Corporate Mentoring Models: One Size Doesn't Fit All

Understanding the Different Types & Choosing the Best One (or Combination) for Your Organization

MANAGEMENT MENTORS

A White Paper Report by Management Mentors

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Introduction:

We're firm believers that every organization—Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, nonprofits, academic institutions, small- and medium-sized businesses, you name it—can benefit from corporate mentoring. But we don't believe that one mentoring model fits all. While some organizations will benefit from a traditional one-to-one program, others will find that self-directed works best. Still others might use a combination approach, perhaps group mentoring for one department and peer-to-peer mentoring for another. And that's okay because, after all, that's the goal: to have the people in your organization thrive and benefit from their involvement in your program, whatever the model looks like.

That said, we understand that choosing the right model is one of the biggest challenges facing people who are designing and implementing mentoring programs. And that's where this white paper comes in. We're going to describe the different types of models, the pros and cons of each, and the types of organizations that we've seen thrive under them. But first, it makes sense for us to explain the differences between some terms we'll be using: **formal vs. informal mentoring** and **coaching vs. mentoring.**

Formal vs. Informal Mentoring

We're approaching this paper from a formal mentoring program perspective. While you could argue that some of the program models below lend themselves better to a more informal environment (i.e. outcomes aren't measured, goals aren't identified, requirements for taking part are vague or non-existent, etc.), we believe that in order for any of these models to be successful, the organization needs to create a formal structure that allows for the following:

- Connection to a strategic business objective of the organization
- Established goals
- Measurable outcomes
- Open access for all who qualify
- Strategic pairing of mentors and mentorees
- Mentoring engagements lasting a specified amount of time
- Expert training and support available, if/when needed
- Direct organizational benefits

Coaching vs. Mentoring

Some of the models we'll be discussing below will seem more like coaching rather than mentoring models. The distinctions between the two are important.

Coaching characteristics:

- Managers coach their staff as a required part of the job.
- Coaching takes place within the confines of a formal manager-employee relationship.
- The focus is to develop individuals within their current job.
- The interest of the relationship is functional, arising out of the need for individuals to perform the tasks required to the best of their ability.

- Managers tend to initiate and drive the relationship.
- The relationship is finite, ending when an individual has learned what the coach is teaching.

Mentoring characteristics:

- It occurs outside of a line manager-employee relationship, at the mutual consent of a mentor and mentoree.
- It is career-focused or focused on professional development that may be outside a mentoree's area of work.
- Relationships are personal—a mentor provides both professional and personal support.
- Relationships may be initiated by mentors or created through matches initiated by the organization.
- Relationships cross job boundaries.
- Relationships last for a specific period of time (usually nine months to a year) in a formal program, at which point the pair may continue in an informal mentoring relationship.

Whatever model you choose, here's something to keep in mind: as businesses grow and evolve, so do their mentoring programs. What might have worked for your organization twenty years ago might not work today, at least not "as is." The beauty of many of these models is that they can work in tandem with one another.

One-on-One Mentoring

What it is: In this traditional model, one mentor is matched with one mentoree, and a trained program manager monitors the match's progress over the course of 9-12 months. Usually, the matches are deliberate; the mentoring program manager pairs two people together based on certain criteria, such as experience, skill sets, goals, personality, and a variety of other factors.

Pros: Because it's a "familiar" model, people tend to be comfortable with it. This model allows for—and even encourages—the mentor and mentoree to develop a personal relationship. The one-on-one nature of the relationship provides the mentoree with critical individual support and attention from not only the mentor, but also the program manager.

Cons: Availability of mentors is the only real limitation in one-on-one mentoring.

Types of businesses that can benefit: This mentoring model works well for businesses that want to target a specific group for development or retention purposes. Usually this means emerging leaders, highly skilled workers, or a specific affinity group to promote diversity.

Self-Directed Mentoring

What it is: Self-directed mentoring offers some of the features provided by one-on-one mentoring. The main difference is that mentors and mentorees are not interviewed and matched accordingly by a mentoring program manager. Instead, mentors agree to add their names to a list of available mentors from which a mentoree can choose. It's up to a mentoree to initiate the process, asking one of the volunteer mentors for assistance.

Pros: This model can work well if your organization's corporate culture prides itself on its independent spirit and members know how to take the initiative. While it's critical, from our perspective anyway, that someone monitors the program and that the organization agrees on the program's main objectives, this model can also work if a program manager is not available.

Cons: This model typically enjoys only limited support within the organization and may result in mismatched mentor-mentoree pairing.

Types of businesses that can benefit: This mentoring model can work for organizations with branches or regional offices that may be spread out and that work independently. It also works for businesses that want to offer mentoring to the larger employee population and prefer to let mentorees manage the entire selection and relationship-building process. In this model, companies are not as concerned about linking overall corporate goals with the specific goals of the mentoring program.

Group Mentoring

What it is: Group mentoring requires a mentor to work with four to six mentorees at one time. The group meets once or twice a month to discuss various topics. Combining senior and peer mentoring, the mentor as well as the peers help one another learn and develop appropriate skills/knowledge.

Pros: Works well for organizations with a limited number of mentors. Mentorees can gain insight from not only the mentor, but also their fellow mentorees.

Cons: Group mentoring is limited by the difficulty of regularly scheduling several busy employees. It also lacks the personal relationship that most people prefer in mentoring. For this reason, organizations often combine it with the one-on-one model. In addition, the organization might offer a "Senior Seminar Series" that involves periodic meetings in which a senior executive meets with all the mentors and mentorees who then share their knowledge and expertise.

Types of businesses that can benefit: This model works well for businesses that have limited mentors to satisfy a high mentoree demand. It's also a popular choice for diversity mentoring. We know that non-majority people tend to be less prominent the higher you go in the organization. So in order to provide non-majority mentorees with a similar model as themselves as mentors, you can create a group process that combines peer mentoring along with a senior mentor. Group mentoring is a less common model and it's usually used in tandem with another model.

Short-Term or Goal-Oriented Mentoring

What it is: This form of mentoring focuses on specific goals with a shorter time window and results-oriented framework.

Pros: Because the goal's scope tends to be extremely narrow (since it needs to fit into a shorter timeframe), results may be immediate, which can boost the mentoree's confidence and benefit the organization. This type of mentoring can be a nice complement to a traditional one-on-one mentoring program.

Cons: In some ways, this sort of mentoring is more like coaching, which isn't a bad thing per se. But if you want a mentoring relationship to reach its fullest potential, it typically needs 9-12 months to do so.

Types of businesses that can benefit: Oftentimes, your employees may be interested in mentoring—or being mentored in a specific area—but, for whatever reason (e.g. travel, part-time work schedules, flex schedules), they can't commit right now to a full-blown mentoring relationship that lasts 9-12 months. Short-term or goal-oriented mentoring can work well in these situations.

Peer-to-peer Mentoring

What it is: This mentoring model pairs young employees with each other—particularly in "onboarding" programs.

Pros: Younger, newer employees (think college grads) will likely benefit from the experience and want to "pass it on" to the next round of recruits. Again, this model can work well in conjunction with a more traditional one-on-one program. New recruits can automatically be assigned a peer mentor. After a certain amount of time, they can be transitioned into the traditional, longer-term one-on-one program.

Cons: While we can learn much from our peers, we can learn even more when paired with more experienced mentors.

Types of businesses that can benefit: This model works well for larger organizations that try to attract top talent through regular recruitment cycles (e.g. think of accounting and financial firms that recruit college grads).

Speed Mentoring

What it is: Think time-limited meetings (usually 1 hour) in which the relationship is intended to deliver targeted information or offer networking opportunities. It's a one-time only meeting.

Pros: Some people will appreciate that they don't have to invest a lot of time to potentially get something worthwhile out of the experience.

Cons: There's no guarantee that something worthwhile will occur in such a limited timeframe.

Types of businesses that can benefit: Again, it probably wouldn't be effective if this were the only mentoring model that you made available. But as an adjunct, it could be effective and perceived as fun. For businesses with regional offices spread out across the country or the world, speed mentoring could work well when you bring these groups together for annual, bi-annual, or quarterly meetings.

Reverse Mentoring

What it is: This model matches senior executives (the mentorees) with younger people (the mentors) to help the older generation stay current and informed about new technologies or trends. For example, a 20-something employee may introduce a senior executive to social networking on Facebook or Twitter.

Pros: Considering the speed at which technology changes, this mentoring model is becoming more popular and important.

Cons: We'd argue that reverse mentoring isn't really mentoring at all — it's coaching. Whatever you call it, this model is still an effective way to keep your top employees engaged, productive, and happy.

Types of businesses that can benefit: Organizations that are adopting new technology, media, etc. would benefit from having this sort of mentoring/coaching available so that it doesn't alienate or lose its veteran workforce. But it shouldn't replace traditional mentoring.

Employee-Alumni Mentoring

What it is: A handful of large companies have supported the concept of corporate alumni for years. McKinsey, for one, has long had a tradition of following alumni as corporate ambassadors, spreading the McKinsey ethic into their new positions.

More recently, however, companies have begun to realize the potential inherent in linking employees and alums. The Big Four accounting firms, for example, have all rebuilt their alumni programs in the last several years under this premise: alumni are an excellent source for recruiting, new business development, and brand promotion.

Pros: Mentoring helps to provide value to both employees and alums while fostering lasting bonds to attract “boomerang” workers. At the same time, this model helps retain current workers by showing (via the relationship with the alums) that they can have a long lasting and enriching career with the organization.

Cons: You already have the main resource—your alumni. Organizing them is another issue, so this particular model might take more time to ramp up than a traditional one-on-one program. Dedicated alumni portals, publications, event programming, directories, social media tools… these are the types of things you'll need to set up in order to support the program. Once it's set up, however, the sky's the limit.

Types of businesses that can benefit: Organizations with a long history and, thus, a deep alumni pool can benefit greatly by investing in an employee-alumni mentoring program.

Next Steps

Still not sure which mentoring model—or combination of models—would work best for your organization? We can help. For over twenty years, we've provided our mentoring expertise through consultations and training. And the best part? We have three products that are bound to meet your organization's specific needs:

1. **Mentoring*Complete***: our premier online mentoring software that's completely web-based and customizable.
2. **Coaching*Complete*:** An app that you can easily buy on its own and/or add-on to Mentoring*Complete*.
3. **Mentor-Quest**: The perfect e-learning course that will guide mentorees on their quest to discover and select the right mentor. This course is interactive and was designed with a video-game-like interface.

Mentoring*Complete*	Coaching*Complete*	Mentor-Quest
One-on-one mentoring	Peer-to-peer mentoring	Employee-alumni mentoring
Self-directed mentoring	Reverse mentoring	Self-directed mentoring
Group mentoring	Short-term mentoring	Short-term mentoring
	Speed mentoring	

Contact us today to learn more!

About Management Mentors:
For over two decades, Management Mentors has been designing and implementing world-class corporate mentoring programs and helping companies attract and retain high potential employees. Based outside of Boston, Mass., Management Mentors' corporate mentoring programs develop future leaders and create a more diverse workforce by removing the barriers to equal opportunity. Management Mentors has achieved a 90% success rate with pairs it matches using a thoughtful, proven process. Current and past clients include Enterprise Rent-A-Car, U.S. Fish & Wildlife, The New York Times Corporation, The City of Tallahassee, Cooper Tire, FedEx Kinkos, Quaker Oats, Schering Plough, TJX Corporation, and Sony Music Corporation. For more information on how your firm can enjoy greater success through mentoring, contact us at (617) 789-4622 or visit us at www.management-mentors.com.

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