

Mentoring Has Morphed

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The Shifting Sands of Time

In England, three languages dominated during the Middle Ages. *French*, the Norman language, was the language of government. *Latin*, was the *lingua franca* of education and the church. Finally, *English*, the *vernacular*, was the spoken language of the common man.

Back then, sending a message between villages was a challenge. Local monks interceded, to scribe and translate letters to & from the vernacular and Latin. Religion was disseminated similarly; the Latin Bible was interpreted and preached from the church pulpit by the monks.

Things changed during the *Reformation* of the 1500s; Gutman's new presses, printed Bibles in the vernacular, removing need for monks to interpret scriptures. Disintermediation occurred, religion democratised, as it moved from the voices of the few, into the hands of the many.

The Classical view, emphasised renewal at the highest organisational levels. In recent years however, we've started to experience similar shifts and "reformation" in the Mentoring process; democratisation is taking hold. Mentoring is morphing into a much broader, much more inclusive, process.

The Mentoring rainbow is diffusing, and change is happening, partly driven by design, and partly drawn by desire. The process is migrating from the organisational centre; horizontally out through professional institutions, vertically down to the individuals; Mentoring is maturing.

It is starting to adopt a project focus, with shorter time commitments for Mentor and Mentee. Mentoring is now realising the potential to strengthen competences at all organisational levels. It's also cradling relevant, collaborative, technologies, enabling the process to push beyond the boundaries of one-on-one, face-to-face, meetings.

These changes allow organisations to reframe their perspective on Mentoring, rethink the processes, and, respond to the differing motivations surfacing with today's participants. Evidence of the empathetic redesign of the Mentoring process continues to surface.

Diffusion and Democratisation of the Mentoring Process

The Classical view was highly selective, resource intensive, and typically realised the growth of human talent at the top end of the organisational hierarchy. However, its selectivity led to a limited reach, and, its formality doesn't really suit the behavioural preferences, of everyone.

Today, we are seeing that process being steadily "pushed" away from the centre, down into the tiers of middle management. The benefits of growing competences throughout the organisation are driving those changes.

Professional institutions are also embracing Mentoring, knowing the effective role they play in building subject matter expertise and skill. Most professional institutions offer project based Mentoring services to their members, such as the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants (ISCA), Chartered Management Institute (CMI UK), and the Institute of Directors (IoD).

The process is also being “pulled” up from the bottom, especially by the younger “millennial” generation. The days of the “apprenticeship” are now well past, yet new organisational entrants also have aspirations of growth. They strongly value Mentoring (and Coaching) to help them progress within the firm, through the development of relevant skills and competences.

Four Areas Where Change is Evident

There are four areas where the Classical Mentoring model is empathetically realising change.

Time Commitment

The Classical view, demands long term time commitments that cover multiple years, timeframes suitable for senior executives. More recently, project based Mentoring approaches are being used, looking to strengthen the organisational core. These reduce the burden of lengthy time commitments, down perhaps to six, nine or twelve-month stints.

At an individual level, increasingly new entrants express a desire to, perhaps even “assume” access to, Mentoring as a necessary part of their personal development and growth. In a way, this is less about a long term, commitment to one Mentor, but more about access to a richer variety of skills and expertise from different Mentors, as and when the need arises.

Mediating Technologies

The face-to-face meeting has been the usual mediation mechanism for Classical Mentoring. It usually involves a regularised schedule, and over time, may be enhanced with phone calls, video calls, or other relevant organisational events. This approach requires Mentor and Mentee need to build and draw on, strong interpersonal skills.

Project based approaches tend to follow similar patterns, though due to their shortened timeframe, more emphasis is placed a regularised series of meetings. Participants diarise formal monthly review sessions, with ad hoc interactions, as and when required.

At an individual level, new entrants are generally comfortable using technologies to collaborate. Speed of access rather than “face time” is valued, interactions tend to be driven “just-in-time”. Often, their learning need is geared to problem resolution on specific tasks, more than longer term personal growth. Both Mentor and Mentee need to draw on strong technological skills.

Growth & Success Measures

Ultimate success in the Classical view, was typically evident once the Mentee had grown sufficiently to step into a new post. That strategy may have been interspersed with a series of structured “stretch” assignments. Once tackled, reflection and review was core to their growth.

Depending on how project-based Mentoring is structured, success may be measured by the outcomes associated on attainment of project oriented goals. Growth may also be determined by development of a series of defined Competences, each relevant to a Mentee’s career path.

At an individual level, success is often measured by a Mentee’s ability to gain the knowledge or skill to achieve their task in that moment. It is often tracked through the capture and reflection of the barriers and breakthroughs achieved over a given period. Much of this can be captured by the technologies used when collaborating with their Mentor.

Program Structure and Motivations

The Classical approach was highly centralised, structured, planned in advance, and set out clear organisational objectives, with distant end destinations in mind. Selection as a Mentee for such a prestigious program, was often motivation in its own right; it was a fast-track to somewhere.

Whilst project based Mentoring is geared toward personal growth and development, a Mentee may interpret it more like a Task-based assignment. Structuring the program requires effort to help a Mentee identify their own growth path, needs, and competences. Motivations may vary, depending upon how a Mentee perceives their involvement; as an opportunity, or, a necessity.

At an individual level, structuring a delegated program requires deployment of collaborative technologies that support Mentor-Mentee interaction. The emphasis is less on “Process”, and more on “Tools” that support interaction, collaboration and dialogue. Motivations tend to be high, as access to the right Mentors can be beneficial, as problems can be resolved quickly.

The Roles & Responsibilities of Mentee and Mentor

In the next two Articles, we’ll move away from the “Process” past and present. We’ll turn our attention to the participants, first, the Mentee, then, the Mentor. The intention is to explore what’s involved to benefit from involvement in a Mentoring relationship.

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