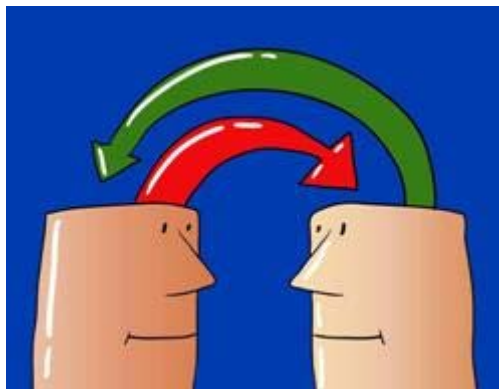




SISC

Senior Intergenerational
Social Capital

Knowledge sharing, mentoring and e-learning within European companies



Transnational report

E.Ri.Fo. Ente per la Ricerca e Formazione

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Main conclusions

Next steps: some tips and suggestions

The aim of the present publication is to present the results of a research, which constitutes the first part of a two-year project: “SISC - Senior Intergenerational Social Capital”, realised by E.RI.FO (Italy), together with the Institute for Private Enterprise and Democracy (Poland), the RKW Hessen GmbH (Germany), and iCentres (Bulgaria), co-financed by the Lifelong Learning Programme – Grundtvig Multilateral.

In the course of the project, we plan to devise a mentoring model for the older and younger employees to share knowledge effectively. The SISC Project aims to support the companies in their efforts to retain the “know-how” of the highly qualified workers in the company, before they retire. The 50+ employees will undergo individual training to become mentors. As mentors, they will transfer the knowledge directly to the younger and less-experienced employees of their enterprise.

In order to define a universal model, better suited to the needs of the target group, we addresses the entrepreneurs and the HR managers, asking them to express their opinion on the knowledge transfer methods, the barriers to these processes, along with their expectations.

The objective of the enquiry, conducted simultaneously in Poland, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria was to detect crucial information about the different European companies’ needs in terms of intergenerational learning and especially mentoring, so as to give to SISC product a really European added value. In particular, the filed research aims to gather key information about possible ways/good practices for the implementation of mentoring and e-learning schemes within EU companies.

The main answers that the partnership will gain from the enquiry are:

- modalities to foster intergenerational learning within enterprises, so as to give value to the experiences gained by the eldest employees during their own working lives;
- main ways to foster the introduction of e-learning as an updating modality for senior

employees: how to engage them overcoming any possible barrier;

- main ways to introduce mentoring schemes within companies and to motivate seniors at best, and ways to organise mentoring sessions;

- main knowledge and competencies needed by senior employees in order to become effective mentors, and main gaps existing between owned and to-be-owned skills.

The information collected from the survey will serve as a basis for the development of SISC main tool: the SISC e-learning pathway. This will be an ICT-based tool targeted to women and men aged 50+, enabling them to make autonomously via PC own individual balance of competencies (stressing mentoring key competencies' related strengths and weaknesses). Moreover, this e-learning tool will let them attend an individualised e-learning pathway about Mentoring, aimed at convincing them of their own importance in terms of knowing how to transfer the knowledge to new generations, and providing them with the proper tools.

The following specific professional figures have been involved in the study: HR Managers, trainers, or employers. This decision derives from the urgency of gathering focused information about companies' organisation and boundaries to the implementation of mentoring and e-learning programs. Four countries have been involved in the enquiry: Italy, Germany, Poland and Bulgaria, for a total of 60 interviews. In particular, 15 interviews were planned to be carried out in each country, matching to the need to implement in-depth interviews. The 60 surveyed companies include 20 small companies (employing 10 to 50 employees), 20 medium-sized companies (employing between 500 and 200 workers) and 20 large companies with over 200 employees. The aim is to analyse the differentiation of answers in companies of different sizes.

In order to gain meaningful in-depth information, an open enquiry method has been selected. Instead of a structured questionnaire with closed answers, a scenario for the interview has been defined.

The scenario for the interview was structured in the following sections:

1. The Company

These questions focus on dimension, belonging sector and composition of the staff of the Company.

2. Internal learning and communication

These questions focus on the general use of different communication channels within the Company and on the general ways in which employees use to share knowledge.

3. Intergenerational learning

These questions focus on the involvement of senior employees in the process of sharing knowledge and experiences gained during the own working lives.

4. Mentoring

These questions focus on ways/possible ways of mentoring programs implementation within the Company.

5. e-Learning

These questions focus on ways/possible ways of e-Learning programs implementation within the Company.

6. Competencies needed by mentors

These questions focus on competencies needed in order to perform the role of mentor effectively.

The last section is dedicated to the formalisation of a possible engagement of the company in the next phases of the project, and particularly in the testing of the tools.

The results of the research are here summarised into a joint European report.

The sample of companies

Focus on dimension, belonging sector and composition of the staff of the companies.

The interviews have been conducted in 60 companies: 15 Italian, 15 German, 16 Polish and 14 Bulgarian companies.

The following chart synthesizes company sector- size information.

	Small	Medium sized	Large	TOT
Building	3	1	4	8
Production	8	4	14	26
Service	12	8	5	25
Trade	1	0	0	1
TOT	24	13	23	60

Most employees, regardless of company size, belonged to the 30-50 age group. The older workers constituted the minority of the total surveyed companies population.

Internal learning and communication

Focus on the general use of different communication channels within the company and on the general ways in which employees use to share knowledge.

SECTION 1. CORPORATE CULTURE

The surveyed companies were inquired to indicate the corporate culture that best describes the model dominating in their organisation, the possible choices being: hierarchy oriented, cooperative and team-building oriented. The participants of the poll could also point to other management styles as prevalent in their companies.

How could you describe company culture?

				
1st	Teamwork	Teamwork	Cooperative	Teamwork
2nd	Cooperative	Cooperative	Teamwork	Hierarchy oriented
3rd	Hierarchy oriented	Hierarchy oriented	Hierarchy oriented	Cooperative

Teamwork and cooperative models are predominant in all the polled companies.

In all the countries (except from Bulgaria) there is a remarkable difference between organizational culture in small and larger companies. Actually, while in small workplaces workload is mainly based on cooperation, sharing and team working, the larger companies are more structured and hierarchy oriented. Small numbers seem to ease sharing and co division processes.

The opposite situation in Bulgaria can be explained on the basis of two main indicators – the area of activity of the respondent companies (mainly production) and the relevant staff structure (mostly one owner or small managerial division and individual workers). Most of these companies lack the intricate managerial structure, including many separate divisions, which is characteristic of large companies, and consequently the decision to implement hierarchy oriented or team work oriented style of work lies exclusively with the owner of the company.

SECTION 2. AVAILABILITY OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The aim of the present set of questions was to determine the availability of the communication channels to the employees of the surveyed companies. The respondents could indicate channels such as: intranet, internet, e-mail, newsletter, meetings, phones, knowledge bases, message boards, computers or other channels. The availability of the individual channels is presented on the following charts.

What are the most available communication channels to the employees?

				
1st	email	meetings/conversations	Telephone	telephone
2nd	telephone	telephone	Meetings	meetings
3rd	internet	internet	eMail	newsletters
4th	meetings	eMail		

In all the countries the most diffused knowledge sharing tools are the telephones, meetings and emails.

According to gathered data, such means are available to all the members of the staff in one case on two.

SECTION 3. USE OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

The polled companies were also asked to indicate three communication channels they used most often.

What are the most used communication channels?

				
1st	meetings	informal information exchange/ meetings	Meetings	meetings
2nd	e-Mailing	eMail	Internet	telephone conversations
3rd	telephone	telephone	telephone	

conversations

conversations

In all the countries the most used communication channels are meetings and telephone conversations.

Intergenerational learning

Focus on the involvement of senior employees in the process of sharing knowledge and experiences gained during the own working lives.

SECTION 1. KNOWLEDGE LOSS WITHIN THE COMPANY

The polled companies were asked how much knowledge do they lose, when older employees retire.

The problem of knowledge lost when older employees retire...



In all the countries (except from Poland) the knowledge loss which happens at the company when older employees leave, is not as seriously perceived as one would expect.

This is the opinion of almost all of the large companies in the survey. Main reasons were:

- no knowledge is lost because there are **no industry-specific skills**
- employees transfer their experience through **helping each other** in the working process
- they can compensate an eventual loss of knowledge through available resources for **training**
- being used at turnover, they already use tools enabling knowledge keeping (such as **databases**);
- **targeted tandems** between experienced workers and younger employees are created;
- **company is young** and few leave;
- knowledge is **well documented**.

However, small companies expressed more concerns. Disadvantages derive from departures of employees who have comprehensive expertise which is not documented while it does not belong to any one of the core processes. In other cases it involves the very specialized knowledge of employees and leadership with extensive experience.

SECTION 2. MEANS OF INTERGENERATIONAL KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

The representatives of the polled companies were asked to indicate methods of knowledge transfer from the older to the younger employees. They were free to choose among: tutoring, mentoring, knowledge bases, training, e-learning and other means of knowledge transfer.

What are the most used intergenerational knowledge transfer means?



Companies polled use to implement intergenerational transfer of knowledge mainly through tutoring between younger and elder persons, where tutoring is meant as constant assistance in presence during work implementation. Another very used modality is training. Both of them foresee a direct, personal support and assistance, not mediated by any ICT mean.

In all the countries the concept of mentoring is not clear, leading to many misunderstandings. eLearning has limited application as an intergenerational knowledge transfer tool within the interviewed companies.

SECTION 3. KNOWLEDGE-TRANSFER RELATED SATISFACTION LEVEL

The representatives of the surveyed companies were also asked to specify the level of their satisfaction with the results of knowledge transfer from the senior to junior employees.

Are you satisfied with the results of intergenerational knowledge transfer?



The surveyed companies are satisfied with the ongoing processes of know-how transfer between elder and younger employees.

It appears that more than 7 respondent companies on 10 (almost all in Bulgaria) have expressed their outright satisfaction. This result is in part due to the positions of the interviewed persons within the companies (owners and top-level managing staff).

The most important key requirements for successful transfer of know-how - according to surveyed companies – could be divided in the following 5 main macro-areas:

Working conditions and workplace stability

- good **company environment**;
- **satisfied older** employees, who are loyal to the company;
- **engaged young** people, who want to stay at the company for a long time;
- **BARRIER**: seniors thinking that the knowledge transfer to the younger colleagues would render them useless.
- **BARRIER**: “knowledge hoarding” in order to secure their own positions;

Relations between the older and younger employees

- **motivation and willingness** on behalf of both elder and younger employees to involve in a process of transferring knowledge, skills and industry-specific experience;
- existence of **trust and understanding** between employees;
- mutual **respect**;
- **BARRIER**: impatience (I can do it myself before I take the time to explain it to someone else);
- **BARRIER**: reluctance of senior workers to share their experience;
- **BARRIER**: anxiety of the senior workers to lose their present position.

Appropriate organisation of work

- the organization of internal and external **training initiatives** to foster communication between older and younger employees as well as to assure the necessary mentoring skills;
- use of specific and interesting **methods** for transfer of knowledge;
- unceasing transfer between employees and the existing **knowledge database** in some of the companies;
- **workload sharing**, thus easing a continuous monitoring of progresses made, the possibilities to identify critical elements and to implement problem solving activities;
- close **physical proximity**;
- **open and transparent** systems within the company;
- **BARRIER**: too little exchange between employees;

- **BARRIER:** too many resources involved in this process, thus losing important working time.

Knowledge of the know-how transfer procedures

- seniors' diffused **ability to transfer knowledge owned** clearly and without useless jealousies;
- **assistance know-how** (knowing how to assist a less experienced person represents a crucial element);
- high **starting level of juniors** (not at their very first experience);
- **professionalism** of experts and **humility** of knowledge recipients;
- **BARRIER:** people do not know how to effectively transfer knowledge.

Creation of professional development paths for the workers

- making **time** available for exchanges;
- assistance must be **long lasting** (up to 2 years);
- this process must measure individual developments through **quantifiable standards**.

Focus on ways/possible ways of mentoring programs implementation within the Company.

SECTION 1. IMPLEMENTATION OF MENTORING PROGRAMME

The representatives of the surveyed companies were also asked about the mentoring programmes already in place.

Have you already implemented mentoring programmes?



One company on two (except from Poland) have implemented mentoring programs.

It is not surprising that we are mainly speaking about large companies.

When discussing about mentoring definition with the interviewed companies, in most cases this concept is used in a different way. It was clear that when companies use mentoring, it was primarily all about optimising internal knowledge.

SECTION 2. OCCASIONS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR MENTORING IMPLEMENTATION

Representatives of the companies which have implemented such programmes, have commented these occasions.

When do you usually implement mentoring programmes?



Mentoring pathways are mainly activated in occasion of new engagements. The mentors are experienced employees, members of leadership and experts.

Organizations which are already implementing mentoring use it with new hires or high potentials to support career development.

Professionals involved as mentors are mainly those who already perform a specific role or who, for seniority, competencies, or knowledge owned may support juniors.

In many cases, mentor is the responsible of a technical area, while the supervisor is a responsible of company organisational development. Mentee are newly engaged employees, usually low skilled.

Main reasons of companies satisfaction with mentoring programmes activated concern deriving benefits for three main targets: company as a whole, insertion and performances of the newly hired employees.

Company as a whole

- **improvement of the overall knowledge and information flow** in their companies (i.e. strengthening of their internal communication system)
- **development** of company knowledge
- **capturing knowledge** within the company
- **retention** of new employees
- **continuity** of company culture
- **best results and performances**
- **quality** of the work improved
- make **transferring knowledge between areas** possible;
- make **knowledge generally available**;
- improved **communication**
- make knowledge and experience more **usable**;
- **retaining** the knowledge of the old experts within the walls of the company
- **faster development** of the whole company

Insertion of the newly hired

- help senior workers realise the **gravity and value of the knowledge** they possess and, as a result, strengthen their abilities to transfer knowledge to the younger workers
- **quicker insertion and adaptation** of new employees within the company
- a good training in the **respect of mentee individual capabilities** and competencies

- sense of **being part** of the company
- more **openness and patience** with the training of new hires;
- to support **openness** and increase **confidence**;
- to build a “**mentee network**“;

Performances of the newly hired

- the **quickest and most efficient work** possible;
- mentees feel as more **responsible** for their own job;
- improvements in the **qualification and professionalism** of the new employees;
- improvement of knowledge transfer and **faster learning process** regarding new workers;
- knowledge about **strategies and exemplifications** learnt by employees during their long experience;
- **less mistakes**.

SECTION 3. BARRIERS TO MENTORING IMPLEMENTATION

The respondents were asked to point at barriers to taking over a role of a mentor by the senior workers.

What are obstacles hindering seniors from being mentors?



The insufficient knowledge about this method and lack of resources emerge as the most frequently met problem.

It seems that the surveyed do not have complete knowledge on the mentoring process, and do not realise that it means in practice the help of the senior workers offered to the younger employees. They neither have an idea of the real costs of the implementation of mentoring processes, which can in many cases be very low.

There is a problematic part of the sample that is not interested in it. Main **resistance points** to be removed are related to the following wrong believing:

- employees **should not be educated once hired**: they must already master required skills;
- juniors, once trained, may **leave the company** bringing with them important company knowledge;
- mentoring is a **time consuming** activity;
- mentoring is a **difficult route**.

SECTION 4. SENIORS' WILLINGNESS

The respondents were asked to state seniors' willingness on taking over the role of a mentor.

Would seniors be willing to become mentors?



At least one senior on two would be willing to become a mentor.

This answer suggests that that the mentoring programmes would enjoy the most popularity among the senior employees of the companies.

SECTION 5. OBSTACLES FOR SENIORS PARTICIPATION IN MENTORING PROGRAMMES

The respondents were asked to point at main obstacles for seniors participation in mentoring programmes.

What are the main barriers to seniors participation in mentoring programmes?



Companies mostly believe that there is no time available for mentoring.

As the main obstacle for participation of company seniors in mentoring programmes is seen the lack of time (problem felt especially by small companies), there are many other that should be taken into account mainly attaining to personal fears and company culture.

Personal fears

- lack of **self-confidence**;
- **frustration** (including the feeling of getting unwanted extra job to do);
- **lack in motivation** from seniors: actually they cannot perceive what kind of benefits they will gain from this process;
- fear from **losing one's "expert" position** (due to the unique know-how possessed) as teaching specific know-how to younger employees;
- **worry** they may say something wrong or give wrong advice;
- fail at **communication**;
- not being able to **listen**;
- not **respecting the younger person's opinion**;
- not being able to **take criticism**.

Corporate culture

- appropriate **preparation** of the workers to taking up the role of mentors;
- **motivation**;
- systemic **support**;
- **time** pressure;
- **roles** which are not clearly defined.

SECTION 6. MOTIVATION FACTOR FOR SENIORS PARTICIPATION IN MENTORING PROGRAMMES

The respondents were asked to state factors that could motivate seniors to taking over the role of a mentor.

What could motivate seniors in becoming mentors?



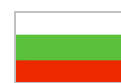
status/ title



status/ title



extra money



extra money

The leading motivation factors are better recognition and financial extra aid.

But there are several factors coming out from the survey that should be taken into account, both hard and soft aspects:

Hard aspects

- **financial benefit** (increase in salary or a bonus);

- **optimisation** of time counting on a more experienced team of newly hired employees;
- mutual share of know how with juniors, with consequent **acquisition of new competencies** also by mentors (mainly ICT);
- having enough **time to devote** to their duties as mentors and that they are not „looked at suspiciously“, when they are talking to their mentees.

Soft aspects

- company special **recognition** of allocated time with a formal request of performing the role of mentor;
- sense of **usefulness** for the company;
- possibility to make **career advancements** (e.g. transferring knowledge as a mandatory step in the individual career);
- **appreciation and respect** from the young employees;
- **privileged position** in the company;
- **extra prestige** (due to a promotion to be an official mentor in the company hierarchy);
- **more esteem** in the eyes of the co-workers;
- **increased self-esteem** (owing to the confirmation of one’s own abilities and capabilities to transfer the possessed knowledge to the younger workers).

SECTION 7. JUNIORS’ WILLINGNESS

The survey participants were also asked to assess the degree of junior employees’ willingness to cooperate with the seniors and point at potential problems.

Are juniors happy to cooperate with seniors?



Young employees’ willingness to profit from older colleagues is high, most companies see no problems with this.

On average, more than 8 juniors on 10 would be willing to participate in mentoring programmes.

But sometimes younger employees may not be as open to the experience of their older colleagues, as ones would wish them to be. **Possible barriers** to participation are related to three main aspects:

Hard aspects

- lack of [time](#).

Personal aspects

- lack of [motivation](#);
- exaggerated [self-confidence](#): actually, young people may tend to think: “I can do everything by myself”;
- the view often prevails that the „old way“ [was wrong](#);
- only the [quick answer is of interest](#), not the background information, the details, their importance is often recognized only later;
- some younger employees are [reserved and insecure](#) around older colleagues;
- psychological problems, due to [insecurity and fear of confront](#).

Interpersonal aspects

- [match](#) between mentor and mentee (interpersonal factors);
- some [communication](#) problems between the generations;
- lack of the common ground for [reciprocal understanding](#);
- difficulties in [accepting assistance and guidance](#), especially for those who are not used to reflection;
- correct [understanding](#) of reciprocal roles.

SECTION 8. ALLOCATED TIME

In the course of the research, the participants were also asked to point at the time necessary, in their opinion, to implement full all mentoring-programme processes.

How much time would you allocate to mentoring?



There is a wide variety of answers on that topic.

The most reasonable mentoring programme foresees a weekly appointment of 1 or 2 hours between mentor and mentee, in call conference or in presence, plus a meeting once each 3 months. The total length of the pathway should not be less than 6 months.

It is difficult to specify strict timetables to be valid for any company. The risk is that the plan will not be respected. In each single case mentor and mentee should define the most convenient timetables and communication means.

SECTION 9. SPECIFIC KIND OF SUPPORT NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF MENTORING

The following question regarded the types of assistance necessary in the implementation of mentoring programmes in the company (respondents could choose more than one answer).

What kind of support would you need when implementing mentoring?

				
1st	exchange of experience and good practices	exchange of experience and good practices	exchange of experience and good practices	exchange of experience and good practices
2nd	coaching	entry courses	entry courses	Manuals
3rd	entry courses	coaching	coaching	entry courses

The most important assistance concerns the exchange of experience and support for the introduction of mentoring. Advice and coaching for the introduction and in case of difficult situations are also desired.

Focus on ways/possible ways of e-Learning programs implementation within the Company.

SECTION 1. IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LEARNING PROGRAMME

The representatives of the surveyed companies were also asked about the e-Learning programmes already in place.

Have you ever implemented e-Learning programs?



e-Learning is not very common in the companies surveyed.

One company on three (except from Poland) have implemented e-learning programs. Country-based factors may hinder its use (for more info read the National reports).

As seen above pretty all companies allow all/many employees access to PC and the Internet.

Therefore almost all companies could make access to the necessary infrastructure for e-learning available to their employees.

SECTION 2. WILLINGNESS OF SENIORS TO PARTICIPATE IN E-LEARNING PROGRAMS

The representatives were also asked about willingness of seniors to participate in e-Learning programmes.

Would seniors participate in e-learning programmes?



Seniors could be easily involved in e-learning programmes (especially in PL and BG).

The most common answer is that age is not a key variable able to foresee interest in e-learning courses. It is an individual matter.

But some representatives interviewed state that e-learning is not so appealing if not associated with in room training (again: blended method).

Many respondents pointed out lack of motivation as a factor hindering seniors participation in e-learning. In particular, they stress its boringness – you are mainly alone in front of a monitor, without any direct contact; you are acquiring theoretical contents.

Other problems might be related to acceptance of competencies acquired by the belonging organisation. In a way they are saying: “I don’t recognize e-learning as a method able to improve your professionalism”. Another important aspect pointed out is the lack of ICT knowledge.

Requirements for an e-learning tool addressed to senior mentors can be synthesized as follows:

- The content must be really **interesting**;
- It must be **simple** to use;
- One should **not have to write** too much;
- It should be **entertaining**;
- **Multimedia design** elements are important;
- Good arrangement / **program** design;
- The **possibility to switch** among topics is important;
- The program should contain **learning loops**;
- The content should be really **useful**;
- Content must be **transferable to workaday life** and therefore be very **practical** and striking.
- Many are „doers“ and not „learners“. This aspect becomes critical when one has to „find their way around“ something new.
- Often computer knowledge is lacking: it should therefore be **simple** to use.

An original suggestion can be taken from computer games: one could for example, increase or decrease a “mentee’s points” based on correct or incorrect behaviour patterns/strategies thereby giving additional incentives.

SECTION 3. MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS

The participants were asked to specify possible factors enhancing seniors motivation to attend an e-Learning programme.

What could motivate seniors to attend e-learning?



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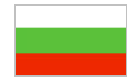
certification



certification



certification



certification

Certification of mentoring skills represents a good motivational factor for seniors.

In the opinion of a most survey participants, the best motivators for the older workers to participate in the e-learning courses could be certificates and diplomas. Many respondents pointed out also acceptance from company of newly acquired competencies and extra financial aid as good motivation factors for the seniors.

There are also an official request made by managers, or rather the possibility to freely manage training times according to individual exigencies.

SECTION 4. ALLOCATED TIME

In the course of the research, the participants were also asked to point at the time necessary, in their opinion, to attend an e-Learning programme.

How much time would you allocate to e-learning?



2/3 hours week

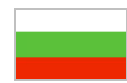


1 hour/week

20/40 hours



1 hour day



1 hour/week

There is a wide variety of answers on that topic.

The respondents are giving a wide range of answers to the question, regarding the necessary time for conducting efficient e-Learning programme.

In the survey participants' opinion, the time needed to be allocated to the implementation of the e-learning as a method of knowledge transfer depends mostly on the subjects covered by the courses and the abilities of the participating employees. The indications varied between 1 hour daily and one full month.

Yet the most popular answers could be 1/2 hours per week.

SECTION 5. SPECIFIC KIND OF SUPPORT NEEDED FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LEARNING

The following question regarded the types of assistance necessary in the implementation of e-learning programmes in the company (respondents could choose more than one answer).

What type of assistance would you need for the implementation of e-learning?

				
1st	hotline	manuals	manuals	manuals
2nd	FAQ	FAQ	entry courses	entry courses
3rd	manuals	exchange of experience and good practices	coaching	exchange of experience and good practices

Companies need manuals and handbooks as a support for e-learning implementation.

Also FAQs and entry courses are appreciated.

Mentoring required competencies

Focus on competencies needed in order to perform the role of mentor effectively.

The representatives of the surveyed companies were asked to rank a set of crucial competences, according to their importance to effective mentoring, in a scale, where (1) signifies the most important competence and (10) – the least important one. The participants were also asked to rank the competences from the most often possessed by the older employees of their companies (1), to the least often possessed (10).

These competencies have been defined and explained to the participants in the survey as followed:

a. Analysis

Ability to analyse a situation, taking into consideration all the aspects in order to identify any possible problem together with main objectives to be reached.

b. Communication

Ability to communicate effectively with the others choosing the best communication channel for a specific purpose, presenting information in an appropriate manner for the situation, and understanding messages and responses received from others. Ability to listen

c. Decision making

Ability to select a logical choice from among a set of available options, forecasting the outcomes of each option, weighting all the positives and negatives, and considering all the possible alternatives.

d. Flexibility and Innovation

Ability to be flexible with clients in order to reach foreseen objectives; and ability to identify criticalities and rigidities of a given framework with the aim of innovating.

e. Internal client orientation

Ability to identify internal clients' (staff members) needs and to match them to appropriate solutions, establishing and maintaining productive partnerships by gaining their trust and respect.

f. Leadership

Ability to motivate a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal, being the inspiration and director of the action.

g. Motivation and development pursuing

Ability to stimulate and motivate others towards personal and team development, by encouraging to self-analysis and continuous growing.

h. Networking

Ability to develop and use contacts made in business/life for purposes beyond the reason for the initial contact.

i. Organization and planning

Ability to establish an appropriate programme of action by setting priorities, anticipating needs, organising time, setting and achieving targets.

j. Tasks allocation

Ability to pursue targets achievement by defining tasks allocation according to available resources and hierarchy in objectives importance/urgency.

Transnational rankings have been considered jointly, in order to satisfy the requests of a tool with an European added value. Average rankings have been calculated and then organised into a chart enabling a quick visualisation of scores.

The criteria to be considered should be the following: priority must be given to the most important competencies (with scores near to 1=max important) and not possessed by the older employees (with scores near to 10=min possession).

Applying this perspective to the values gathered, we obtain the set of most important competencies to be transmitted to future mentors:

- **Communication**
- **Analysis**
- **Decision making**
- **Motivation and development pursuing**
- **Leadership**

Responses place great value therefore on interpersonal skills: approaching other people, finding the right words, motivating and supporting others.

The following chart presents the detailed breakdown of average rankings:

Diffusion	10									
	9									
	8									
	7					INT				
	6				LEA MOT	ORG		NET		
	5		COM		DEC	FLE TAS				
	4				ANA					
	3									
	2									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Importance										

COM	Communication (3;5)	FLE	Flexibility and Innovation (6;5)
ANA	Analysis (5;4)	INT	Internal client orientation (6;7)
DEC	Decision making (5;5)	ORG	Organization and planning (6;6)
LEA	Leadership (5;6)	TAS	Tasks allocation (6;5)
MOT	Motivation and development pursuing (5;6)	NET	Networking (8;6)

In addition to the above mentioned competencies, the respondents added some additional skills, which would be necessary or recommended for any senior, who is willing to be a mentor.

Considering also these further suggestions, the 5 essential training areas are:

Communication - Ability to communicate effectively with the others choosing the best communication channel for a specific purpose, presenting information in an appropriate manner for the situation, and understanding messages and responses received from others. Ability to listen, empathy and sensitiveness.

Analysis - Ability to analyse a situation, taking into consideration all the aspects in order to identify any possible problem together with main objectives to be reached + capability to analyse the competencies/knowledge of the mentees.

Decision making - Ability to select a logical choice from among a set of available options, forecasting the outcomes of each option, weighting all the positives and negatives, and considering all the possible alternatives.

Motivation and development pursuing - Ability to stimulate and motivate others towards personal and team development, by encouraging to self-analysis and continuous growing.

Leadership - Ability to motivate a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal, being the inspiration and director of the action. Ability to gain and maintain trust.

Mentoring benefits – Motivational module showing mentoring related benefits for all the actor involved.

Self esteem - Convincing them of their own importance in terms of know how possessed.

Mentoring tools – Proper instructions and tools for implementing mentoring programmes.

Transnational analysis enabled the collection of precious inputs for tools definition. Some of the most important elements to be taken into account follow.

European surveyed companies are **used to knowledge sharing**, being mainly based on team working and mutual cooperation.

Companies mostly **own the needed infrastructures for undergoing e-learning sessions**. In most cases PC, Internet and e-Mails are available to all the members of the staff. This is clearly more seldom in the production area than in all administrative, research or service jobs. **Special solutions** must be conceived in order to let seniors belonging to **production field** attending SISC e-learning course.

Being **meetings and telephone conversations** the most used/ available communication channels, it is worthy to start conceiving mentoring programmes based on such means.

European companies must be sensitised about the very large loss deriving from senior employees retire. They should understand that **experience gathered by retired workers is hard to recover**, and that when seniors retire they bring with them company story and culture. Continuity may be assured only through a constant transfer of critical knowledge, especially related to network leadership and contacts.

Knowledge transfer within companies is mainly implemented through tutoring. The most important aspects of tutoring method should be taken into account when planning mentoring pathways. Tutoring is a methodology that **eases** trainees' learning pathway through the **provision of expertise, experience, and encouragement**, and the assistance of learners in **getting answers**. Tutoring eases **problem solving**. It provides **one-on-one instruction** to help trainees succeeding in own learning pathway, through the creation of a **friendly and positive learning environment**. Tutors represent a **reference point** for those who need particular assistance in **finding needed keys and resources to optimise individual learning experiences**.

Efficient knowledge transfer depends on some key factors, that must be stressed in order to pursue efficiency of a mentoring pathway. Such factors are: the working conditions and the **relations** between the older and younger employees, the appropriate **organisation** of work, **knowledge** of the know-how transfer procedures, along with the **openness** of both the junior and staff to learn, but also perceived workplace **stability** and creation of professional **development paths** for the workers.

Companies must be helped in **understanding the meaning of mentoring**, together with its requirements and benefits. Only in this way they could promote this intergenerational knowledge transfer method.

The **mentors are** experienced employees, members of leadership and experts. They are those who, for seniority, competencies, or knowledge owned may support juniors.

Main reasons that could motivate a company to implement a mentoring program are enabling the new employees to **quickly acquire new knowledge** (otherwise unreachable neither in professional nor personal training courses) and **adapt to the corporate culture**. More generally, company should be provided with motivating factors related to three main targets: **company** as a whole, employees **insertion** in company culture, new employees better **performances**.

The key effective question to be posed is: “How can you be sure, that key knowledge stays within your company, when the employee with a central function leaves?”. Companies should be sensitised about the importance of **creating a learn-place** (learning workplace), stressing the costs savings deriving from such knowledge transfer method and its great effectiveness. Actually, mentoring enables newly hired employees to acquire the new, complete and “priceless” knowledge based on the past experience. A **corporate culture pro-mentoring** should be installed too: meaning that the project must really be desired and pushed within the company. In addition those at the management level should lead by example and take part in the program.

On the other side, seniors should be informed about **benefits** deriving from being a mentor (e.g. a certification), and about special **time** make available for implementing this task. In particular, they should be helped in **loosing fears** about sharing knowledge and expertises.

Mentor training could help to **develop the right soft skills** required for the role of the mentor.

The biggest problems in making younger and older workers cooperate effectively would be: insufficient **time** and negative **attitude** of the junior workers, together with the resulting **lack of the common ground** for reciprocal understanding caused by the lack of **self-confidence**, the fear of **failure, frustration or unwillingness** to reveal one's limited knowledge in a given area. For mentees, it is important that they have the feeling that they are **taken seriously** by the mentors

Some important success factors are: young people's **initiative** should not be taken from them; there can be no place for **know-it-alls**; it's all about a real **exchange** as well as offerings; mentor and mentee need to have the right **chemistry** between them; the offer should be made on a **voluntary** basis.

Moreover, mentoring programmes must be inserted into a **long term plan** throwing oneself towards company future, enhancing individual planning capability.

It is difficult to specify strict timetables that could be valid for any company. The risk is that the plan will not be respected. In each single case mentor and mentee should **define the most convenient timetables and communication means**.

A proper introduction of mentoring programme within a company should foresee a **workshop** for introduction addressed to the decision makers as well as to the mentors and mentees. This can help to emphasize how seriously the company takes the project. Furthermore such support offers avoid raising inaccurate expectations among the participants. Moreover important rules of mentoring can be discussed here.

Overall, companies are generally **sceptical** about e-learning tools, especially as mentoring involves behaviour based learning. For experienced employees in a production environment who do not work daily with a PC, the technology represents an additional hurdle. This is less true for employees who work in company administration roles.

For this reason expectations for this tool are noticeably high. It must satisfy modern demands on learning and have a high **entertainment** value, so that employees like to use it while at the same time achieving a **learn effect**. Theoretical considerations or simple multiple-choice questions are seen as being unsuitable and as having a low motivational value.

As mentoring skills relate for the most part to suitable behaviour and the correct attitude in the mentoring process, the e-Learning tool should have **many practical examples and demonstrate**

the consequences of different types of behaviour. Ideally, speaking situations could be demonstrated with the question „How would you behave?“ or “Why was the discussion so difficult” etc. It must be possible to test alternative behaviour.

Several favourite motivators included **recognition** in the sense of appreciation but also **certificates** and awards were among the favourites. Ideally the certificate would be enhanced by a test which one should have to pass.

Just as important for those surveyed is the quality of e-Learning programs. Therefore learned material should be able to be **immediately experienced**, the content **application-oriented** and the design **entertaining and playful**.

Considering all these elements 8 training modules should be designed:

Communication - Ability to communicate effectively with the others choosing the best communication channel for a specific purpose, presenting information in an appropriate manner for the situation, and understanding messages and responses received from others. Ability to listen, empathy and sensitiveness. (IPED)

Analysis - Ability to analyse a situation, taking into consideration all the aspects in order to identify any possible problem together with main objectives to be reached + capability to analyse the competencies/knowledge of the mentees. (ICENTRE)

Decision making - Ability to select a logical choice from among a set of available options, forecasting the outcomes of each option, weighting all the positives and negatives, and considering all the possible alternatives. (IPED)

Motivation and development pursuing - Ability to stimulate and motivate others towards personal and team development, by encouraging to self-analysis and continuous growing. (RKW)

Leadership - Ability to motivate a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal, being the inspiration and director of the action. Ability to gain and maintain trust. (ICENTRE)

Mentoring benefits – Motivational module showing mentoring related benefits for all the actor involved. (RKW)

Self esteem - Convincing them of their own importance in terms of know how possessed, and loosing fears about sharing knowledge and expertises. (ERIFO)

Mentoring tools – Proper instructions and tools for implementing mentoring programmes. (ERIFO)

Next steps: some tips and suggestions

Some tips and suggestions about Mentoring and e-Learning

“In Greek mythology, Mentor was the son of Alcumus, an elderly friend of Ulysses. When Ulysses sailed away to the Trojan War he left his son, Telemachus, and his palace to be supervised by Mentor”¹.

This is the source of the modern usage of the word mentor: a trustworthy friend, a confidant or a teacher.

It constitutes a way of developing social competencies with the specific support of an expert.

Mentoring may be defined as a relationship between two persons, that occurs through periodical meetings in which one of the two members of the couple (the mentor) puts own experience at disposal of the other one, with the aim to guide and support him/her during own learning and developing pathway. Normally, the relationship lasts one or two years, and it happens in concomitance with particular moments of the mentee professional life that foresee significant transitions requiring a development of his/her own knowledge assets.

Differently from tutoring, mentoring process aims not only to enable the mentee to develop own knowledge, but also to integrate him/herself within the company culture and to provide him/her with a psychological-kind support.

The main functions of a mentor are to support the mentee for what concerns both the following spheres:

- professional sphere (acquisition of competencies, cultural integration within the company)
- personal sphere (enhancement of motivation, emotional support and better comprehension of the meaning of own work).

Mentors (experts) provide authentic and experimental learning opportunities, as well as an intense interpersonal relation through which social learning occurs.

Mentoring is normally defined as being the relation between a more experienced and a less experienced person, through which the Mentor gives orientation, advice, security and feedback to his protégé” (Haney, 1997).

In formal mentoring programs, there usually are goals, agendas, training (for mentors and protégés) and evaluation.

¹ Paraphrasing Odyssey II, 255; 267

Technology is helping mentoring in organizations, as a link between offices throughout the whole country, and e-mentors throughout the world through e-mail and videoconference (Jossi, 1997). Telementoring constitutes an essential aspect of distance teaching. The isolation that often contributes towards the lack of motivation from the “distance trainees” can be overcome by associating these trainees with Telementors.

Learning is more effective when it is done within a context in which new knowledge and competencies are taken into account, and people construe individual meanings, but in a context of interaction with others².

It may supply individuals with opportunities to heighten cultural conscience, aesthetic appreciation, and the necessary potential to conduct meaningful lives (Galbraith and Cohen, 1995).

E-learning is a learning context available to adults, either to use for self-teaching in pursuit of personal training aims, even informally on a home computer, or as active participants in intentional learning processes agreed with a teacher or provider and in which tutoring occupies a central role. E-learning can incorporate many elements that make learning new material, a new process or a new program more fun. Making learning more fun -- or interesting -- is what makes it more effective. If a person isn't pulled into the material, she really isn't learning as well as she could be. This is what makes e-learning so great for so many types of learning. Obviously, every type of training can't be turned into e-training, but many can with excellent results.

The keys to successful e-learning include:

Varying the types of content

Images, sounds and text work together to build memory in several areas of the brain and result in better retention of the material.

Creating interaction that engages the attention

Games, quizzes and even just required manipulation of something on the screen creates more interest, which in turn builds better retention.

Providing immediate feedback

E-learning courses can build in immediate feedback to correct misunderstood material. The more immediate the feedback the better, because each step of learning builds upon the previous step. If no feedback is given, then the next step may be building upon an incorrect interpretation.

Encouraging interaction with other e-learners and an e-instructor

² According to the Theory of Constructivism.

Chat rooms, discussion boards, instant messaging and e-mail all offer effective interaction for e-learners, and do a good job of taking the place of classroom discussion. Building an online community significantly influences the success of online programs.

The e-Learning key words are the following ones:

□ **Self-paced**

E-learning lets learners go through the course at their own pace. This helps avoid missed information in situations where learners either have to leave the course for an outside emergency or you just don't catch what the instructor said.

□ **Interactive**

Another element that e-learning offers is interactivity. This type of interactivity can be in the form of simply clicking on appropriate responses to questions, clicking to animate an object or start a process, or dragging and dropping items to practice a skill.

□ **Motivating**

Being motivated to learn is half the battle. Knowing the course learners are taking is going to have some "fun" elements like video, audio, animation and "gaming" scenarios creates more interest and curiosity in learning. This, too, leads to better retention and faster learning.

Other motivating factors with e-learning are the conveniences that it offers, such as being able to go through the course any time and anywhere (almost).

Steve Pena - Senior Instructional Designer and Implementation Consultant SyberWorks, Inc. – offers 10 basic tips to sharpen training programs:

1. Know your audience. Understand what they bring to the table, and what they need from each course. Determine your audience's education level, entry knowledge, and their goals in taking the course. This will help you identify their *performance* gap-between what they already know and can do, and what they need to know and be able to do.
2. Use learning (or performance) objectives to nail down what your learners are supposed to know and be able to do, once they have completed the course. Your learning objectives should be SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant (or Results-oriented), and **T**argeted to the audience. These learning objectives will help to guide your development of course content and provide a yardstick for measuring how well learners have mastered it.
3. Using these learning objectives as a guide, keep your course content pertinent to the task at hand. Keep the information in your course focused and relevant, with a minimum of extraneous detail. And “chunk” course content into small, digestible bites of information.

4. Use the variety of media available in e-Learning to serve different learning styles, such as auditory and visual learners. Use narration, graphics, and text, but not necessarily all at the same time.
5. Spell out the “WIFM” (What’s in it for me?) for your learners. Adult learners want to know why they are learning something, and how it will help them on the job. This might easily be the most important tip!
6. Adult learners generally prefer to have some-or even a lot-of control over the learning process. They want to take responsibility for their own learning. This favors using self-paced instruction, providing tools for assessing one’s own progress, and implementing the freedom to choose among different learning activities (where possible).
7. Provide a “gate” that learners must pass before they advance to more difficult content. This may be a test, a demonstration, or a role-play activity.
8. Related to the above, if your students possess different backgrounds and levels of experience, consider using a pre-test to “sort them out,” and even allowing the more advanced learners to “opt out” of content that is too elementary for them.
9. Once you have constructed a course, have actual learners, not just other developers, test it. They can provide real-world insight and feedback that you can use to improve the course.
10. Consider developing “job aids,” “cheat sheets,” “quick reference cards,” or other reminders based on your course content, which learners can easily access while they are on the job.

In short, understanding your learners’ needs, and applying common sense to meet them, will dramatically improve your training programs.

Further references:

“ASTD E-learning Handbook: Best Practices, Strategies and Case Studies”

The electronic version of the book:

http://books.google.it/books?id=uXA-xCltrc4C&pg=PA186&lpg=PA186&dq=elearning+adult+tips&source=bl&ots=1dwqBL2BfV&sig=93AqG9O8s1ONib2XvQHqLZSFreM&hl=it&ei=Jxy0SYDPJ4-X_ga3uL3DBA&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=4&ct=result