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Mentoring by Extended Networks
to Organise Volunteer Resources

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Mentoring Good Practice Report

A report into good practices identified relating
to mentoring, creating a MOOC and developing
sustainable networked organisations

SUMMARY

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Based on survey and desk research undertaken by the Project Partners between December 2019 and March 2020.

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Contents

This paper pulls together the strands of research carried out by the MentorNET project partners concerning the key skills needed for mentoring and mentoring migrants in particular. The key topics that should be included in a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) to teach people how to mentor and the characteristics that successful sustainable networks possess. It also considers good practice in e-learning course design.

Two methods of research were used during the course of developing this report:

1. An online survey aimed at selected experts in mentoring and mentoring migrants. The survey was designed for distribution to selected experienced mentors in the UK to understand their views concerning mentoring skills and MOOC content.

2. Desk research: Looking at prior research conducted in each of the partner countries. The countries involved were Cyprus, Germany, Italy, Poland and the UK. This method was supplemented where possible by interviews and an informal focus group.

The online survey was designed to collect expert opinion on what a mentoring MOOC should focus on. The results provided some excellent information and insight into vital aspects such as the definition of mentoring, the challenges posed to both mentors and mentees, the overall mentoring relationship, key skill requirements and the structure of a MOOC.

Conclusions on mentoring skills

A number of "key themes" were identified from the results of the research:

• There is a need for a clear definition of mentoring.
• There is a need for a mentoring "agreement" to define conduct and boundaries, for example manners, respect, etc.
• Trust is an important element of a successful mentoring relationship.
• A mentor needs to develop soft skills, for example: openness / willingness and seeking feedback.
• A mentor should be able to demonstrate empathy and understanding of their mentee's situation.
• A mentor should be able to communicate clearly and at times use simple language in order to promote understanding. At the same time they need good listening skills.
• A mentor should be adaptable.
• A mentor needs good intercultural awareness if they are mentoring migrants.
• A mentor needs to be willing to give up their time and be committed to the mentoring process. They also need good time management skills, including following up when needed.
• Some mentoring requires specific knowledge, e.g. mentoring within a technical or scientific context.
• A mentor needs to be able to focus and be clear about the purpose of the mentoring relationship.
• There should be realistic expectations in the mentoring relationship. It is important that the mentee does not become over-reliant on the mentor.
• A mentor should ideally be matched to their mentee. This helps to ensure continuity in their relationship.

• A mentor should aim to provide leadership to their mentee, helping to instil self-belief and to build a nurturing mentoring environment.
• A mentor should understand their reasons for being a mentor—is it altruism / to enhance personal skills and experience / advance career or a mixture of these?
• Having a support network to offer advice, resources and guidance helps to create a successful mentoring relationship, e.g. this could be a formal mentoring network or a more informal network of friends and colleagues.

Conclusions on sustainable networks

Several key themes were identified from the research:

• There is a need for a clear organisational structure: this could be in the form of a hierarchy vs developmental; with a person in charge.
• Clear policies, guidelines and ethics should be established for the network.
• A successful network needs clarity of purpose and ownership by all.
• Regular meetings / and an "office"—this can be virtual and is important to sustain the network.
• Local / regional representatives are needed to act as focal points.
• Within a network technology becomes a "leveller".
• The level of openness within the network is important in encouraging members to work together.
• Contagion (3 degrees): this can promote either negative or positive behaviours, so the focus within a successful network must be on promoting positive behaviours.
• A successful network needs clearly defined roles for its members.
• Diversity and the strength of relationships are important in a successful network.
• One of the keys to sustaining a network is the support mechanisms it has developed and put in place.
• Key performance indicators should be developed as it is important to be able to demonstrate that the network is delivering.

Conclusions on MOOCs

From the survey concerning MOOCs and the research into e-learning, a number of themes and conclusions were evident:

• The MOOC must provide a clear definition of mentoring.
• The MOOC must describe what good mentoring looks like; it should provide clear course aims and design.
• The MOOC should help develop trust in the mentor–mentee relationship.
• The MOOC should help the mentor to develop ways of understanding their mentee's needs.

• The MOOC should help develop a clear understanding of the purpose of mentoring.

• Multilingual audience—a MOOC designed for use by a wide range of nationalities must be available in several languages with the provision of subtitles.

• Time—the length of the MOOC is important if it is to be a useful resource for potential mentors.

• Learners on the MOOC need to be supported—the importance of following up and following through.

• A MOOC supporting volunteer mentors mentoring migrants should contain two sets of knowledge resources: generic mentoring skills and specific knowledge in mentoring the needs of migrants.

• The MOOC should have in place agreed measurements for success.

• The MOOC should clearly manage learner expectations.

• The MOOC should provide a chat function / forum and moderator. It is important to ensure that learners are not isolated.

• The MOOC can be supported by a blended learning approach if that suits the learner's situation, in particular if they are being sponsored by an organisation or network. This could include a mix of online / face-to-face / virtual meetings. This approach was also identified in our research survey and shows the importance of ensuring that the learner does not feel isolated and has support when they need it, either through the MOOC or via face-to-face / mobile / social media.

• The MOOC may be supported by face-to-face support for the learner before, during and after via a learning network.

• The MOOC should be created with a clear structure and support – made explicit to the learner.

• The MOOC must have interactivity and multidimensional tasks for the learner to complete.

• The MOOC must provide opportunities for self-reflection.

• Consideration should be given to how assessment / testing would be carried out within the MOOC if required.

• Consideration should be given to the criteria to be used to be provide a Certificate of Participation to the learner if required.

E-learning conclusions

The content of an online course which aims to support volunteer mentors to learn about mentoring and about mentoring migrants in particular must consider the conclusions of good practice identified above. In addition, for the course developers, the way that technology is used to deliver e-learning to students is the important factor in its success, and to help achieve this, at the very least, such technology should be reliable and accessible as well as easy to navigate.

In order to help inform the design process, pedagogical themes can be summarised and placed under three sub-headings:

Preparatory activity

• Understanding what the learner wants / needs and what is the aim of the course. What basic requirements are there for the course: IT skill level; knowledge of the subject area, etc.

• How long is the course intended to take?
• What support is available if anything goes wrong with the technology or if the learner is having a problem with the course materials and required tasks?

Course Design features

Areas the course design needs to address and includes making provision for areas such as:

• Environment and context of the learner;
• Building on tacit knowledge;
• Cognition—how the learner acquires knowledge;
• Clear route maps (able to move easily backwards or forwards and find current place in the course). Colour coding can be useful here;
• Dividing the course into clear sections or "chunks" as a teacher would do in a face to face lesson with clear educational aims and outcomes for each "chunk";
• Scaffolding / tutor support or support provided within the course design if it is self-learning;
• Personalisation;
• Interaction with the course materials;
• Feedback and encouragement;
• Reflection;
• Opportunity to record / assess achievement on completion of the course which might be a formal certificated qualification.

Learner attributes

What the individual learner brings to the course:

• Individual learning styles—offer a variety of activities;
• Individual motivation to learn and self-improve;
• Prior knowledge and experience.

All e-learning courses need to be trialled and modified according to the feedback received from the tutors / facilitators (if any) and from the learners. It is important that the technology works seamlessly and supports the course materials and activities and does not hinder the learning experience. The design of the course should provide that it will have the same "look" and feel on a computer screen as it does on a tablet or mobile screen, with clear navigational routeways which record / bookmark where the learner has got up to, as learners may be accessing the course by one or more of these methods.

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