

Chapter 3.5

Concepts, Technology, and Applications in E-Mentoring

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INTRODUCTION

The so-called “Internet revolution” has dramatically changed the way people communicate and work nowadays. Attending to The Word Factbook developed by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), there are 1,018,057,389 Internet users in the world by 2005 (CIA, 2006). Fostering of the Internet revolution from a business perspective is out of question and the ever-growing number of Web functionalities has implied a significant and dramatic change in all business management

areas. Within these areas, this revolution has not gone unnoticed, particularly for human resources management. Mentoring, which has been used as a tool for human capital development leverage in organizations has also been deeply impacted by the emergence and generalized use of Internet technologies giving birth to the so-called “e-mentoring.”

The origins of the term must be looked for in Ancient Greece. In the Homer masterwork “Odyssey,” Ulysses, king of Ithaca, recommends mentor Alcímida his house, properties, and his son, Telemachus, education on leaving for the Troy War (traditionally dated from 1193 BC-1183 BC).

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Apart from the word etymology, several modern disciplines literature (such as management, social psychology, sociology, or knowledge management) have provided with mentoring studies from the late seventies of the XX century, particularly, from the mid-nineties. As a consequence of the growing interest of the topic and its broad application in business ecosystems, thousands of definitions have popped up, trying to cover the semantics of the concept. Due to the aforementioned popularity of the concept, Friday and Green (2004) accomplish a re-conceptualization of the term stemming from a deep and detailed study about existing literature definitions. Subsequently, a definition for the mentoring concept is provided, aiming at being universal, following the authors goal: Mentoring is a guidance process that takes place between a mentor and a protégé (also known as mentee). Authors define similarly the mentor term as “wise and trusted counselor or teacher.”

Hence, mentoring is an improvement process in a number of aspects related to the professional career, but it is also the improvement of the individual integrating two sides: a senior advisor and a junior protégé. The established relationship is a win-win situation, having mutual benefits for both sides. On the one hand, the protégé, following the empirical studies about the topic, benefits from improvements in his professional career mainly related to promotions (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Scandura, 1992), a higher income (Dreher & Ash, 1990; Whitely, Dougherty, & Dreher, 1991), more satisfactions in the work environment, and socialization in the workplace (Chao, Walz, & Gardner, 1992). On the other hand, mentors benefit from faster promotions, reputation, and personal satisfaction (Scandura, Tejada, Werther, & Lankau, 1996). Finally, organizations also benefit, given a highest motivation of the employees, lower working mobility rates, and the improvement of leadership and development skills (Levesque, O’Neill, Nelson, & Dumas, 2005), relying on more adaptable employees, willing to share knowledge and ready to face a decision

making process with more trust and confidence (Ragins & Scandura, 1999).

BACKGROUND

Due to technology capability of setting up new communication means and paradigm among people, the envisagement of electronic communication as a means for mentoring relationships was immediate. E-mentoring refers to the process of using electronic means as the primary channel of communication between mentors and protégés (Hamilton & Scandura, 2003). The key distinction between electronic mentoring and traditional mentoring (t-mentoring) is reflected in the face-time between mentors and protégés. The communication means used by both sides is absolutely different in the two mentoring types. While traditional mentoring uses face-to-face relationships, e-mentoring, which also harness face to face relationships, particularly at the beginning of the relationship, is mostly based on e-mail, chat, instant messaging, and several other Internet applications.

As it was previously outlined, e-mentoring is a kind of mentoring, based total or partially on electronic communication. Due to the great amount of electronic communication instruments, a remarkable number of different names for the concept e-mentoring have been provided. According to Perren (2003), e-mentoring can be seen to encompass a range of terms: computer-mediated mentoring, tele-mentoring, e-mail mentoring, Internet mentoring, online mentoring, and virtual mentoring. In this section, we will describe the most relevant e-mentoring features through a review of advantages and disadvantages of e-mentoring faced to t-mentoring, the phases in the mentoring cycle, and the description of e-Mentoring mentoring styles, to end up with the main and most widely used e-mentoring implementations.

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