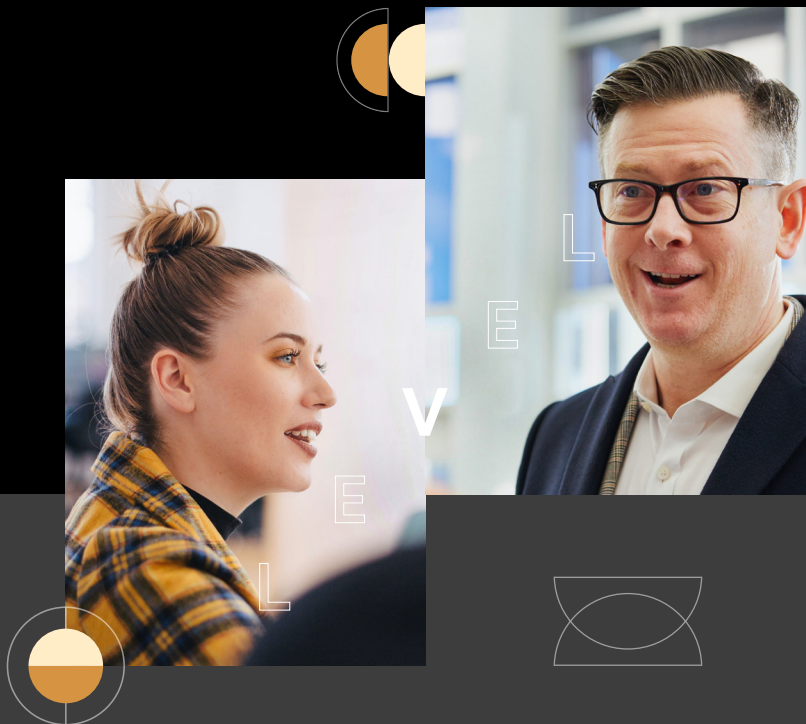# Establishing a Mentoring Programme

The Level Project

Accelerate Equality. Accelerate Success.

What's included?

This document provides an overview of how to establish a basic mentoring programme, with a focus on providing mentoring to support women in personal development and building organisational skills. We also look at more advanced mentoring programmes, such as reverse mentoring and informal mentoring.

Introduction

The purpose of mentoring is to provide development and guidance, based on the mentor's own experience and knowledge, to another individual. The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) defines it as follows:

> **"Mentoring in the workplace tends to describe a relationship in which a more experienced colleague shares their greater knowledge to support the development of an inexperienced member of staff."[1]**

While most descriptions of mentoring describe a partnership between a more senior member of staff and a more junior member, this is not the only way to use mentoring to impart development and share knowledge – these are further discussed later in the document. It is also worth remembering that mentoring can help senior leaders in the business to get to know your female talent, allowing them to perform more of an advocacy and sponsorship role for them overtime.[2] Sponsorship has been found to be more effective than mentoring in advancing female careers but there must be an existing knowledge of the capability and track record of the person being mentored. This can be challenging for senior leaders to build without having a pre-existing knowledge. Mentoring is one of the ways in which that knowledge can be built.

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[1] www.cipd.co.uk: knowledge fundamentals people development coaching mentoring factsheet
[2] hbr.org: lack of sponsorship is keeping women from advancing into leadership

Benefits of mentoring

The benefits of mentoring span both organisational need and individual need.

Individual	Organisational
Access to a more senior/more knowledgeable individual at a more senior, similar or more junior level	Typically a low-cost and low-resource development initiative for the organisation to leverage
Organisation-relevant knowledge from an individual who understands the context	Harnesses existing organisational knowledge and context
Provides an opportunity to share specific challenges you face as a more junior employee and/or as a women in the organisation	Improve senior leader understanding of the perspective of more junior employees and/or women in the organisation
As the relationship develops, the individual can gain access to the mentor's network to build their organisational knowledge, promoting the breakdown of silos	Sharing of knowledge and perspectives across typical organisational silos and developing networks that might not be growing organically
Mentor acts as a sounding board for new ideas and potential career plans	Mentors encourage women to apply for roles and opportunities they might not otherwise apply for

Building your mentoring programme

There are a number of decisions you will need to make when establishing your mentoring programme in order for it to be effective. These relate primarily to the establishment of a formal mentoring programme, but creating a culture of informal mentoring may also be an option to consider to get you started.

Things to consider:

1. Purpose

What is the purpose of the programme? Use a goal-setting methodology such as SMART to ensure that the purpose of the programme is clear and agreed by stakeholders in advance of launch.

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S M A R T

Specific & Stretch	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time-Based
Be as specific as possible in setting your goals, the more detailed the goal the more likely you are to achieve it and the more successful you will be at reviewing and agreeing the goal with others.	"That which is measured gets done". Set a metric of success so that you can determine when you have achieved the goal and communicate progress. Again, agree the metric with relevant stakeholders.	Ask yourself if this goal is attainable? Is it realistic based on resources, including your time, available. The 'A' may also stand for "Agreed" and "Actionable".	Is this goal relevant to the individuals that will participate in the programme and to the organisation?	What is the time frame in which you will achieve the goal? Think about elements of the task and setting intermediate milestones if necessary.

2. Identify the owners of the programme

Who will administer the programme and who will sponsor the programme? Identifying a sponsor from the senior leadership team can be helpful to getting buy-in to the programme. You may also consider creating a "mentoring committee" to run the programme, including individuals and leaders from across the organisation and from different job levels.

3. Objectives of the programme

Agree the objectives with those running and sponsoring the programme. These may be different to the purpose statement, for example:

Purpose: To build a mentoring programme for female employees to enhance their development opportunities and readiness for senior roles over the next 12 months.

Objectives:

- Include women from all departments of the organisation OR focus on departments where women are under-represented

- Provide a sustainable framework for mentoring to use in the future OR complete a pilot programme

- Build a group of mentors that can act as future champions for female talent

4. Duration and format

Decide on the duration and format of the mentoring relationship, for example, will it last for six months or a year and will the meetings be face to face or virtual? Does the mentee reach out to the mentor to kick off the meetings or should the mentor initiate?

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5. Scope the profile of mentors

Determine who the mentors of the programme will be. You may consider, for example:

- Should the mentors be men and women?

- Should mentors and mentees be in the same reporting line?

- Should mentors and mentees be in the same department?

- Will the mentors be more senior?[3]

- How will mentors be identified? Will they be volunteers or all senior leaders?

6. Scope the profile of mentees

This should have emerged in your discussion of purpose and objectives above (Things to Consider #3). Other considerations:

- In what departments/functions are women under-represented?

- At what point in the hierarchy do women become under-represented? Mentor the women at the level below to develop them for promotion.

- How will mentees be identified? Will they apply to join or be nominated by their managers?

7. Determine how matching will be performed

Matching is the process of pairing mentors and mentees. Make sure to consider not just who will do the matching, but also what information you require from mentors and mentees in order to perform the matching. Consider using an application process to encourage mentees to apply to be on the programme, ask them to think about and state their objectives for the programme. This has the dual advantage of supporting the matching while also encouraging the mentees to be specific about what they want to get out of the programme.

8. Check-in points

Determine what check-in will be conducted with the participants on the programme by the programme owner. It is good practice to check in on mentors and mentees just after programme start, at the mid-point and at the end point. This allows you to check that the relationship is progressing as it should and to deal with any challenges that may arise in a timely manner. This is especially important when piloting a programme for the first time.

9. What to do when a match doesn't work

Discuss and agree what should happen where a match doesn't work – this may not happen often, but it is better to have been clear about this upfront so there is a clear course of action should a mentoring relationship not work out.

10. Ending and measuring success

If you have determined the duration of the programme, also discuss and decide how you will end the programme. Include how you will measure the success of the programme. Consider the following:

- Feedback from the mentors and the mentees either through surveys or focus groups

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[3] Reference other types of mentoring later in the document

- Achievement of stated objectives at the beginning of the programme, for example, increasing the number of women applying for more senior roles

- Development experienced by the mentees over the course of the programme summarised by the mentees themselves, for example, broadened network, completed a development programme

11. Mentoring handbook/guide

Create a mentoring handbook/guide clearly articulating the decisions you have made above. This will help mentors and mentees to have a clear picture of how the programme works and should also clearly lay out the expectations of mentors and mentees.

12. Training

Provide training to mentors and mentees on how mentoring works, guidance for getting started, and how to build and keep rapport and momentum. For example, topics for discussion during the meetings.

Other forms of mentoring

The programme described above is how most people understand and describe mentoring. However, mentoring is also a powerful tool outside the confines of a senior to junior relationship and can be an invaluable tool to share perspectives of more junior and female employees with largely male senior leaders. Some other forms of mentoring to consider:

MENTORING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE FORMAL

Some organisations hesitate to introduce mentoring into the organisation because it feels like a big endeavour, but remember, it doesn't have to be, informal mentoring can be just as impactful as a formal programme and may not require any more to get started then informing mentees of what to look for and encouraging them to reach out internally. These mentoring relationships may also be one-off coffee meetings to get started allowing employees and leaders to get a taste for mentoring without a formal, longitudinal programme.

- **Reverse mentoring** – where the more junior individual mentors the more senior individual. This can be a powerful vehicle for helping senior leaders to understand the perspectives of more junior staff, build awareness of the issues and perspectives of those from a different generation, and understand the lived experience of those that might be of a different gender from themselves. Reverse mentoring can also be used where skills that are considered "native" to new joiners are being shared with longer-serving employees.[4]

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[4] www.cipd.co.uk

– **Peer to peer** – where mentoring can support the sharing of knowledge between those at the same level. This can be most useful where, for example, an individual has specific skill, such as networking or presentation skills, which a colleague is trying to build.

– **Buddy programmes** – another mentoring vehicle that leverages peer-to-peer mentoring are Buddy Programmes. These are programmes that match peers for a specific purpose such as supporting the onboarding of new employees or, in the case of female talent, in supporting those going on or returning from maternity leave to work their way through the transition with the listening ear of a colleague who has been through it.

– **Cross company** – mentoring is also available across companies, either through an individual finding a mentor in a similar organisation to build industry-wide knowledge or to get impartial advice. These programmes are also provided by external organisations such as the 30% Club.[5]

"TRUSTED PEER"

Introducing a mentoring programme may also create an opportunity to support employees in understanding how different forms of mentoring may help them every day, without having access to a "formal" mentoring programme. For example, peer to peer mentoring may also take the form of an individual asking a "trusted peer" to provide them with timely feedback on their performance in a leadership team meeting. Supporting employees to leverage these other types of mentoring helps to create a learning organisation.

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[5] 30percentclub.org and www.imi.ie: Network Mentor Programme Brochure

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