

eLearning and Social Networking in Mentoring Processes to Support Active Ageing

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Mentoring is a human resources development process often used to induct, introduce and guide staff into places of employment.

Training people on the job or using elderly people as mentors can be organised to address aspects like skill shortage in organisations, recruiting and retaining personal with the necessary knowledge and active involvement of older people. In this paper we present some aspects of mentoring, particularly the ICT support of such process and give examples.

1. Introduction

Mentoring has been used in Europe for a long time. It is a human resources development process often used to induct, introduce and guide staff into places of employment. (Edelkraut & Graf, 2011; Johnson & Ridley, 2008)

However, over recent decades the utilization of these concepts has also been shaped with regard to worldwide phenomena of demographic change. In this paper we use it relating to active ageing concepts.

The effects of demographic ageing will be felt all across Europe and will have significant social, economic and budgetary consequences (European Commission, 2011).

It is not sure that economic, social and educational models of the past fifteen years will be able to face up to these changes. Organisations recognise today that it is often difficult to recruit and retain personal with the necessary knowledge and that active involvement of older people can bring economic and social value to society. They can make direct contributions as volunteers, workers, informal careers and consumers and this maintains older people motivation, sense of feeling valued and contributes to avoid social isolation and many of its associated problems and risks.

Mentoring altering people on the job or using elderly people as mentors can be organised to address these aspects.

Mentoring on the job (at work place) is a complex process involving not just guidance and suggestion from mentors to mentees (protégés), but also the development of autonomous skills, judgments, personal and professional mastership, expertise, trust and selfconfidence over the time. It is particularly important for mentees with special needs like these with disabilities or elderly ones to support them in utilization of their resources (knowledge, skill, aptitude) and to socially integrate them also into the work and social life (Breipohl & Hamburg, 2011; Kram, 1985).

The company can have benefits from mentoring by a quick introduction of the mentee into formal and informal company structures and demands, dissemination of technical or internal

knowledge, training of social competence of the mentee and the mentor.

Mentees have the opportunity to meet with a trusted person to enter into a work place quickly and to cope with initial problems to discuss and resolve emerging job problems of genuine nature and in relation to the individual needs. They learn setting realistic goals and achieving them, enhance their skills and thus their future career opportunities and prospects in the future, can build social relationships or interactions and contacts new communication partners.

A mentor should possess competence like:

- Social Competences (particularly interest, motivation, awareness, (verbal and non-verbal) communication, aptitude, empathy and engagement skills).
- Professional Competences (responsibility standards in knowledge and skill).
- Operating Competences according to ethical and professional standards and to know the boundaries when engaging with mentees.

The training, the mentors receive in order to achieve such competences, means for them enhancement of their training and counselling skills, development of their role within the company, possibility to share their professional experiences with others, exchange of experience with other mentors by using, e.g., a social network

Elderly people can also be mentors for newcomers in a company or they can work as volunteer's mentors i.e. within social networks.

2. ICT supported mentoring

The using of flexible learning methods like eLearning, of advanced social connectedness and social network activities within the mentoring process supports active ageing by increased integration and social life. This process can be supported by an ICT-based platform, particularly one based on social media and Web services allowing mentors and mentees (aged people) to learn online, to communicate and collaborate, and to share knowledge and other different pathways to assess learning processes.

Such ICT approach supports different learning abilities of students and overcomes the limitations in time or space etc. of traditional face-to-face training,

Social media, particularly based on Web 2.0 ((O'Reilly, 2005), i.e., media which supports social interactions and social knowledge transfer, can be used to develop such systems taking many different forms, including internet forums, weblogs and wikis. The technical skills needed to use social media are rather low.

ICT supported mentoring in a social network like a mentoring oriented Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger et al., 2002; Hamburg et al., 2008) has a number of benefits:

- Provision of a 24 hour access of saved knowledge, for online training material and communication
- Accessible anywhere with internet availability
- Provision of a platform even if face-to-face communication is not possible
- Learning assessment and progress monitoring of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Although eLearning in an ICT supported CoP ((Johnson, 2001) allows for "anytime, anywhere" access to learning content, unsolved difficulties and misunderstanding of online learning can frustrate mentees particularly elderly ones. One example is "Provision of a 24 hour access for online training material and communication". If this aspect is not clarified, the student's anxiety increases sitting at the computer and waiting for an answer to their questions or messages.

Other aspects are trust and the depth of relationships. Face-to-face interaction and socialisation processes consolidate the relations between members and group membership. Trust is important for knowledge sharing in a network and this develops primarily through face-to-face interactions. A trust relationship has to be established online, if this approach will be used in the project on a regular basis by the mentors and mentees. So traditional elements of monitoring/mentoring have to be affiliated. Experience from our projects demonstrates the need for a constant presence of experienced and qualified mentors in the ICT supporting system. Often elderly mentees feel isolated when they are enrolled in completely eLearning courses.

ICT supporting system should be used in a context so that personal issues, which are not suitable for the online environment, do not become accessible for all. It should support real mentoring and not be understood as a supervisory tool.

3. Examples

IBB2 (Integrated Care Taking http://www.lebenshilfe-guv.at/unsere_dienste/eu_projekte/ibb_2_integrative_behindertenbetreuung) is an European Leonardo innovation transfer project aimed to support people with disabilities to enter and to be successfully integrated into professional life through a mentoring approach. For Germany we extended the project with mentoring for elderly people.



Figure 1: IBB2 CoP (Source: <http://www.ibb2.com>)

The training of diversity coaches DC (who train mentors) and mentors is done by informal and formal face to face and eLearning methods supported by an ICT based CoP developed with the social media tool TikiWiki (www.ibb2.com). It supports:

- Training of the DC and mentors
- Knowledge Transfer from DC to mentors and from mentors to mentees
- Mentoring process including mentee learning.

Training material for mentors is available online but in addition, a discussion forum for each module enables learners and trainers/experts to exchange and add ideas to the environment, to provide feedback (anonymously, if desired). It also enables them to pose queries to which other participants or the mentors can answer.

Another EU on-going innovation transfer Leonardo project is Net Knowing 2.0: Web 2.0 Technologies and Net Collaborating Practices to support learning in European SMEs (www.netknowing.com). One of the aims of the project is to help SMEs to turn their daily work into a source of corporate learning for all their employees. Discussions with SMEs have been done about efficient using of informal learning and eLearning also within a mentoring process. The goal of mentoring staff from SMEs is to improve job performance by increasing employee's capability to manage their own performance emphasizing on trust, experience, and supervision, to facilitate performance in the organisation, to support retention particularly for elderly staff and leadership development. A first version of an ICT based CoP supporting also mentoring has been developed by using TikiWiki. The eLearning suite developed in the project and connected to the CoP contains a module for mentor training.

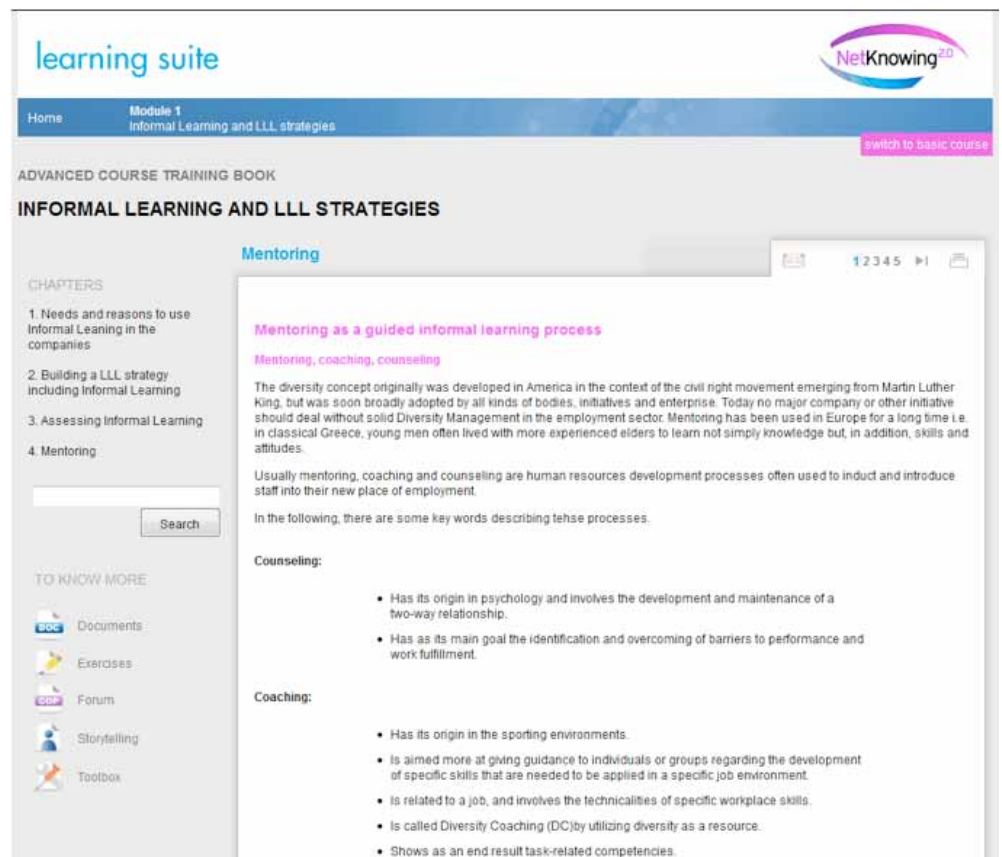


Figure 2: NetKnowing 2.0 Course from eLearning suite (Source: <http://www.nk2.uvedev.es/>)

4. Conclusions

In the process of supporting active ageing by using mentoring within informal and formal approaches, ICT methods should be blended with traditional face-to-face ones. A trust relationship has to be established first (if possible) face-to-face and later on-line, if the ICT based system will be used in the project on a regular basis by the mentors and mentees.

Acknowledgement

This paper describes work within the Leonardo innovation projects IBB2 and Net Knowing 2.0.

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