors and protégés is highly variable

- for employees whose performance does not meet standards

- for employees identified as early career leaders on a fast track up the corporate ladder

- for new hires, particularly within a department or business unit, where much corporate learning is needed in terms of on-the-job skills plus social or contextual skills.

more effective and efficient than traditional mentoring programs, or use the assessment tool in the job aid at the end of this *Infoline:*

- A person has just joined the company and needs to learn specific skills as well as the social context of the work (structured mentoring is particularly important for college new hires in this case).

- A person has changed jobs in the company and needs support in the transition, such as expanding a personal network to learn skills for the new position.

- A person has an identified skill deficit in a particular area.

- A person is being groomed for a promotion.

- The task is more than the sum of its parts, such as in consulting or management, where both knowledge and soft skills are critical to job success.

What do these situations have in common?

- The duration of the learning to demonstrate mastery of a particular set of learning objectives will be six months or less.

- There are specific skills, knowledge, and expertise (including social contextual skills and development of a personal network) for the protégé to acquire.

- The protégé is motivated to acquire the expertise quickly.

- The company has a vested interest in ensuring that the protégé succeed.

- Specific activities and experiences will address identified employee skill, knowledge, or performance gaps.

Make the Case for the Program

When you build a business case for a new program, it's important to document the predicted benefits of the program, particularly the expected return-on-investment (ROI). Predictive measurement provides valuable data to help make

Key Differences

The following presents some of the key differences between structured mentoring and traditional mentoring.

Structured Mentoring	Traditional Mentoring
• time limited, focused on the protégé's acquisition of a particular skill set, usually within a particular context	• long- or short-term, depending on needs of protégé and willingness and availability of mentor
• focused on specific behavioral objectives	• focused on career development and overall career performance from a long-term perspective and/or over a period of time
• clearly articulated expectations for both mentors and protégés	• used by corporations to assist employees in learning and adhering to certain corporate requirements
• planned activities created for the purpose of providing the protégé with an opportunity to learn specific skills in a specific context	• activities come up on the job that are not created specifically for the purpose of learning
• presence of a means for structured feedback from the mentor	• lack of structured means for feedback; feedback is provided, but the quality and quantity depends on the mentor
• active engagement of the protégé in reflection and self-assessment	• general absence of reflection and journaling; self-assessment may or may not be present, but mentor mostly provides feedback
• inclusion of an evaluation component to document business results	• metrics and an evaluation component may or may not be present

investment decisions. The data describes the relationship between individual performance and business results that will come from an employee participating in a structured mentoring program. The information is useful for establishing a business case for a structured mentoring program.

To determine the predicted ROI for a proposed program, estimate its costs and benefits and use this information in the following cost-benefit calculation:

$$([Benefit - Cost]/Cost) \times 100$$

To estimate the program costs of a structured mentoring program, consider staff costs and costs to set up the program (communication, project management, creating training materials, and so forth). You may need to interview several people to gather this information, but it's an important element of building a business case.

Then consider the anticipated business results (the benefits): What return will the company receive from an employee acquiring a skill more rapidly? What is the business value, for example, of good customer relationship skills in a consulting engagement? Work with your corporate learning organization to identify a variety of benefits and then quantify them.

Set Up the Mentoring Office

Establish a mentoring office by identifying the owner of the program within the organization. In a large organization, this may be a department or a business unit, and in a small organization, the training department may be the best fit. Identify a champion: a visible and committed leader who will help obtain the needed resources. You may want to start small—a part-time program manager and a part-time support person with project management skills—and then as the program grows and demonstrates meaningful business results, add staff. Functions of the mentoring office include the following:

● creating business and learning objectives

● determining criteria for mentor selection

● determining criteria for protégé selection

● identifying potential mentors

● training mentors on their responsibilities

● matching mentors and protégés

● creating the "tools": mentoring agreement, e-learning for protégés to learn to use the learning cycle, and so forth

● creating tracking and evaluation forms

● gathering evaluative information

● focusing on continuous improvement.

Create Plans

The next step is to create communication and project plans. Why is a communication plan important? A communication plan highlights the potential utility as well as the successes of the program as a way of creating awareness about it. Many employees can benefit from structured mentoring, but they must be made aware of its availability. Managers, too, must know about the program so they can direct employees to it, as needed. Furthermore, to work at all, the program needs access to people who can provide experiential learning activities, and these people need to understand the value of their participation. You can do this through a variety of communication vehicles, designed for key audiences. You can send managers an email that describes the program and its potential benefits to their direct reports. Potential protégés could receive the information from the company's intranet as well as targeted emails. If your training organization has a newsletter (paper or electronic), you can provide information through that vehicle. The champion of the program can call on second- and third-line managers to encourage their participation to nominate mentors.

A project plan details the activities required to plan and launch structured mentoring and serves as the basis for determining resource requirements to start and sustain the program. The sidebar *Critical Success Factors* at right provides a checklist to help ensure the success of the program.

Plan to Evaluate

To capture information about the effectiveness of the program, create an evaluation framework and

Critical Success Factors

The following are some critical success factors to ensure your program will be successful.

Overall Program

☐ corporate support with a focus on business results

☐ clearly defined program objectives and business impact statements

☐ focus on critical skill areas needed for transformation or skill growth to support business initiatives and goals

☐ program viewed as perk—whether employee is low or high performer

☐ measurable outcomes that are linked to corporate business results

☐ part of total corporate training or personal development program

☐ organizational advantages to being involved in the mentoring program; protégés get visibility leading to more desirable assignments, and mentors receive recognition

☐ advocate in human resources and/or the training organization

☐ overall program support as a corporate mission to support employee development

☐ built-in accountability—reporting outcomes in terms of both personal growth and business results

☐ organizational readiness

☐ effective strategies for matching mentors and protégés; the mentoring office must understand what protégés need to learn and be able to perform based on their request for mentoring; the mentoring office will need profiles of potential mentors to facilitate the matching process

☐ a proactive and ongoing communication plan with a focus on reciprocal benefits for mentors and protégés

Mentor or Protégé

☐ clearly defined roles and responsibilities of the mentors, protégés, and the company with expectations clearly stated

☐ trained, dedicated mentors

☐ training for protégés to help them create objectives and learn to implement the learning cycle, including journaling, self-assessment, and reflection

☐ clearly defined timeframe for each skill acquisition as part of mentoring agreement

☐ clearly defined, measurable learning objectives

☐ clearly defined performance levels and incentives for acquiring the new skill

☐ progress tracking

☐ environment in which a trusting relationship can be developed (for example, protégé is not a direct report of the mentor)

☐ appropriate training and support for mentor

☐ support for protégés in their work on reflection and interpretation and in understanding their experiences

☐ journaling, which may seem unnecessary, but is a critical part of reflection and of capturing in-process questions and needed clarification

☐ assertiveness of protégés in asking questions and asking for help when needed

plan for continuous improvement. Begin by defining success for the program. Because structured mentoring works best within a business unit or large department where there are common tasks and activities to be learned and performed, consider business results at this level.

Gather information from several different sources such as the following:

- mentor-protégé pairs

- supervisor input on skill growth and increased performance

- business results from protégés who have completed the program

- business results from the unit or department after several employees have gone through the structured mentoring process

- protégé input on what could have been more helpful

- mentor input on effectiveness and value added to the business.

Plan to gather evaluative information on a regular basis, including at the end of each protégé-mentor relationship and at least on a semi-annual basis for the business results for the program as a whole.

Implement the Process

Unlike traditional mentoring programs, a structured mentoring program works best when it is narrowly focused. A corporation may have more than one structured mentoring program to serve different purposes. You can use a structured mentoring program to address the needs of high performers (challenging growth assignments or broad exposure) or low performers (aggressive plans for improvement). Ideally, your organization should use the program for both, so it doesn't get a reputation as a support venue for employees with performance issues.

Use the following guidelines to set up your own structured mentoring program. The flowchart presented in the sidebar *Flowchart of the Structured Mentoring Process* at right illustrates the steps in the process.

Step 1. Identify Gaps

Structured mentoring begins by identifying a skills gap. This gap can be identified by a manager in a performance review, by an employee who understands what he or she needs to know based on experience on the job, or through a program for new hires designed to ensure that an employee has the right skills to perform successfully.

The identified skill gap does not have to relate to a performance deficit but can relate to planned career growth. For example, an employee might identify and eliminate a skill gap by performing experiential learning activities that would stretch him or her and facilitate his or her career growth. In the context of a structured mentoring environment, the employee can work on new tasks in a supportive, risk-free environment. Ideal protégés understand the need for learning a particular skill and are willing to participate thoughtfully. Structured mentoring requires a higher level of commitment and accountability from protégés than do other types of mentoring or coaching.

Step 2. Describe End State

Once you have identified the skills gap, describe the desired end state. What should the employee know and be able to do as a result of participating in the structured mentoring program? Depending on how the skill gap, learning need, or desired behavioral change was identified, the manager or the employee drafts a statement of the intended outcome in terms of the skill or knowledge to be learned or the behavior to be exhibited.

Step 3. Contact the Mentoring Office

The next step is to contact the mentoring office or, in a large company, the staff within the mentoring office that focuses on particular departments or business units. The manager and employee together discuss with the mentoring office whether the identified learning needs are appropriate for the structured mentoring program. If they are, the mentoring office works with the requestors to clearly understand the kinds of experiences and learning that will be required to close the skill or knowledge gap.

Flowchart of the Structured Mentoring Process

The following flowchart illustrates the steps in creating a structured mentoring process.

1. Employee or manager identifies job-related skill gap through skills assessment, performance review, or career development plan.

2. Employee or manager identifies desired end state, including job, career, and psychosocial skills, behavior, and knowledge.

3. Employee or employee plus manager contact mentoring office to ensure that learning needs are appropriate for the structured mentoring program and start process.

6. Mentor and protégé create mentoring agreement to set expectations.

5. Mentor works with resources in mentoring office to identify appropriate experiential learning activities.

4. Mentoring office identifies mentor and works with mentor and protégé to create detailed learning objectives, including performance standards.

7. Protégé completes short e-learning activity to understand the learning cycle and his or her responsibilities.

8. Protégé learns and performs experiential learning activities using the learning cycle.

9. Mentor supports and helps protégé do honest reflection in a risk-free environment.

12. Mentor and protégé document new skills.

11. Protégé and mentor reflect on the affective portion—the contextual social skills, networking, and political savvy.

10. Mentor and protégé provide feedback to each other. Mentor: What's the progress in closing the gaps (measurements). Protégé: What's working and not working in the assignment.
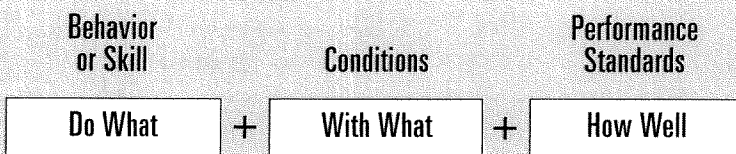
Useful Learning Objectives

The components of learning objectives are:

1. Behavior or skill—"Do what?"

2. Conditions—"With what?"

3. Performance standards—"How well?"

Learning Objective Components

Behavior or Skill		Conditions		Performance Standards
Do What	+	With What	+	How Well

The following table presents some examples of objectives. The "Do What?" column indicates the task the protégé is to perform. This task is then used as a guideline to identify appropriate experiential learning activities. The "With What?" column provides information about context. The "How Well?" column specifies performance standards.

Do What?	With What?	How Well?
Use active listening skills to identify customer requirements.	Customer or team input and identified requirements for an ACS application	All ACS application functionality included in the HTML pages is clearly identified, and the customer agrees that the requirements define their expectations of the HTML final pages and deliverables.
Create a personal network.	Team, peer, and manager input	Make contact with a minimum of four new members of the personal network who have skills and knowledge directly relevant to the current project.

Step 4. Select the "Right" Mentor

Who are the "right" mentors? These are skilled employees who are expert in one or more areas and who are willing and interested in sharing their knowledge and experiences. They should be regarded as successful in the organization and be able to structure needed experiential learning activities. They should have good personal networks so they can help protégés create their own networks. The mentor needs excellent communication skills and can help the protégé understand not only how to perform the task, but also how the task fits into the larger context of the job. To the extent possible, the mentor should be outside of the protégé's direct reporting structure.

Step 5. Develop Activities

The mentoring office provides support as needed to the mentor-protégé team to construct detailed learning objectives, each with a performance standard (the sidebar *Useful Learning Objectives* at left presents examples of learning objectives). The performance standard provides a means for both the mentor and the protégé to have a shared vision of excellence in terms of the performance expectations.

Next, the mentor and protégé link experiential learning activities to the learning objectives, which is a key task in the structured mentoring program. That's where the protégé actually gets the hands-on learning opportunities. But these learning opportunities must be carefully selected to ensure that they will:

● focus on the skills the protégé needs to acquire and practice

● occur in a realistic work setting so they are more easily transferable to on-the-job tasks

● provide an opportunity to observe and learn the social skills needed to be successful in that situation.

Ideally, experiential learning activities should be part of "real work" rather than a contrived set of tasks. Real learning can include shadowing, where the protégé works closely with a person performing the tasks they are to learn. Protégés learn by observing and asking questions and then performing selected tasks on their own.

Step 6. Create Agreement

After identifying the experiential learning activities, the mentor and protégé create a mentoring agreement to document expectations. Because the intent of a structured mentoring program is for time-limited relationships that focus on a particular skill set, it's important to ensure that the time commitments are honored. Important tasks in developing the agreement include:

- creating observable learning objectives

- defining performance criteria

- setting dates for the cycle of review

- devising a method for collecting data from supervisors, team members, and clients as to performance level

- creating a sign-off procedure on objectives.

Step 7. Train for Mentoring

Prior to beginning the experiential learning activities, the protégé completes a short e-learning activity or individual exercise to understand protégé responsibilities and the learning cycle (the sidebar *The Learning Cycle* provides an illustration). Because many protégés have never kept journals and may not know how to reflect upon their learning and experiences, the e-learning contains brief activities and suggestions to support the protégé in this activity. The learning cycle is composed of four phases: performing, reflecting, interpreting, and planning.

■ *Phase 1. Performing*
In this phase, the protégé focuses on performing the tasks described in the learning objectives. This is the experiential learning element of the mentoring process. The protégé works on tasks with a clear sense of what is expected based on the learning objectives.

■ *Phase 2. Reflecting*
In this phase, the protégé thoughtfully reflects on what is happening. A good way to approach reflection is to keep a journal. A journal is a means of capturing questions the protégé has about the work, including contextual social skills, and that the protégé may think of in the moment but may not remember at the meeting with the mentor.

These kinds of questions are important to the learning and can help protégés fill in gaps in their understanding. It's also important to capture insights gained as the work is being performed and make notes about new things to explore related to the tasks being performed.

Reflection is a key component of the structured mentoring process that:

- focuses on the meaning of the experience
- is not a diary of activities
- requires honest self-examination
- must result in action planning.

■ *Phase 3. Interpreting*
The protégé and mentor discuss what is happening on the project: What is going well and what needs work. An important element of this is to create a trusting relationship so the protégé feels comfortable sharing things that did not go well on the project, things that are confusing or that are not understood. It's important to maintain a risk-free environment.

■ *Phase 4. Planning*
In this phase, the protégé and mentor build on lessons learned and skills acquired from performing the tasks in the experiential learning activities. At this point, skill gaps that were closed are documented. If additional skill gaps have been identified through the reflection and interpretation phases, the mentor and protégé would create a new set of learning objectives and identify tasks and activities to address these skill gaps and develop another round of structured mentoring and experiential learning.
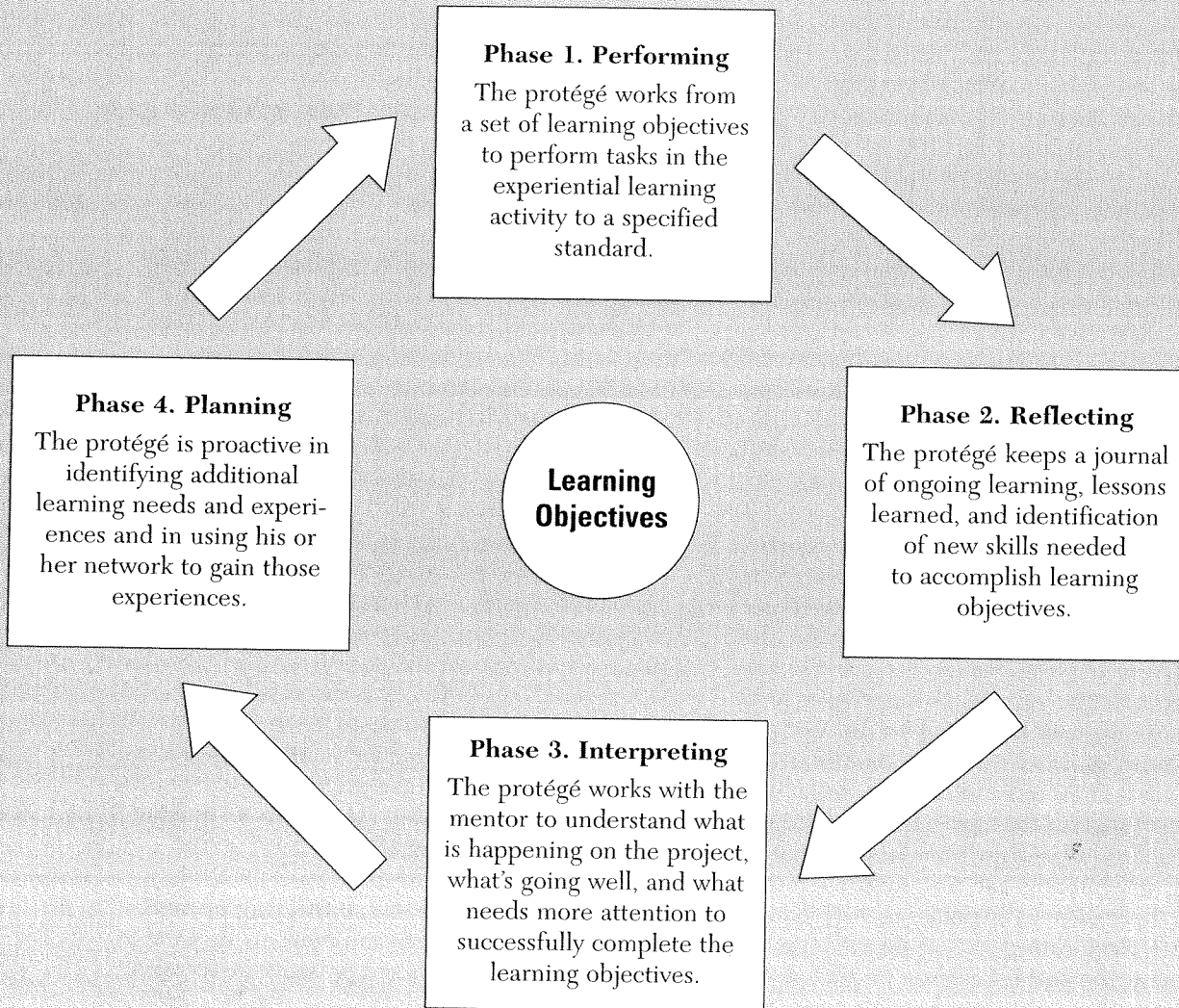
Mentors also must undergo training on their responsibilities prior to the mentoring. Some specific roles of mentors and protégés are detailed below:

■ *Mentors*
Responsibilities of mentors include understanding how to create learning objectives; how to provide supportive feedback; how to support the protégé in reflecting, understanding, and planning aspects of the learning cycle; and how to complete the mentoring agreement. The learning activity (training) must be easy and convenient to access and update and require a minimum amount of time for the mentor to complete.

The Learning Cycle

The four phases of the learning cycle focus on active learner involvement in the structured mentoring process. It requires thinking about the learning, making connections between what is happening and why it is happening, and considering additional learning to achieve the learning objectives. The centerpiece of the learning cycle is a set of well-constructed, measurable learning objectives.

Phase 1. Performing

The protégé works from a set of learning objectives to perform tasks in the experiential learning activity to a specified standard.

Phase 2. Reflecting

The protégé keeps a journal of ongoing learning, lessons learned, and identification of new skills needed to accomplish learning objectives.

Learning Objectives

Phase 3. Interpreting

The protégé works with the mentor to understand what is happening on the project, what's going well, and what needs more attention to successfully complete the learning objectives.

Phase 4. Planning

The protégé is proactive in identifying additional learning needs and experiences and in using his or her network to gain those experiences.

■ *Protégés*

The responsibilities of protégés include understanding how to create learning objectives, understanding details about the learning cycle and expectations for how to use it, seeking guidance on how to do the reflecting and interpreting components of the learning cycle, requesting suggestions for conducting thoughtful self-assessments, and providing evaluative feedback about the program.

Step 8. Carry Out the Activities

The protégé is now ready to begin the experiential learning activities, using the learning cycle to actively reflect on the tasks to be performed. The protégé and mentor meet on a regular basis, often weekly, depending on the nature of the tasks and the role of the mentor in the project. Some protégés work on projects that their mentors also are assigned to so the two may have closer contact than other mentor-protégé pairs.

During the weekly meetings, the protégé discusses what has been learned and carries out self-assessments to determine the extent to which the learning objectives are being met. The protégé also asks questions about processes or tasks not understood and discusses the social and networking aspects of the work performed.

Step 9. Support Reflection

During regular mentor-protégé meetings, the mentor must actively support the protégé's reflections by asking questions such as, "What happened?" "Why did it happen?" "What might it mean?" "What are the implications for your learning and performance?" "What are some possible ways you can modify your behavior to achieve the goals you have set?"

Step 10. Provide Feedback on Performance

If the mentor is working on the same project as the protégé, a risk-free environment for the protégé to ask questions, examine potential deficits in performance, and reflect on ways that he or she can learn the needed skills and knowledge is critical. The mentor can create a risk-free environment by ensuring that mistakes made during the learning

process are not considered in any type of performance evaluation. Protégés provide feedback to the mentor on how well the experiential activities are meeting their perceived learning needs, and both parties mutually agree on any identified changes. The process of tracking progress should not be intrusive or burdensome and may consist of a short checklist completed by the protégé and signed off by the mentor on a regular basis.

Step 11. Provide Feedback on Affective Outcomes

An important part of structured mentoring is the affective portion: the contextual social skills, networking, and political savvy required for long-term success. The protégé needs feedback here as well as on behaviors learned. To do this, the mentor must be able to observe the protégé in interactions on the job with teammates, customers, project managers, and so forth. The mentor must be able to analyze the potential impact of the protégé's interpersonal behaviors. For example, if the mentor observes that the protégé appears not to be listening carefully to a customer, he or she must not only point out this needed skill but also discuss with the protégé the potential consequences of this behavior.

Step 12. Document Skills

When the protégé has completed the experiential learning activities and has demonstrated the desired skill level, he or she works with the mentor to document the new skills and knowledge. The mentoring office should provide some type of program evaluation feedback form to gather information on what's working and what could be improved. In addition, participants also can explore questions about how the learned skills and knowledge support the company's business results.

Prepare for Success

Establishing a structured mentoring program in your organization can reduce costs, shorten time to productivity for new hires, and help retain talent. The sidebar *Case Study: Structured Mentoring Program* presents a case study that describes how the program can be used and the kind of ROI that can be expected from its implementation.

Case Study: Structured Mentoring Program

A large corporation has a program that hires high-achieving college graduates into the company's consulting practice. The program design mandates that each person participate in intensive training for one of the tracks in the consulting practice prior to his or her initial deployment on a consulting project.

But in reality this did not often take place. Some people were deployed to projects before completing training. As a result, these people missed the opportunity to learn several important skills, such as the company's productivity tools. They also missed the opportunity to establish personal networks with other participants in the program.

In other cases, the training was technical, such as a programming language, and the trainee was not assigned to a project where he or she could put the new skill and knowledge to use immediately. As a result, the person needed a refresher course in which the newly learned technical skills could be practiced before coming onto a project.

To address these challenges in providing the development needed to become a successful consultant, the corporation created and prototyped a structured mentoring program with experiential learning.

The Premise of the Design

The program design's premise was that the organization could use carefully structured project assignments to develop the skills of these new consultants more effectively through application of lessons learned than by assigning these people to projects without the support of structured mentoring. The program used well-constructed learning objectives with performance standards within a learning cycle in which protégés proactively assumed responsibility for learning.

The Goal and Anticipated Outcomes

The goal of the structured mentoring program was to create a process whereby participants could become skilled consultants (in other words, billable) in a shorter time period. The anticipated outcomes of the structured mentoring program included the following:

- decreased time to acquire customer-valued skills

- increased quality of project deliverables

- increased use and reuse of intellectual capital

- decreased time required for readiness to transfer to a consulting practice

- increased revenue during the first year of employment

- increased customer satisfaction.

The Business Case

As part of the business case developed during the prototyping project, predicted return-on-investment (ROI) was calculated. The following assumptions were made:

- 100 new consultants (NCs) in the program would require one half-time manager plus one half-time support person. Estimated cost: $50,000, without load.

- The setup of the mentoring office would require communications, training materials (e-learning) for protégés and mentors, recruiting, and developing the supportive materials. Estimated cost: $100,000.

- Half of the mentors would need a budget code. Based on 20 hours per protégé, these mentors would incur costs of $1,000 each. Estimated total: $50,000.

Total first-year estimated costs: $200,000.

Estimated savings for the 100 NCs at $10,412 per person: $1,041,200.

Predicted ROI = 420 percent.

The Process of Implementation

Four participants were selected to prototype the process. In this program, the participants were encouraged to take responsibility for their learning. Each person was taught how to create learning objectives using the learning objectives format:

Behavior or Skill	Conditions	Performance Standards
Do what?	With what?	How well?

Each participant worked with the new consultant manager as well as the project manager on the consulting engagement to which he or she was assigned to identify appropriate tasks and activities that would allow the NC to meet the learning objectives.

As part of the rollout of the program, each NC learned about the learning cycle, paying particular attention to reflecting and interpreting. Two of these initial participants had kept a journal in college and provided insights to the other participants about how to keep a journal with specific examples of what they wrote down and how it helped them remember certain activities. They used the journals to capture questions about the process of performing the tasks or information that was unclear that they later looked up or requested clarification on. They also captured their thoughts about what they were doing and how the tasks they were assigned fit into the consulting engagement they were working on.

Mentors agreed to work with the protégés to help them learn the desired skills and knowledge. The mentors had different roles within the company: Two were members of the project team for the consulting engagement, one was a technical specialist (one NC was working on Java programming skills), and the fourth mentor worked with a project manager (the NC was learning project management skills) on a different consulting engagement.

In all cases, the protégés created the learning objectives working with the NC manager and the consultants who designed the structured mentoring program. The mentors identified appropriate experiential learning activities, with input and guidance from the NC manager. The mentor also supported the affective or psychosocial learning activities of listening to clients, understanding team roles and appropriate team behaviors, establishing personal networks within the client site, and so forth.

Results of the Program

Each NC was interviewed after they had created their learning objectives and had begun work on their experiential learning activities. The NCs were asked to predict how the use of learning objectives and associated experiential learning would help them achieve their personal skill development goals.

Their responses indicated that they expected the learning objectives and guided experiential learning to decrease the learning curve to master new consulting skills by an average of 49 percent. All NCs anticipated that participation in the program would decrease the length of time required to be ready to transfer to a consulting practice by three to six months. Decreasing this time meant the NC would be billable more quickly. Using a mid-point estimate of four months and a beginning salary of $31,236 (without load), estimated savings per NC would be $10,412.

Other benefits of structured mentoring were not as easily quantifiable. One of these was better communication with the project team. One NC noted that having specific learning objectives gave him a reason to ask questions of other team members on the consulting engagement. He shared his learning objectives, and the team focused on helping him learn particular skills and acquire the needed knowledge. He noted that without the learning objectives, asking for help would have been more difficult. Another NC noted that having the learning objectives and specific experiential learning activities helped him make more efficient use of time on the project because of a clearer focus and understanding of the tasks he was to perform.

Views from Protégés

"Having the learning objectives helped me think about what I wanted to get out of the project. I knew what I needed to learn, and I had a clear sense of what I needed to do. I also thought very consciously about how the project needs to benefit from what I do on the project."

"Prior to using the learning objectives, I went into an engagement not understanding either the final deliverables or my role. If there had been learning objectives, it would have helped a lot. It was like swimming in the deep end at first—scary! Having learning objectives on a recent engagement helped me clarify my role and specific responsibilities, provided a reason for me to ask specific questions for clarification, and lessened the amount of rework because I did the tasks right the first time."

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Structured Mentoring Readiness Inventory

This self-assessment tool is designed to determine how you and your organization fit with the requirements of an effective structured mentoring program. The following presents a series of paired statements. From each pair, choose the statement that best describes you and/or your organization. There are no right or wrong answers. To gain meaningful results, please respond honestly.

1A	Mentoring is necessary to develop specific skills within a department or business unit.
1B	Mentoring should focus on long-term career development.

2A	A mentoring program does not need a specific skill assurance to be effective.
2B	Specific, measurable outcomes are an important element of a mentoring program.

3A	Our organization's mentoring program needs a clearly defined timeframe for skill acquisition.
3B	Our organization's mentoring program should be ongoing and allow for a long-term approach to career growth.

4A	Feedback on mentoring outcomes should be given annually during a private, formal performance review.
4B	Clear and timely feedback on an ongoing basis is a necessary component of the mentor-protégé relationship.

5A	Mentoring will be used in a stable environment to gain deep understanding of general business competencies.
5B	Mentoring is used in both a changing and a stable environment.

6A	A mentoring program must have clearly defined objectives that relate to business goals.
6B	The major outcome of a mentoring program is employee growth and job satisfaction over the long term.

7A	A mentoring program must focus on critical areas needed for business transformation or skill growth.
7B	Areas of focus for the mentoring program will be selected by the protégé and agreed to by his or her mentor.

8A	Our organization's business initiatives and goals are major design points of the mentoring program.
8B	Career advancement and skill growth are the major design points of a mentoring program.

9A	The responsibility of a mentor to a protégé is defined by both the mentor and the protégé.
9B	The mentoring program office should clearly define roles and responsibilities of mentors and protégés.

10A	A protégé's manager should be informed of progress of the mentoring activities on a regular basis.
10B	Mentors should review the protégé's progress with the manager during an annual review.

11A	A mentoring program should have corporate support and be available to all employees in the company.
11B	A mentoring program should have primary support from business functions or a large department that has a core set of skills and knowledge for its employees.

12A	Being asked to participate in a mentoring program usually means that an employee is not performing well within the business function.
12B	Participating in a mentoring program is viewed as a perk.

Job Aid

13A	Top performers should be mentors and, due to their high performance levels, do not require specific training.
13B	Training should be provided for all mentors to ensure a clear understanding of the goals and focus of the mentoring program.

14A	Mentors should be allowed to set aside specific times to work with their protégés as part of their regular work assignments.
14B	Mentors should be creative in their time management to allow for mentoring time with their protégés.

15A	Mentors focus on ensuring the protégé acquires the needed skills and knowledge no matter how long it takes.
15B	There should be clearly defined timeframes for specific skill acquisition for each protégé.

16A	Clearly defined processes must exist to ensure that the mentoring program functions as it was intended.
16B	There should be an overarching program vision to guide mentors in interacting with their protégés, but no specific guidelines.

17A	Management trusts mentors to grow talent within the organization.
17B	It is important that a trusting relationship be established between the mentor and the protégé.

18A	A mentoring relationship is more successful when the mentor is highly motivated to share his or her expertise.
18B	A key success factor for a mentoring relationship is the motivation level of the protégé to acquire expertise in a particular area.

19A	Mentoring is used most often when a person is being "groomed" for a promotion.
19B	Mentoring is a critical element in growing skills and improving human performance for all employees.

20A	A mentoring program should provide specific learning activities and experiences that address identified employee skill gaps.
20B	A mentoring program should be tied to overall career growth and performance.

Scoring the Structured Mentoring Readiness Assessment

The following choices receive 1 point: 1A, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5B, 6A, 7A, 8A, 9B, 10A, 11B, 12B, 13B, 14A, 15B, 16A, 17B, 18B, 19B, 20A. The other choice in the pair gets no points.

Add up the number of points you received for your responses to the 20 statements. Scores of 10 to 13 are more in line with traditional mentoring, scores of 14 to 16 are "transitional," and scores of 17 or higher are more in line with structured mentoring,