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IN-HOUSE MENTORING AND COACHING SCHEMES

The demand for mentoring and coaching schemes is on the increase in South Africa, driven by the skills development and BBEE imperatives. Professional associations and SETA's have specified mentorship as an important element of professional training, internships and learnerships. Business development agencies such as SEDA and the Youth Development Fund are running small business mentoring schemes. Many magazines carry articles on topics such as executive mentoring.

The general model of mentoring and coaching schemes is to use external experts or professional coaches. Recent research studies into the return on investment for external coaching schemes have shown that the return can be many times the cost of investment. Research on the success of small business mentoring schemes has yet, to my knowledge, to be carried out.

But experience with a small number of organisations in South Africa and with a very large number of organisations in Europe and the UK shows that many organisational goals can be met using in-house mentoring and coaching schemes - where managers and internal specialists or experts take on the role of mentor or coach.

Some of the benefits can include:

For the mentor or coach:

- ❖ Personal growth and acquisition of new skills - particularly useful for mid-career people who may not have much more upward movement and for people approaching retirement who may wish to take on such a role in retirement
- ❖ Insight into coping with diversity and difference - this often helps with managing their own teams
- ❖ Better understanding of different parts of the business - particularly where the mentee or coachee comes from a different department or section
- ❖ Better coaching skills which often translates into better performance management skills - often a major lack on many companies
- ❖ Intellectual challenge in having to help someone think through different issues
- ❖ Personal satisfaction from helping someone else to develop their potential

For the mentee or coachee:

- ❖ Learning to cope with the formal and informal structures, culture etc of the company or department - useful for new, transferred and recently promoted employees
- ❖ A further source of stability and support - often as line managers change or the employee rotates positions, there is little sense of support from the organisation
- ❖ Career advice and guidance
- ❖ Speeding up learning - being helped to think things through can support good decision making and learning from mistakes
- ❖ Affirmation that the company is investing in individual development - assistance with implementation of a development plan

For the company:

- ❖ Improved retention of talent - research from UK has proven that retention improves dramatically if a well structured in-house mentoring scheme is in place
- ❖ Better assimilation of new employees - quicker “on-boarding” and reaching initial performance goals
- ❖ Support for the company culture - a good mentor or coach will model and explain the company culture
- ❖ Improved communication - mentoring and coaching relationships support wider internal networks, which support better communication
- ❖ Improved understanding of the business - particularly where pairs are set up across divisions or business units
- ❖ Leadership development - self reflection in the mentoring or coaching sessions helps to develop self awareness and from there leadership competencies.

A recent case study of a large South African ICT company demonstrates neatly the contribution of both in-house mentoring and in-house coaching schemes.

The coaching scheme was set up to support the learnership scheme. The company takes on approximately 20 graduates as learners each year. Each learner was assigned a coach and the company realised that the technical experts who would be doing the coaching were not necessarily skilled coaches. Short training sessions were run for the coaches which led to considerable improvement in awareness of role most usefully played by a coach - emphasis was also laid on what was not expected from the coach, such as counselling, personal problem-solving etc, for which HR was providing the support. Further skills practice sessions will be run. Similar training sessions for the learners were run, concentrating on their responsibility for self-development, how to be a pro-active learner and how to ask for and act on feedback. These sessions were highly appreciated by the new learners.

The mentoring scheme was set up as a pilot, with two different target groups - firstly senior managers with potential to reach top management and secondly newly promoted middle managers. Specific objectives have been set for each of these schemes. 17 mentoring pairs are working at present. Similar training sessions were run for both mentors and mentees - again with very positive feedback. The pilot will be evaluated after a year and if appropriate, the mentoring scheme will be adapted according to the feedback and then rolled out on a wider scale.

What is the distinction between mentoring and coaching? The above example demonstrates what we believe is the important distinction. The coaches' role is to help the learners to achieve very specific performance goals, whilst improving the learners' ability to direct their own learning. The mentors' role is to support the mentee in personal and career growth, working on a agenda specific to each individual and determined by that individual. Thus the content and nature of each mentoring relationship will be somewhat different, whilst the content and nature of each coaching relationship is likely to be pretty constant.

What makes in-house schemes successful - what are the important issues to consider when designing and running such a scheme? The European Mentoring and Coaching Council¹ has sponsored the introduction of the International Standards for Mentoring Programmes in Employment². These standards have six key elements, which constitute the key success factors and these can also be applied to in-house coaching schemes. These key elements are:

1. Clarity of purpose
2. Stakeholder training and briefing
3. Processes for selection and matching
4. Processes for measurement and review
5. Maintains high standards of ethics
6. Administration and support

A few UK organisations have reached the Gold Standard of these Standards and their schemes are indeed impressive to see, with results to match.

There is much room for learning and improvement with in-house mentoring and coaching schemes in the South African environment.

¹ www.emccouncil.org

² ISMPE www.ismpe.com

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