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**THE MENTORING, A SUCCESSFUL WAY TO DEVELOP SKILLS,  
IN THE MODERN SOCIETY**

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**Abstract**

The education that traditionally was seen as beginning in childhood and ending in the period of transition to the adult life, acquires, nowadays, new meanings, the lifetime alternating periods of study and work. In this context and taking into account that every man spends more than a quarter of life at work, the workplace is looming to be crucial in making lifelong learning a reality by stimulating the motivation to learn and by the adults participation in education and training.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate a vital issue for the contemporary society, where the requirements are getting higher: the issue of the adult education in general and mentoring, more in particular. To achieve this purpose, it was conducted a literature review to identify how mentoring is interpreted and applied in organizations. In this regard, the paper starts with a presentation of the crucial role that companies, through the types of training offered, meet at generating lifelong learning for their employees, continuing with the conceptual definition of mentoring as a mechanism for the transfer of knowledge and the development of skills within organizations. The analysis undertaken have identified a number of advantages and limitations regarding the mentoring process at the workplace, the final conclusion being that mentoring is a win-win process in which both parties can gain valuable benefits.

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## 1. Introduction

Adult learning in the workplace is a basic element for learning throughout life, especially if we consider that most people spend a large part of their time at work, this becoming possible by stimulating the motivation to learn and through adult participation in education and training. There is a range of ways



that can lead to achieving adult education in the workplace, the employees being able to learn through the work tasks assigned, from colleagues and mentors, by solving challenges that may arise, by job rotation, and through continuous training that employers can offer, through various specialized courses.

Following the adoption of ambitious strategies and introducing a number of new models of work organization, companies are becoming more aware of the lack of certain skills, rendering imminent the need for continuous training. In this regard, the employer has the responsibility to create all the conditions in the workplace for employees to continue learning and to develop their skills.

A key indicator for the crucial role that work has in lifelong learning may be the proportion of companies that offer training. According to Eurostat, in 2010, at EU level, 66% of companies provided continuous training to their employees, percentage with 6 points higher as compared to 2005. Among the analysed countries, most of them recorded an increase of this percentage, in 2010 compared to 2005, exception made by Poland (13% decrease), Romania (16% decrease), Great Britain (10% decrease). The largest increase was recorded in Belgium, where the percentage of firms that provide continuous training to their employees was, in 2010, 78% versus 63% in 2005.

**Table 1.** The share of companies providing continuous training to their employees in 2010

	The highest share		The lowest share	
Austria	87%		Poland	23%
Sweden	87%		Romania	24%
United Kingdom	80%		Bulgaria	31%
Netherlands	79%		Latvia	40%
Belgium	78%		Hungary	49%
France	76%			

Source: Eurostat. *Vocational education and training statistics*. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Vocational\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_statistics#Further\\_Eurostat\\_information](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Vocational_education_and_training_statistics#Further_Eurostat_information), consulted on 17.08.2016.

In 2010, at EU level, 56% of companies were offering to their employees training as a form of continuous learning, while 53% were conducting other types of continuous education (such as training on-the-job, job rotation, study visits, workshops, self-directed learning). The proportion of companies that offer courses as a form of continuous training of their employees exceeded 75% in Denmark and Sweden (76%), situating above the EU average in several countries, including Belgium, Austria, Spain, France and the Netherlands. In contrast, with less than 25% of the companies providing courses is positioned Bulgaria (21%), Greece (21%), Poland (20%) and Romania (14%). The percentage of companies that provide other types of training is noticeably higher, having in the top Denmark (84%), Austria (77%), UK (75%), Sweden (74%).

**Table 2.** The share of companies that provide courses and any other type of training in 2010

Country	% companies that offer courses		Country	% companies that provide other types of training
Denmark	76		Denmark	84
Sweden	76		Austria	77
Austria	72		United Kingdom	75
Belgium	72		Sweden	74
Spain	71		Netherlands	69

Country	% companies that offer courses		Country	% companies that provide other types of training
France	71		Germany	66
Netherlands	70		Cyprus	66
Latvia	27		Latvia	33
Bulgaria	21		Bulgaria	29
Greece	21		Greece	23
Poland	20		Romania	20
Romania	16		Poland	14

Source: Eurostat Database. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/education-and-training/data/database>, consulted on 15.05.2016.

By comparing these results, we can conclude that there are countries where companies have a higher probability of providing training to their employees, as well as some in which companies are more likely to provide other types of training to their employees.

According to Allen & Eby (2007), in the context of changes occurring on the labour market and of demanding working environments, maintaining updated knowledge and skills becomes essential. In this context, lifelong learning is not only the obligation of a low-skilled, vulnerable on the labour market, but a necessity and a responsibility for all, both employees and employers. (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2011, p. 19)

As defined by the Council of the European Union (2011, p. 3), adult learning refers to all types of learning, formal, non-formal and informal, general or vocational, made by adults after they finished their initial education and training.

Learning in the workplace is seen by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (2011, p. 98) as including informal learning, non-formal, ad-hoc, practical and occasional learning, incorporated into workplace, into work-related processes and tasks, for introducing new staff members in the working processes of the company as well as for continuous development of experienced employees. Both formal and informal learning are equally important elements of workplace learning, involving, however, different processes and results. Thus, while informal learning occurs as part of daily workflow processes, producing particularly implicit or tacit knowledge, formal learning takes place in the context of organized training and learning activities, with the purpose of generating explicit, formal knowledge and skills. Given these considerations, it is advisable that the different ways of learning in the workplace to be combined so that the formal learning use informal learning. (Tynjälä, 2008, p. 140)

In conclusion, learning-at-work proves to be an effective form of training, as it allows immediate application in the workplace of acquired knowledge and skills.

## 2. The Mentoring, a Successful Way to Transfer Knowledge and to Develop Skills

In order to establish an effective development strategy to ensure business performance, it is imperative that companies anticipate the needs of future professionals. A study by Oxford Economics shows that, in order to develop their skills, employees rely more on training and mentoring, 50% of respondents expecting to receive more feedback from their supervisors than from colleagues from previous generations. (Leloup, 2014, para. 1)

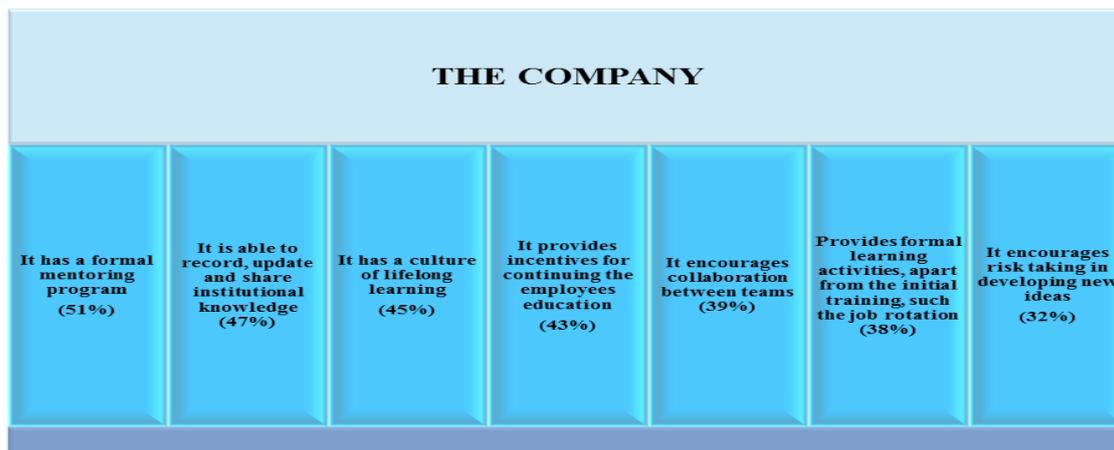


Fig. 1. Learning culture in organizations perceived by employees

Source: Oxford Economics. *Workforce 2020. The Learning Mandate*. Retrieved from <http://www.oxfordeconomics.com/workforce2020/reports>, consulted on 20.08.2016.

According to Cuerrier (2003), the mentoring can be defined as a form of voluntary help, encouraging development and learning, based on an interpersonal relationship of support and sharing where an experienced person (mentor) invests his accumulated wisdom and expertise in order to foster the development of another person who has skills to acquire and professional goals to attain.

The protégé is a person looking for personal and professional fulfilment, motivated to use knowledge, skills and values provided by a senior so as to facilitate the achievement of personal and professional objectives. (ADASUM, 2015, p. 2)

As people go through different stages in life, they can experience several forms of mentorship, as a way of learning specific to each stage: youth mentoring, academic mentoring, mentoring in the workplace. Mentoring-at-work takes place in an organizational framework, representing a means to facilitate career development among employees, due to its purpose for personal and professional development of the protégé. The mentor may be a supervisor or anyone else in the company which is outside of the command chain of the protégé, or a person from another organization. (Eby, Allen, Evans, et al., 2008)

Recognising mentoring as a mechanism of important knowledge transfer within organizations has increased significantly in the last years, the literature focusing in particular on the manner in which the mentor/protégé relationship is built, on the behaviour expected from mentors, as well as on the identification of mentorship functions. (Swap, et al., 2001, p. 99)

People with experience in an organization can help newcomers or novices to interpret the events, understand the technological and business processes and to identify the values and norms of an

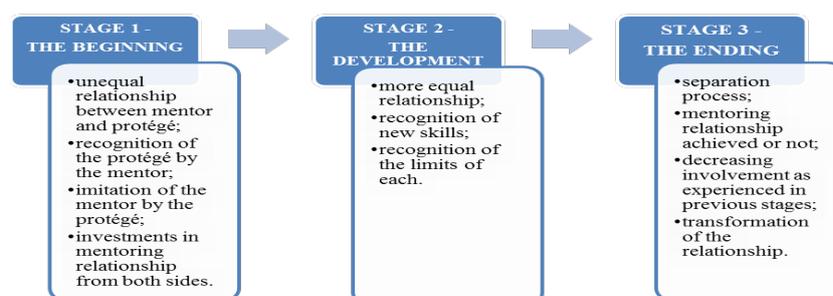
organization. In Houde's opinion (1995), the mentor is perceived as fulfilling the following duties (St-Jean, & Josée, 2009, p. 4):

- Receiving the protégé in the working environment;
- Guiding the protégé at work by presenting norms, values and taboos of the organizational culture;
- Teaching the protégé;
- Training the protégé to acquire the specific skills necessary for carrying out activities specific for a workplace;
- Favouring the protégé's promotion in the work environment;
- Being the protégé's model; the later must identify with his mentor, prior to differentiate from him;
- Presenting a series of challenges to the protégé and offering him the opportunity to prove his skills in solving them;
- Advising the protégé regarding certain issues;
- Providing direct useful and constructive feedback;
- Morally supporting the protégé, especially in times of stress.

In order to fulfil these functions, mentors (BioTalent Canada, 2014, para. 5):

- assesses the strengths, development needs and personality of the protégés, using their skills to adapt the mentoring to the person they supervise;
- clearly specify their requirements, helping protégés to decide what they want from this relationship and what they need;
- also understand that mentoring is an interactive process: the learning experience takes place in both directions;
- help protégés to focus on clear and realistic objectives, that seek mastering of a task or solving a problem;
- sharing knowledge and experience, being willing to give and receive feedback and help protégés to improve and to correct the manner in which they work;
- as protégés achieve their goals, mentors help them establish new ones, assigning new tasks and responsibilities so as to continue to gain experience in different areas;
- encourage protégé to take advantage of learning opportunities outside the company, sending them to others who can help them to acquire knowledge and skills relevant to their position.

Mentorship can be seen as a gradual process in three stages, each involving specific aspects (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Stages of a mentoring relationship

Source: Brunet, Y. (2009). *Élaboration d'un guide d'encadrement pour le mentorat auprès du personnel enseignant débutant en soins infirmiers au collégial*, p. 47, Université de Sherbrooke.

### 3. The Benefits and Disadvantages of the Mentoring

The benefits of mentoring are analyzed through increased workplace satisfaction and through employee retention. Numerous studies have shown that people who have benefited from mentoring perform better and promote faster, in part because they have acquired knowledge and teachings from their mentors. (Swap et al., 2001, p. 99) The Chartered Accountants of Canada reported in their work that an USA study on mentoring revealed the following benefits:

- 25% of employees who participated in a mentoring program changed the pay scale for a more advantageous environment. At the opposite pole, only 5% of those who did not participate in such a program could accede to a more favourable salary grid;
- Mentors have won promotion six times more often than those who did not participate in a mentoring program;
- Protégés were promoted five times more often than those who did not participate in a mentoring program;
- The retention rates were also higher for the protégés (72%) and mentors (69%) than employees who did not participate in a mentoring program.

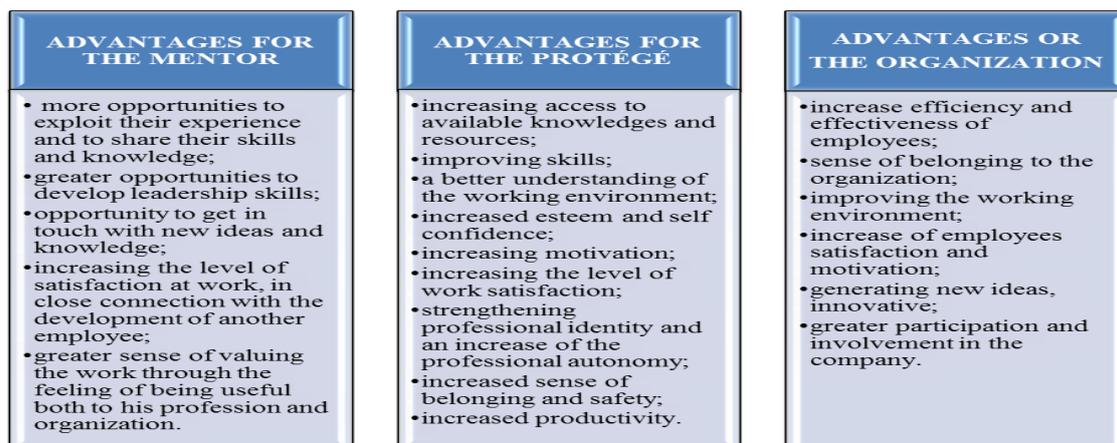


Fig. 3. The mentoring benefits

Source: Grenier, J.A. (2014). *Mentorat – Nouvel employé UMCEP* and Bureau de l’alphabétisation et des compétences essentielles. *Mentorat et compétences essentielles*. Retrieved from <http://www.edsc.gc.ca/fra/emplois/ace/docs/outils/mentorat.pdf>, consulted on 15.05.2016.

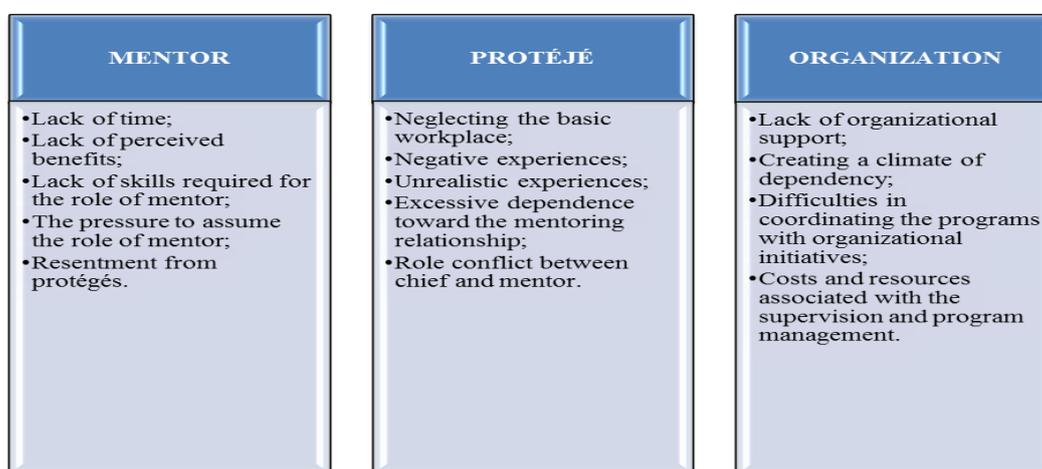
Although mentoring proves that is bringing many benefits to all organizational participants, Long (1997, p. 115) points out that it may have a “dark side” and that although the general picture is a bright side of wonders that mentoring can do, especially for the professional development of staff, at least some scholars and practitioners are sceptical. In fact, in different circumstances, mentoring relationships may actually be detrimental to the mentor, the protégé or to both of them.

The major concerns in terms of mentoring include those under which mentoring is time-consuming for all parties involved, the mentoring process can be poorly planned, an unsuccessful assignment between mentors and protégés can be made, leading to a weak relationship between mentor

and protégé, a lack of understanding of the mentoring process may appear, the mentoring can create tensions in the workplace, there may be an over-utilization of available mentors, the protégé may reproduce the mentor's work style. (Ehrich, & Hansford, 1999, p. 102)

Another problem mentors may face is the lack of support for professional development. In companies, employees are selected to be mentors as they are qualified for the jobs they occupy, however, mentorship requires different sets of skills and, thus, many mentors face difficulties regarding the high demands of the role, not having sufficient experience as to deal with it. Several authors have raised the issue of security-at-work, citing the Japanese mentoring, which expects for more experienced workers to support the development of beginner staff, being in the same time protected against the possibility that protégés take their positions. Furthermore, it is considered necessary that employees benefit from paid free time to learn how to be effective mentors. (Holland, 2009, p. 20)

Figure 4 presents synthetically a number of potential disadvantages of the mentoring relationship.



**Fig. 4.** The mentoring drawbacks

Source: Douglas, C.A. (1997). *Formal mentoring programs in Organizations. An Annotated Bibliography*, Centre for Creative Leadership, Greensboro, NC, p. 86.

In conclusion, we can say that despite grey aspects, imminent for any process, mentoring, as a means to help employees improve their skills and essential abilities, is a win-win process, in which all parties can gain precious advantages, and mentors, whether or not formally appointed, serve as informal teachers, their knowledge being successfully transferred.

#### 4. Conclusions

Nowadays, work is proving to be more competitive than ever, the war for talents making their presence felt more strongly. (Bolser, & Gosciej, 2015, p. 7) In this context, it emerges as a major opportunity for the companies to use labour to meet these challenges through mentoring, which proves to be beneficial for both the employer and the employee. (Ray, 2015, p. 23) A formal and structured relationship between a mentor and a protégé is an alternative approach or an original addition to traditional methods of training and career management. (Benabou, & Benabou, 1999)

Mentoring fosters a culture in which employees are considered to be lifelong learners, this collaborative approach going beyond generations and hierarchies, with an essential role to facilitate a faster transfer of valuable tacit knowledge throughout the organization.

As highlighted by Oxford Economics in its report, the value of learning in the workplace can be clearly translated in that it leads to benefiting from well-trained employees, with constantly updated skills and knowledge, essential aspects for building stronger companies. Despite these issues and although employees require more education and development opportunities, and managers recognize the importance of training their employees, learning culture remains a sensitive area for most companies. By providing more opportunities for training and skills development and by promoting an environment where sharing knowledge is encouraged and rewarded, companies will have superior opportunities to thrive in a world belonging to this century, focused on information.

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