



Workplace mentoring system

"Only the dumb are frightened by the new; rose has also come from foreign lands to make its cultivation domestic."
Ferenc Kazinczy

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The integration of any new colleague is a time-demanding, and not always flawless process. One is to comply with the professional requirements, adapt to the “team”. One has to adjust to the written and unwritten rules of the given workplace culture, which is hard to map up without any assistance. It is especially difficult for those who do not have extensive workplace experience, or return to world of work from some disadvantaged situation, after several years out of work due to childcare or unemployment.

Nevertheless, if one succeeds the energies expended in the initial period will pay on the long run. Each company has its own system, procedure for the reception and assistance of new associates.

According to the manager of the Zoo and Botanical Garden of Budapest, one of the members of the partnership, the advantage of the mentoring system lies in the fact that clients “has also felt that they are not freely floating, but taken by the hand in a positive way”.

In its “Inclusive Budapest” project, Budapest Public Employment Service Non-Profit Company has worked out and tested such a support system with the involvement of a few employers that have acted as partners in the project. The project supported the training and one-year employment of people who were out of the labour market for longer and shorter whiles. For this very reason, their integration in the new workplaces have been assisted by older, more experienced colleagues, named as mentors.

The mentoring system has met the related expectations, as the scheme has been efficiently applied to the re-integration of the long-term unemployed to the labour market. After the closing of the project, more than 70% of the participants have remained at the workplaces where their employment was supported for a year. This is a remarkable achievement, because the employees concerned came from the most disadvantaged groups of the labour market. A great advantage of the system has been the assistance, support that the new associates have received towards tackling day-to-day problems, and thus they have been more likely to remain at their new workplaces.

Within the framework of the project, the system has been tested in connection with the long-term unemployed (including

elderly, low-schooled and Roma people), yet it is also applicable to other groups. Workplace mentors have meant great help to career starters, career restarters or those returning to work after years in childcare.

Most of the employment-oriented projects are less apt to build upon the involvement of employers, yet it is a major factor of success. The mentoring system involves employers in active work, and makes them interested in keeping the new – even disadvantaged – employees.

"INCLUSIVE BUDAPEST" PROJECT

The "Inclusive Budapest" project has aimed at demonstrating useable practices against prejudicial attitudes by the employers, as well as manifest results. Four large service providers of Budapest, Budapest Transport Company, the Zoo and Botanical Garden, one of the largest hospitals and the Public Employment Service have co-operated to establish a model of equal chances at workplaces.

The improvement of the personal opportunities of the persons involved has been just a partial aim of the project, while other targets have included the formulation of interests for organizations acting as employers in the labour relations, as well as the realization of further improvement. In the course of the project, participants have been trained in the light of the demands of the respective employers, while employers have been offered the opportunity to engage disadvantaged people in the framework of supported employment, and then they have been to prove their aptitudes, demonstrate their own values. The project has had a very important influence on the formation of employer attitudes, and the establishment of good practices.



ORIGINS OF THE MENTORING SYSTEM

Integration of low-skilled labour force at RATP (Marie-Claude Dejardin-Laloy)

RATP is the public transport company of Paris, and it operates four separate networks: RER, metro, bus and tram lines. With its 42,000 employees, it is the second largest employer of the Ile-de-France region.

Programs for the admission of local, low-skilled young people were started back in 1996. Annually, 1,200 new employees are engaged by the company, and 800-900 of them are directly employed in the field of transport. Naturally, some of them have special training backgrounds, but approx. ¼ of the new human resources are without proper qualifications. There are two types of programs operated within the context of their inclusive strategies. One of them is learning for the employment as designed for young people (Contrat de Qualification); it is attended by 350 young people annually, and more than 75% completes the program successfully.

The other program is Employment of Solidarity (Contrat Emploi Solidarité) wherein jobs are offered to long-term unemployed persons, mainly in maintenance functions; this program involves 150 people annually.

Both programs rely on workplace mentors and mentoring teams.

The core idea underlying the system is the selection of long-engaged workers as mentors for the disadvantaged newcomers. Young people have had individual helpers, while the long-term unemployed have participated in group work in the teams of the respective mentors.

As concerning their tasks, mentors have been provided with special preparation in the form of trainings, and continuous supervision towards the best possible efforts in their activities. All the mentors are volunteers, and 500-600 mentors worked at the Company in 2003.

SET UP OF THE MENTORING SYSTEM

According to foreign experience, integration to workplaces is easier if members of the “core team” having been working at the given workplaces help fresh entrants. People in disadvantaged situations in the labour market experience very high fluctuation, they tend to drop out of the workplaces easily and quickly.

At the present, organizations and programs offer a broad range of various services to the unemployed wishing to work, yet after their admission to jobs they receive less attention. A great advantage of the mentoring system is that it demonstrates the commitment of the employers, and deploys the assistance by people who know the given workplace, job the most thoroughly, and are committed to support the integration of the newcomers. Mentors therefore help integration, the preservation of the workplaces, thus improving the job-preservation capabilities of the given companies. For the employers, lower fluctuation rates mean smaller training costs. Mentors are high-esteemed members of the work communities, and feel commitment to assist newcomers. They know the corporate culture and processes well, and have good internal relations.

Key elements:

15 workplace mentor for 30 employees

co-equal workplace relations between the mentors and assisted persons

minimum 2 meetings a week

preparative trainings for mentors

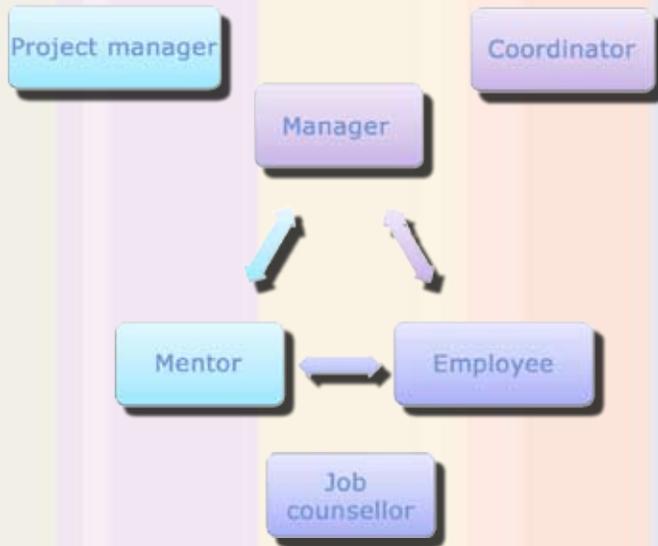
case discussions for mentors

process monitoring

extra benefits for the attendance of mentoring tasks

PROCESS CONTROL

The professional team has worked out a model that considers all the actors in the mentoring system, categorizes the tasks, and tries to map up the route and frequency of communication.



The figure shows the actors of the mentoring system and the potential routes of communication. The triangle links up the basically dominant actors of the system. Objects beyond the triangle represent actors that are also important in view to the project, and that have regular contributions to the system, yet with different intensities, functions.



WHO IS A WORKPLACE MENTOR ?

The mentor is one of the key contributors to the successes of the project. A professional who have been working at the inclusive workplace for long and/or have extensive experience, and who supports the professional, workplace integration of the client with advise.

Did you know?

The Hungarian word for mentor (patrónus) means also protecting saint:

Those saints of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Church who according to the associated religious beliefs can offer protection against diseases, epidemics, acts of God, etc., on the one hand, and on the other hand exercise generally beneficial influence on certain activities, occupations. They are usually depicted, represented in the vicinity of the livestock, pastures, vineyards, water bodies, houses offered to their protection, and are also among icons in the rooms of farmers: – Greek Catholic people primarily deem mentors, protecting angels to be the safeguards

Tasks of the mentors:

- assist new employees in being properly oriented in the organizational structure,
- introduce new employees to the other associates, the given organizational set-up,
- provide information on the formal and informal requirements at the workplace,
- support and encourage clients, provide consultation,
- assist the most proper way of working in the given jobs,
- participate in the preparative trainings, as well as supervision and case-discussion team activities organized for them,
- detect workplace problems, and notify the same to the coordinator and job counsellor,
- meet the clients regularly – on a weekly basis in the first three months, later on a monthly basis – towards supporting workplace integration.

Advantages of the mentoring system for the organization:

- fewer supported employees tend to leave the organization, lower fluctuation decreases training costs and idle time,
- supported employees perform better,
- the mentor is the keeper and conveyor of corporate culture to the new entrants,
- the mentor is capable of early correction,
- for mentors, the task means respect, positive feedbacks, and thus the long-standing loyalty and knowledge of mentors can be rewarded.

Advantages of the mentoring system for the mentor:

- for the mentor, the appointment as a mentor means professional and organizational appreciation,
- the mentor can share his/her experience, which also increases his appreciation,
- the successes of the supported person are also deemed to be his/her successes,
- the fresh professional knowledge, ideas of the supported person mean development potentials for the mentor,
- the managerial skills of the mentor develop considerably.

The project has contributed to the execution of the work of mentors:

- preparation, training of mentors,
- continuous arrangement of case discussions, supervision,
- appreciation of the work of mentors (payment of benefits).



KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PREPARATION OF MENTORS

The mentor is entrusted with orienting the new employee within the organizational structure. A part of this integration process is the introduction to both formal and informal expectations, norms, as well as the promotion of the establishment of cooperation. It is an important aspect that the mentor should not act instead of the newcomer, but just facilitate orientation in the complex network of relations or hierarchy. The mentor is a support to the new employee in work organization, technical issues.

An essential element in the preparation of mentors is that they should be aware of the fundamental rules of assistance, have appropriate communicational skills, including the method, technique of communicating feedbacks in a tactful, but clear manner. They are to be aware of their own limitations, restrictions, and they should not try to solve the problems of the employee, but rather perceive their role, function accurately. They are to know the rules of the games in workplace and assistance relations, as well as the ways how these relations can be handled.

Their training includes communicational practices, conflict-management information and practices, as well as self-knowledge and personality development elements, situational exercises.

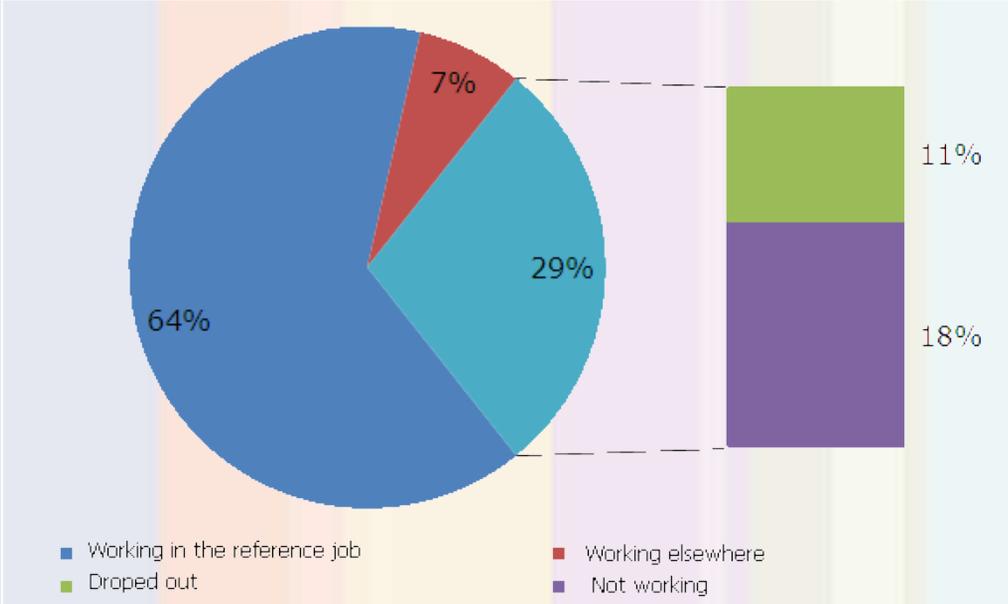


We have inquired from the participants, mentors and managers concerned what they think of the efficiency of the system. Nearly half of them have opined that the system is a real help for disadvantaged employees, and an additional proportion of 20% think that it could be applied to each new employee; another 30% reckon that the system has more benefits to offer than the work expended on its operation.

According to the mentors, the following constituents are required for the efficient operation of the system.	Number of respondents
open, flexible workplace	7
appropriate preparative training	6
appropriate relation between the mentor and the supported person	5
good communication	3
broad-ranging information	3
proper workplace manager	2
job counsellors for the support of new employees	2
adequate benefits for the attendance of mentoring tasks	1

According to all the responding mentors, it would be useful to operate the system continuously within the organization, and not just for the time period of a project; most of them have thought that it should be tested in other areas, as well. The majority of them would undertake additional mentoring tasks in the future.

With the use of the mentoring system, 70% of the participants of the project have remained at the respective workplaces after the end of supported employment in spite of the fact that due to the freezing of the headcount by the maintainer in the meantime the Zoo was not able to employ the participants any longer.



Altogether for 70% of the participants permanent jobs have been created instead of permanent unemployment.

GE Women Network

The legendary leader of GE, Jack Welch noticed that while one-third of the company's 300,000 employees were women, in the top management the share of female associates was rather insignificant, around eight percent. His idea was that those women who had the talent and ambition to rise into the top management should help each other with the provision of information and advice, as well as the dissemination of "best practices". As a consequence, in 1997 GE saw the establishment of the Women Network, and by today one-fifth of the position in the top management have come to belong to women, while their proportion in the total headcount of the company has remained one-third.

The basis of WN at the company is constituted by networking and mentoring, meaning that more experienced and higher-ranked women support talented, young female associates with their network of relations, advice. Nevertheless, it is not a program of equal chances for everyone. At the Hungarian subsidiaries of GE, 15,000 employees are engaged, and the members of the network count some eighty.



ABOUT OUR COMPANY

The Municipality of Budapest is engaged to take an active role assisting unemployed people in Budapest since 1996. By founding Budapest Public Employment Service Non-Profit Company, the city has built a safety network for all those unemployed, who fall out of institutional subsidy system. The Service has also taken on successfully reintegration employment. More than 50% of our current employees had started its career in public employment.

By 2002 more than 1500 persons applied every year in our branch offices, operating in six districts, serving potentially 430,000 inhabitants. We provide mentoring and job counsellor assistance to people looking for first employment. We paid special attention to the integration of our Roma colleagues. Nowadays our reintegration programs, runed by consortiums of municipalities, employers and non-profit organisations receive significant co-financing from the EU. We have been taking pioneer role in elaborating complex, innovative programs for reintegration, and in coordinating partnerships.

To ensure a secure financial background to our basic activities we offer business solutions, including landscaping and gardening. In 2003 the Budapest City Council resolved to establish the Equal Opportunity Office of the Municipality of Budapest between the institutional frameworks of Public Employment Service. Its main task is to help developing a coherent system of employment and social services in Budapest. In order to meet this goal we use the toolkit of "open coordination", the Office offers professional and methodological assistance to organisations helping Budapest citizens. The Office manages projects using European, national and local funds. Through our model programs and our EU related projects we have gained international reputation and relations. We have participated in developing Development Programs for Hungary, Central Hungary Region and Capital's Agglomeration.

Undersecretary Dr. Lilla Garzó

„ I know your work is a diverse, gap-filling activity. I am pleased that your methods and knowledge are regularly spreaded by publications, brochures, and conferences. Let me thank all you at the Company for the efforts you made in the field of employment policy.”

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