

People's Empowerment through blended mentoring: the EMPIRE project experimentation in Spain and Italy

M. Begoña Arenas [barenas@scienter.es]
 Alicia Hitos [alicia.hitos@imfgranada.es]
 Matteo Perchiazzi [matteo.perchiazzi@tiscali.it]
 Sara Ugolini [s.ugolini@filprato.it]
 Editor: Bertie Ross [bertie.ross@bhrconsulting.net]
 Scienter España [http://www.scienter.es]
 Calle Luis Amador 24.
 Centro de Negocios de la CCING.
 Oficina F. E-18014
 Granada. Spain.

Abstracts

English

Mentoring works as a strategy for helping people and particularly disadvantaged groups of population such as the unemployed, young people or immigrants improve their professional opportunities and succeed in life. It helps give people the confidence, access to valuable resources, and skills they need to reach their potential.

The article presents two out of four blended mentoring pilots conducted in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Project EMPIRE. The first considerations resulting from the pilot projects are:

- The right mix of face-to-face and e-mentoring elements in addition to indirect communication varies from target group to target group.
- The use of ICT tools appropriate to the goals of the pilot and its target groups increases the potential of mentoring.
- the organisational structure needed to continuously support, motivate and follow the "blended mentoring couples" is key to promoting a fully successful Lifelong Guidance and learning experience
- Blended mentoring is particularly effective in career development when combined with other professional development activities and tools such as internships or work placements.

Spanish

La mentoría es una estrategia para ayudar a la gente en general y a grupos de población con especiales dificultades como parados, jóvenes o inmigrantes a mejorar sus oportunidades profesionales y ayudarles a incrementar sus posibilidades de éxito en la vida. Esto ayuda a proporcionar la necesaria confianza, el acceso a valiosos recursos y la adquisición de habilidades para que estos grupos alcancen su potencial.

El artículo presenta dos de los cuatro proyectos piloto de mentoría llevados a cabo en el marco del proyecto EMPIRE (programa de Aprendizaje Permanente). Las primeras consideraciones resultado de los proyectos piloto son:

- La mezcla de reuniones de mentoría cara a cara y elementos de e-mentoría además de la comunicación indirecta debe variar según las características del grupo objetivo.
- El uso de herramientas TIC adecuadas para conseguir los objetivos del piloto incrementa notablemente el potencial de la mentoría.
- la estructura organizativa necesaria para apoyar las relaciones de mentoría es clave para el éxito de la experiencia
- El *Blended mentoring* (que combina las reuniones cara a cara con el contacto a través de las TIC) es particularmente eficaz en el ámbito de la orientación profesional cuando se combina con otras actividades de desarrollo profesional y con instrumentos como prácticas en empresas.

Keywords

Mentoring, ICT, Learning, Practice, Career guidance, Innovation

Introduction

The practice of mentoring seems to have far off origins: in ancient Greece young males usually lived with more mature men at their side: in this way they could learn their values.

The same principles as those used in modern mentoring, as Murray states (1991) can be traced to the corporations of arts and professions dating back to medieval times: in such associations, which in those days dominated the commercial world, it was the custom to take on young apprentices who lived and worked with their master, the owner of the workshop.

The industrial revolution brought about the standardization of work, production and training. This type of relationship fell into disuse, but the basic ethics survived: in this period and an informal type of relationship between supervisors and gifted workers can be traced in factories: enabling these workers to reach a better position (Rawlings, 2007). Since the 1970s mentoring has spread in the United States of America mainly in training contexts (Parsloe, 2000). In the 1980s mentoring started to extend in the United Kingdom where it is widely used in the working and training environment. In the latter, the strategy has many applications in training students for teaching roles (Furlong, Maynard, 1995). IMentoring has also developed in countries such as France, Spain, Greece and Italy since the 1990s (Felice, Tagliavini, 2004).

There are differences according to Clutterbuck (1998) in the US and European approaches:

- *"The traditional, North American concept of mentoring is embodied by someone older and more powerful, who expects loyalty in return for advice, guidance and a helping hand. In this*

personification, the mentor may be the person's line manager. The term protégé is typically used to describe the relationship, which places relatively little emphasis on learning (by either party) and a lot on assistance with making the right career moves.'

- *'By contrast, the European concept of mentoring assumes that the mentor has more experience rather than more power. Indeed, a characteristic of an effective mentoring relationship is the 'parking' of any power differences so that the two can deal as equals. As a result, European mentors are almost always off-line, not least because it is difficult to be very open to someone who has the power to influence your pay, status and general well-being. The purpose of the relationship is primarily learning or development, although a result of learning may well be better career management by the mentee.'*

At this point, we need to mention, that European career guidance services have the potential to contribute significantly to the development of human capital. Nonetheless researches and policy reports (Sultana and Watts, 2005) have expressed concern about the fact that career information and traditional matching of people and jobs are not enough.

The article contains the focus of the Spanish and the Italian pilot projects, and some initial consideration about the two experiences.

The EMPIRE Project

The use of ICT in mentoring has been tested in some projects in the UK and Italy. These mainly focusing on the use of email, but it is difficult to find research findings regarding the use of ICT in mentoring. In the frame of the EMPIRE project "Blended mentoring" is a mix of on-site (face-to-face) and online events that would create an opportunity for career counselling and development services to adopt mentoring in their ordinary practice. Piloting with blended mentoring is the core objective of the EMPIRE project.

Advances in the use of technology (such as cyber-counselling) and the introduction of new methodologies like mentoring could enrich the career counselling profession's contributions to individual development and expand access to a broader range of customers.

Through the analysis derived from a series of focus groups, the EMPIRE partners established the basis for piloting tailored blended-mentoring schemes capable of meeting the needs of different target-groups in the European Countries piloting the scheme (Italy, Spain, Germany and Austria). The pilots ran from January to June 2009.

A mentoring kit was prepared by FII and tested, with adaptations reflecting the needs of the various target groups and the specific sectors in the different countries participating.

Analysis of the overall experiences has produced a set of guidelines/recommendations for career development agencies. EMPIRE has introduced innovative methodologies in career exploration and planning, and will help to promote technological developments regarding mentoring and the use of ICT to improve the career opportunities of specific groups of the population. From an overall perspective, it will contribute to the Lisbon Strategy through promoting innovation of career guidance services on a cost/effective level and better levels of employability through increased adaptability of workers.

The EMPIRE Spanish pilot

We are focusing here on the Spanish pilot because it has a very interesting set of factors:

- The target group selected was immigrant women living in Granada (Spain) that were looking for employment and undergoing VET courses. Existing practices and research findings convinced the Spanish partners that this target group would welcome the customised blended mentoring approach proposed in EMPIRE
- The ICT facility selected was NING (<http://www.ning.com/>). NING is an online social platform where a group may be created easily by the coordinator (in our case, the tutor of the pilot) and it could be used as a very simple way to promote digital literacy among the mentees.
- The Spanish partners had a very complementary background: IMFE, the municipality Institute for Training and employment in Granada and SCIENTER España, a research centre that has been working in mentoring related issues since 2000.
- The training for mentors was selected and adapted from the "Mentoring Training Handbook" produced as the main output of the MAITRE project (and adapted to the profiles of the mentors).

The pilot focused on the following steps.

1. Recruitment of 5 mentors and 5 mentees.
2. Launch of the programme: 2nd March 2009.
3. Interim evaluation and follow-up
4. Final evaluation and dissemination

ANUNCIO
AHORA TÚ PUEDES PARTICIPAR EN UN PROYECTO DE LA UNIÓN EUROPEA

Con el objetivo de favorecer el desarrollo de un aprendizaje innovador y de calidad durante toda la vida, adaptado a las necesidades del mercado laboral y que contribuya a paliar el desempleo, al tiempo que hace Granada más competitiva y avanzada, El IMFE está trabajando, desde hace un año, en los proyectos de la Unión Europea, BE-MULTILINGUAL y EMPIRE, en colaboración con distintas entidades de Alemania, Austria, Francia, Suecia, Lituania, Polonia, Portugal, Rumanía y España.

BE-MULTILINGUAL pretende promover el aprendizaje de idiomas en el sector turístico, vital en la economía de Granada. Este proyecto busca formas de aprender idiomas de una manera fácil y divertida, apostando por la formación a distancia en una plataforma gratuita en internet. Para experimentar la metodología **el IMFE busca voluntariado** con el siguiente perfil: personas del mundo de la formación, con experiencia, conocimiento alto de inglés (como para leer un manual y valorarlo), idealmente profesorado de idiomas o español, aunque también personal técnico, de administración, etc.

EMPIRE se centra en un tema muy de moda en la actualidad en formación: la mentoría. Personas que han pasado por situaciones de exclusión social como inmigrantes ayudan a otras a superar obstáculos, a la vez que se integran y aprenden en un ambiente de confianza. **IMFE busca voluntariado:** personas con un cierto grado de experiencia como inmigrantes, nacidas en España o en el extranjero, o habituadas a tratar con extranjeros, y mujeres que necesiten orientación o ayuda, profesional o personal, en situación de estancia en Granada.

Se acreditará la participación en el proyecto.
Personas interesadas pueden ponerse en contacto con Alicia Hitos hasta el 13 de febrero a las 14.00 horas en el Tfno 958 216120 o Email: alicia.hitos@imfegranada.es.

Figure 1. Advertisements in the local press

The Recruitment Process was carried out from December 2008 to the end of February 2009. It was based on a combination of advertisements in the local press (see Figure 1), plus a series of meetings with the staff of the local Institute for Employment and Training (where 125 people are working) and with local Immigrant associations (such as Red Cross, SOS Racismo, Asociación De mujeres Politólogas, University of Granada...etc) followed by:

- Separate meeting with mentors and mentees
- Analysis of the profiles of mentors and mentees
- Proposal for matching mentors and mentees.

The **results of the recruitment** process included the recruitment of 5 mentors & 5 mentees, all of whom were women. The age range was from 24 to 39.

Mentors came from a diverse range of nationalities: Cuba, Argentina, Mexico, Spain (2). Mentees originated from Bolivia, Morocco, Russia, France and Gambia.

The professional profiles of the mentors included: an entrepreneur, a teacher, a commercial agent, a waitress, a dancer, a Human Resources professional, a shop assistant, a psychologist. The mentees 'a butcher, a hairdresser, a child minder, a social worker, a cleaner, a waitress and a personal assistant.

After the recruitment process an adapted mentoring kit was produced for the launch session in March 2009. The kit was translated in to Spanish and based on the original version created by Fil and included the agenda for the launch event. Supplements to the kit consisted of:

- a presentation of the EMPIRE project,
- synthesis of the competencies of the mentor,
- mentor handbook with training on six key issues,

mentoring tools (five tools simplified and translated into Spanish) - these: including the mentoring contract, setting objectives, planning, mentor and mentee diaries and an evaluation questionnaire for mentors (with questions adapted from those proposed by Prof. Miller).

The Programme Launch on 2nd March 2009. consisted of:

- mentor **training** on six key selected competencies: What is a mentor?; the phases of mentoring; Managing the mentoring relationship (Dos and Don'ts). Establishing and managing boundaries; How can mentors provide information, counselling and career guidance in VET?; How to communicate effectively on-line; How to help with setting objectives and action planning?



Figure 2. Matching mentees

- **Matching** mentees to a suitable mentor used a combined approach based on a pre-selected form profiling mentors and mentees and a speed networking session - mentors and mentees were allowed two minutes to meet each other. (see Figure 2).



Figure 3. NING social network

- **The presentation of the features of the NING social network** platform available at: <http://empireSpain.ning.com/> (see Figure 3).
- Evaluation: The session was assessed using questions adapted and translated from those proposed by Prof. Andrew Miller (UK). Feedback from mentors and mentees was also collected.

The results of the evaluation include:

Mentors: All mentors reported that they understood their role and were satisfied with the training. They also felt that the platform had the potential to help in their relationship with the mentee. Mentors considered the approach interesting and innovative. One mentor commented that . . . *"this one-to-one approach and the philosophy of helping the mentee to help themselves is very motivating"*. Two out of five mentors indicated that they would be interested in additional training.

Mentees: Five out of five mentees confirmed that they understood their role and were satisfied with the session and thought they could make good use of the NING platform; All mentees reported that they were very happy with the matching session and with their assigned mentor; and considered that the experience could help them in many ways. Mentees expressed their satisfaction with comments such as "I will solve some professional doubts" and *"This will help me feel that I exist, having someone with whom I can share. Thank you"*.

The follow up activities included the circulation of updated relevant information (such as where to go if a computer and a connection is needed, information on group support sessions, interesting quotes...etc), IMFE also provided free resource materials (e.g. books with relevant career guidance information, success stories of immigrants ...etc). Scinter España promoted and facilitated regular face2fac, online chat meetings and contact using the NING social network (messages, blog, chat) to support mentors.

As an example of the results of the evaluation and follow up activities we include below a brief summary on Interim Support face-to-face session carried out on 23rd April 2009. We will present the main problems that emerged and the corrective actions proposed:

- Problem: Language and cultural barriers
Corrective Action => Need for more conversation and motivation to open her social life
- Lack of ICT skills
=> Specific support depending on needs
- Lack of initiative of one mentee
=> Promote the involvement of the mentee in the relationship and by setting specific activities and telling stories of motivation
- A "too formal" relationship
=> Breaking the ice by taking a coffee first and then setting an appointment in a park with the child of the mentee
- Little help and share among mentors
=> Specific online chat and face-to-face session (e.g..29 April at 11:00)

Some initial results include:

- one of the mentees has already found a job
- all the mentees (5/5) have acquired new skills on the use of ICT as means to develop personally and professionally
- all of the mentees are very satisfied with the relationship all the mentors believe they are helping the mentees to succeed

The Spanish pilot is in its final stage: until the end of July 2009 where it will be evaluated and presented to the local Associations through a dissemination activity. Our main focus from July will be to carry out the groundwork with local Associations and institutions to start new mentoring programmes to help disadvantaged groups of the population to grow personally and professionally.

Initial Conclusions of the Spanish pilot test

As a strategy for helping people and particularly disadvantaged groups of population such as unemployed, young people or immigrants improve their professional opportunities and succeed in life, mentoring

appears to be effective. It helps give people the confidence, resources, and skills they need to reach their potential.

The use of ICT adapted to the needs of the target groups increases the potential of mentoring. Smart use of technology is a way of improving the quality of the mentoring programme. It enables mentors and mentees to reduce travel time and spend longer in their communities while acquiring ICT skills that will help them in their professional and personal life.

But as with any development strategy, blended mentoring works best when specific measures are taken to ensure quality and effectiveness. The project outcomes will include an adapted mentoring kit that may be transferred to other contexts and target groups. Similarly the recommendations on how blended mentoring may have a positive impact on Lifelong career guidance approaches.

The EMPIRE Italian pilot

The Italian pilot test was entirely conducted by F.I.L spa, a public-private training and employment agency of the Province of Prato which has been operating successfully since 1995.

Three challenging target groups were defined:

1. safety officers
2. freelancers and architects and other creative professions,
3. tax consultants. For the first target e-mentoring was tested to foster specific job functions rather than develop a career path.

An open source platform was adapted for on-line communication and virtual communities of practice set-up for every target. The presentation of the features of the Empire platform is available at: <http://empire-leonardo.org>

The steps of the pilot:

- Recruitment of mentors and mentees
- Launch of the programme
- Mentor training
- Interim Evaluation and follow up
- Final evaluation and dissemination

Mentors and mentees were recruited in the autumn and winter 2008 via press releases, newspaper articles, community newsletter articles and public service announcements in schools and universities. It resulted in 11 mentors and 12 mentees. Some mentees came from current training courses, whereas mentors were drawn focus groups with stakeholders organised by FIL.

The Programme launch took place in December 2008. It included:

- **Training.** The preparation of mentors focused on six key competencies: What is a mentor?; The phases of mentoring; Managing the mentoring relationship (Dos and Don'ts). Establishing and managing boundaries; How can mentors provide information, counselling and career guidance in VET?; How to communicate effectively on-line; How can mentors help to set objectives and planning? The toolkit "*Kit for managing a mentorship relationship path*" by Matteo Perchiuzzi was used for training. The comprehensive toolkit contains "ready-to use" templates needed to start or maintain a blended- mentoring programme. (Mentoring agreement; Mentoring objectives and goals; First need analysis; Recall your past experience – job; Recall your past experience-personal sources; Goal setting and Action planning; Mentor's diary; Mentee's diary)
- **Matching.** A series of individual interviews with both mentors and mentees were arranged. The analysis of the resulting profiles was combined with a meeting during which mentors and mentees chose each other.

Initial Conclusions of the Italian pilot test

The feedback coming from mentors and mentees was generally very positive. All participants seem to be happy with the pilot and consider it a valid experience leading to personal growth. The tool-kit proved to be a useful set of instruments for gradually building-up both the mentor mentee relationship and the individual professional project, which – in some cases lead to internships in the mentor's organisation or in organisations found through mentor.

Virtual communication tools were mainly used for organisational questions. More significant exchange took place in the forum.

The Italian pilot is now almost at its final stage. By the end of July 2009 it will be evaluated and the outcomes presented in an international conference scheduled for November 2009 in Prato – Italy.

General Conclusions and some Considerations

In this final section we would like to focus on a key issue: What does "blended-mentoring" stand for? What is the role of blended-mentoring in career guidance and development?

Blended mentoring *describes a mentoring relationship that is partly conducted via the Internet (emails, platforms, forums) and partly face-to-face* (Miller 2007). Blended mentoring is closely linked with blended learning – a combination of different learning methods combining traditional face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction.

The blending refers to:

- A. communication (the mix of face-to-face elements and indirect communication between mentor and mentee;
- B. learning methods (mix of e-learning with other types of training delivery)

In the frame of EMPIRE, it was suggested to focus on a mix 20% - 80% in which 20% was at least dedicated to face-to-face communication and the rest based on the use of ICT.

The selection of this mix is important not only to better manage the mentoring relationship but also for the organisation of the support that is needed at the programme level (M. Perchiazzi, 2009). Other authors have considered the pros and cons of eMentoring and face-to-face mentoring such as Miller (2002), Clutterbuck (2004) and Allen Tammy D. & Lilian T. Eby (2007).

At this point it is important to emphasise:

- the importance of the **organisational structure** needed to continuously support, motivate and follow the "blended mentoring couples" so as to promote a fully successful Lifelong Guidance and learning experience;
- the blended mentoring pilot proved successful for career guidance and is even more effective when combined with **internships or work placements**.

References

- [1] Allen Tammy D. & Lilian T. Eby. (2007) The Blackwell Handbook of Mentoring, Edited by Tammy D. Allen Lilian T. Eby.
- [2] Clutterbuck, D. (1998) 'Power in the mentoring relationship', Facets of mentoring in Higher education 2. SEDA Paper 103, SEDA, Birmingham, UK.
- [3] Clutterbuck D. and Meggingson D (2004) Techniques for coaching and Mentoring, Edited by Clutterbuck and Meggingson.
- [4] Furlong J. & Maynard, T. (1995). Mentoring Student Teachers. Routledge.
- [5] Felice, A. and Tagliavini, A. (2004) CAMEO: Comparazione ed Analisi del Mentoring in EurOpa, Collana ISFOL Strumenti e Ricerche, Franco Angeli, Milano
- [6] Miller A. (2002) E-mentoring: A guide to mentoring via e-mail. National Mentoring Network, Department for Education & Skills.
- [7] Murray, M. (1991). Beyond the myths and the magic of mentoring: How to facilitate an effective mentoring program. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- [8] Parsloe, E. and Wray, M. (2000) Coaching and Mentoring, practical methods to improve learning. Kogan Page. US.
- [9] Perchiazzi M., (2009) Apprendere il Mentoring. Manuale operativo per la formazione dei Mentor, Transeuropa Editore, Massa.
- [10] Rawlings, J.K. (2007) Mentoring Basics. Delta Heritage Books. US.
- [11] R. G. Sultana & A. G. Watts (2005) Career guidance in Europe's public employment services: trends and challenges. European Training Foundation. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities