

### 3.0 WHAT IS MENTORING?

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Mentoring is a technique for helping people realise what they could be, what they are capable of achieving, and the capacity to transform their performance.

As Goethe said<sup>7</sup>:

*'If you treat people as they are you will be instrumental in keeping them as they are. If you treat them as they could be, you will help them become what they could be.'*

According to Clutterbuck<sup>8</sup>, mentoring is one of the fastest growing methods of developing skills and talent in European organisations. It can be seen as the most intimate of learning approaches. One useful way of describing mentoring is that it is a means of assisting transitions in thinking patterns.

Eric Parsloe and Monika Wray<sup>9</sup> describe mentoring primarily as:

*"A process that supports and encourages learning to happen"*

The word 'mentor' has been used to refer to a relationship whereby a knowledgeable person aids a less knowledgeable person<sup>10</sup>

As outlined in existing research<sup>11</sup> there is a tendency for coaching and mentoring to be used interchangeably. This becomes more apparent when looking at mentoring on an international basis. Tabron et al<sup>12</sup> distinguish between mentoring and coaching:

*"...a one to one process of helping individuals to learn and develop takes a longer-term perspective which focuses on the person's career and their development. It is distinguished from coaching which has a more immediate performance-based focus."*

The term 'mentoring' has different meanings for different people in many different contexts. At the outset of this study it was imperative to be clear on what is meant by mentoring. For the purposes of this study we have drawn on the WMC's definition, which describes mentoring as:

***"Help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work, or thinking", but longer definitions have key elements in common, focusing on learning, confidentiality, trust, change, holistic approach and personal relevance.***

### **3.1 Different types of mentoring**

Mentoring can take many different forms. A summary of the different types of mentoring is given below together with the merits of each approach.

#### ***Peer mentoring***

Employees of similar status form mentoring relationships within their organisation. Peer mentoring can be effective at increasing communication and breaking down traditional departmental barriers. However, without clear and concise guidelines, training and objectives, mentoring sessions may quickly become general chatting sessions with no real value. There is also a pre-conception that a mentor should be more experienced than the mentee. Peer mentoring is more popular and more effective within professional/consultancy firms where it is used to increase the knowledge bank and skills of individual consultants.

#### ***E-mentoring***

An alternative to face-to-face mentoring is to use the resources and accessibility of the Internet as a means of mentoring. E-mentoring uses electronic communication as its primary form of contact between mentor and mentee. E-mentoring is also used to support face-to-face mentoring meetings.

There are conflicting views about the effectiveness of E-mentoring. Some, such as Clutterbuck<sup>13</sup>, would argue that apart from in exceptional cases, E-mentoring should only be used for occasional queries between face-to-face mentoring meetings. He commented that many respondents and interviewees stressed the importance of the relationship between the mentor and mentee, and doubted this could be established or maintained through E-mentoring. Stokes,<sup>14</sup> however, in a pilot study of e-mentoring for SMEs, cites the key advantages offered as the flexible nature of delivery which suits busy time schedules, and ad-hoc questioning, reflecting the kind of informal, on-the-job approach to learning preferred by SMEs. One of the consultees for the report (Chrissie Webber from Coaching and Mentoring Wales) also endorsed E-mentoring as a cost-effective approach for developing SMEs.

#### ***Group mentoring***

Group mentoring can be an effective method of mentoring, where a number of potential mentees benefit from the same kind of mentoring in a group setting. Issues of confidentiality and honesty are major concerns within group settings as some individuals feel they cannot open up in front of others. It is, however, a cost effective method for introducing people to the concept of mentoring.

### 3.2 What is driving mentoring?

There are a number of issues that are driving mentoring. A recent explosion in the range of 'people-development' disciplines is a key factor. This comes with the recognition that people and the development of these people is a company's most important asset. Other drivers include an increasing emphasis on self-development and a 'learning culture', the return of people management responsibilities to line managers, and flatter hierarchies in organisations which rely more on relationships<sup>15</sup>.

Managers are increasingly required to fulfil a broader, more versatile role, ranging from possessing the vision to developing the strategy; a hands-on style to keep on top of operational issues; leadership skills to build teams and so on. This is particularly true for managers of small firms. It is not surprising, therefore, that individuals and teams have gaps in their skills base and development needs, many of which can be met by mentoring.

The table below summarises the key external and internal influences for mentoring.

**Figure 1: External and internal influences for mentoring**

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES	INTERNAL INFLUENCES
Business environment Globalisation Technological change Restructuring of organisations Mergers and acquisitions Diversity Changing shape of development Corporate social responsibility Changing psychological contract Managing stress at work Work-life balance and flexible working	Developing organizational capabilities Succession planning War for talent Focus on business performance Increased motivation Encouraging teamwork and productivity Change management initiatives Knowledge management Individual development and continuous improvement

Source: Cranwell Ward et al<sup>16</sup>

According to Clutterbuck<sup>17</sup>:

*"the influence of external 'quality' bodies has put more emphasis on reviewing how to ensure professionals have the required competencies and how colleagues can draw on each others' skills and experience, using on-the-job learning and one-to-one methods of development. The 'new' knowledge cannot all be found in books or on courses: but much of it can be gained through the job and from the experience and wisdom of others. When it is impossible to see more than one career move ahead, the benefits of a personal mentor can be appreciated in terms of encouraging the widening and lengthening of the mentee's horizons".*

Building on existing LEED unit research, we believe that mentoring as a form of development has the potential to be a key driver for SMEs as it fits well with the way that SMEs like to learn.

### **3.3 The business case for mentoring**

According to Clutterbuck<sup>18</sup>, the payoff from a mentoring programme will normally be a mixture of the following:

- Easier recruitment of the best talent
- More rapid induction of the new recruits
- Improved staff retention
- Improved equal opportunities performance and diversity management
- Increased effectiveness of formal training
- Reinforcement of cultural change
- Improved networking and communication
- Reinforcement of other learning initiatives

A report by the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative<sup>19</sup> (SFEDI) highlights the importance of business mentoring. Almost 90% of respondents to their survey on mentoring thought that businesses benefit from mentoring and felt the availability of mentors should be extended. Based on this survey it would appear that there is substantial scope for extending business mentoring opportunities. Almost nine in every ten respondents to the SFEDI survey thought owner-managers would benefit from such provision.

The participants involved in the focus group held in South Wales cited the main benefits of mentoring as:

- To act as a sounding board
- Another member of the team
- To share experiences and knowledge
- Confidence building

An independent study of Northern Ireland's Bridge mentoring programme found a number of benefits for SMEs directly attributable to the scheme, including:

- Increased sales turnover of 3.3 per cent
- Increased after-tax profits of 17.9 per cent
- Increased employment of 6.1 per cent

The report shows that there are also a series of "soft" benefits such as increased confidence for entrepreneurs, better staff management and internal processes, and broader networking, which can improve business performance in the longer term.