Learning and Development

**Leveraging Technology** to Maximize the Power of Mentoring

A step-by-step guide to best practices
Table of Contents

3 The Role of Mentoring in Promoting Development and Increasing Engagement

5 Why Are Organizations Adopting Mentoring Tools?

6 What Are the Necessary Steps for Effectively Using a Mentoring tool?

10 Conclusion

Lauren Pytel, MA and Steven T. Hunt, PhD
SAP SuccessFactors HCM Research
The Role of Mentoring in Promoting Development and Increasing Engagement

Mentoring is a term used to describe a relationship between two people established to support the learning and development of one or both individuals. Mentoring programs can foster a culture of continuous learning and development, increase employee engagement\(^1\), and improve employee commitment\(^2\) and satisfaction\(^3\), all of which we know to be critical to organizational success.

A recent Gallup study for example, showed that business units in the top quartile of engagement greatly outperform those in the bottom quartile, realizing 17% higher productivity, 24% lower turnover, and 21% higher profitability\(^4\). Compared to formal training, mentoring also offers a more natural and cost effective approach to advancing employee development.

But to truly maximize the power of mentoring, organizations must ensure that mentoring is an integral component of other talent management initiatives, something that appears to be easier said than done. According to a recent study conducted by SAP SuccessFactors, less than 60% of organizations integrate mentoring with career development in their organizations, 42% with succession management, 34% with employee onboarding, 25% with performance management, and only 20% with diversity and inclusion efforts\(^5\).

While these statistics are unfortunate, they are not entirely surprising. Creating large-scale and integrated mentoring programs can be extremely difficult. Fortunately, recent advances in technology have resulted in mentoring tools that add substantial value by making mentoring less manual, and more efficient, measurable and scalable. This paper will define the critical steps and decisions to think through when using a mentoring tool, while highlighting how to effectively leverage technology to maximize the power of mentoring.

---

4. Gallup 2017 State of the American Workforce
5. SAP SuccessFactors 2017 Future Proofing HR Survey Series: Mentoring
WHAT IS MENTORING?
Mentoring is a relationship between two individuals established to support the learning and growth of one or both partners. For organizations, these relationships represent powerful means of supporting employee development. Effective mentors should share with their mentees constructive feedback, emotional support, opportunities for career building, personal experiences and valuable skills. While the term “mentoring” is often equated with “career mentoring”, this traditional partnership represents just one of many purposes that mentoring can serve in organizations. For example, a mentoring program might be created for the specific purpose of supporting socialization of new employees (i.e., onboarding), or, to emphasize a new focus on employee health and well-being. Table 1 summarizes some of the more common types of mentoring programs.

To learn more about different types of mentor relationships and tips for creating effective partnerships, see our recent whitepaper Learning Partnerships in Organizations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program type</th>
<th>Partnership roles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career mentoring</td>
<td>Person with considerable career experience (mentor) works with person earlier in their career seeking development (protégé)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition and socialization</td>
<td>Person starting a new position and/or joining the company (newcomer) works with person with existing experience with the position or company (veteran)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill development</td>
<td>Person possessing specific skills and capabilities (expert) works with person seeking to learn new skills and capabilities (novice)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational</td>
<td>Person from an older age generation works with person from a younger age generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity mentoring</td>
<td>Person from specific demographic group with more career experience (mentor) works with person from specific demographic group with less career experience (protégé)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and well-being</td>
<td>Persons sharing similar fitness goals work together</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Are Organizations Adopting Mentoring Tools?

If all mentoring programs were highly effective, efficient and easy to manage, there would be no need for mentoring tools. The reality, however, is that successful mentoring is not the norm. When we interviewed SAP SuccessFactors customers about their experiences with mentoring, most of them described similar challenges that led them to adopt a mentoring tool. Four of these challenges are described below:

1. ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN
Mentoring programs can be burdensome and time-consuming to manage manually. Some customers described the hassle of needing to use a combination of data sources and communication outlets (i.e., Excel, email, social groups, etc.) to run their programs. While this upkeep might be possible for administrators of very small programs, it becomes quite difficult for those of greater size.

Even when a mentor partnership is self-managed (as opposed to run by dedicated administrators), there are still administrative tasks such as scheduling meetings, setting goal plans, tracking progress, etc. that when done manually, require significant organization, time and energy.

2. LIMITED SCALABILITY
Many companies want to scale mentoring in their organizations, offering more programs to more employees. But without the use of a mentoring tool, there are likely to be limitations on both the number and types of programs, as well as the number of participants in these programs, that an organization can support.

3. INEFFECTIVE PARTNER MATCHING
Matching mentors and mentees is one of the most difficult and time-intensive responsibilities that program administrators face. The task can be even more daunting for hopeful mentees searching for potential mentors. The skills and proficiencies someone possesses, their strengths and weaknesses, their preferred learning style, the level of commitment their schedule allows – these are just a few of the important things to consider when matching or finding mentorship partners. Partner matching was described by many companies as a major pain point and significant reason for interest in the SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool. Details on capabilities of the SAP SuccessFactors tool and its intelligent mentor-mentee matching algorithm are provided in the next section.

4. DIFFICULTY OVERSEEING PROGRAM HEALTH
A critical component of maintaining a successful mentor program is monitoring its health to drive ongoing improvement. Programs should be evaluated to ensure they are serving their intended purpose and that participants are sufficiently engaged and satisfied. Best practices for measuring program success, including the metrics that are most important to track, will be addressed in the next section.
STEP 1: DETERMINE WHAT YOUR IDEAL MENTORING PROGRAM LOOKS LIKE

Before turning on a mentoring tool, you should know the answers to several questions. The first is what types of partnerships you want your mentoring program to support. The customers interviewed for this study reported planning to offer various combinations of career development, skill development, leadership development, role development, transition/socialization, and diversity and inclusion partnerships. To effectively support different program types, a mentoring tool must be able to support different program structures. After determining the types of partnerships your program will support, you need to decide what structure is most appropriate for that partnership and whether your tool can effectively support that structure. This includes defining whether a partnership is time-bound or open-ended, invitation-based or self-enrolled, supervised or unsupervised, etc.

For example, one of the customers we interviewed described their existing mentoring program as being very formal and structured in nature. The program’s primary purpose is to support career development. Becoming a participant in the program is a selective and competitive process. In this organization, having a tool that supports the option to make a program invitation-only, time-bound and supervised is essential. On the other hand, for organizations that want to offer an informal program open for all employees to join at any time, an effective tool would need to support a self-enroll, open-ended, unsupervised structure. For many of the customers we spoke with, the ability of a mentoring tool to adjust to varying needs of their business is critical.

Defining mentoring program types and structures also plays a role in the next important decision, which is what person, team, or department will be responsible for providing support for your mentoring tool. While technology can mitigate much of the administrative burden typically associated with mentoring programs, tools still need to be supported to be effective. Will this responsibility be delegated to a few individuals or to an entire team? Will it primarily be the responsibility of HR or of another department? There are no right or wrong answers to these questions, but it may be helpful to review your objectives to help guide your support requirements. For example, a self-enrolled, self-matched, and/or unsupervised program will require less administrative support than an invitation-based, administrator-matched, supervised program. In programs where partners are matched by administrators, support might also be best provided by those individuals or departments that know participants at a personal level.

The SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool supports a variety of program types including supervised programs, unsupervised, invitation-only, open-ended, etc.
STEP 2: DETERMINE WHAT A SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP LOOKS LIKE – AND COMMUNICATE THIS INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS

After determining who will provide support for your mentoring tool, this person or persons should come to consensus on important components of the partnership such as goals and appropriate roles for each participant. For example, what should employees achieve or gain by investing time in this partnership? What does success for this particular partnership look like? Identifying the answers to these questions early in the process provides context for program participants, and also creates concrete reference points for evaluating program and partnership success. Individual partner roles also need to be determined. Most of the time this will be done by the partners themselves, but in some cases, will be determined by program administrators. For example, one customer we interviewed described how mentees in the partnership are responsible for initiating communication with mentors, setting partnership goals, planning meetings, etc. in their program; “We remind our mentors that they’re the tour guide, but mentees are the bus drivers.” In a case where partner roles are pre-determined, program administrators need to be diligent about communicating these roles to participants.

With the SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool, program admins can automatically create social communities when creating a mentoring program. This integration with the SAP Jam social collaboration platform makes it faster and easier for mentoring program admins to launch new mentoring programs. Mentors and mentees who have been matched can easily communicate and collaborate with one another as either a large group or as part of subgroups. With automatic feeds, the lines of communication for program participants remain open and mentors and mentees stay engaged. Moving forward, we also plan to support the ability for program participants to set and track goals, create and share activities and achievements, and even record one-on-one meetings.

With the SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool, it’s easy for participants to collaborate e.g., share content, manage activities, post updates, access a calendar of events, etc.
STEP 3: DETERMINE PARTNER MATCHES
Achieving a successful mentor-mentee match is easier said than done. While general criteria such as skill proficiency/deficiency, learning style, personality fit, schedule compatibility, etc. are useful starting points, often times successful matching standards will depend on the specific type of partnership. For example, a program aimed at improving diversity and inclusion might have partners who differ in group membership (i.e., race, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc.) purposely paired together to encourage growth and understanding.

The automated and intelligent partner matching offered by the SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool was a significant point of interest for many of the customers we interviewed. Not only does the functionality save administrators, mentees and mentors time and stress, it was also described by customers as providing “objectivity” and “transparency” to the process. For example, partner matching in manual programs tends to happen behind closed doors and with little input from potential participants. At the same time, the matching is often deemed inaccurate and flawed. With the SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool, requestors gain visibility into who their potential mentors might be and can even initiate the relationship themselves, assuming the program is open.

Our intelligent algorithm takes into account preferences and configured criteria which can include skills, competencies, demographic and other employee profile information such as job title, department, location, etc. to find the perfect match. Mentees can see mentors who are considered ‘matches’ with their profiles and can request to partner with them. Moving forward, support for using additional fields from the in-depth employee profile, as well as custom pick lists of matching criteria based on data not already captured via the employee profile, will be supported by the matching algorithm. In addition, custom rules (e.g., the business unit cannot be the same for mentor and mentee), and weighting of matching criteria that’s configurable on a program by program basis will also be supported.

The SAP SuccessFactors mentoring tool leverages an intelligent algorithm to facilitate automatic mentor-mentee matching and makes it easy for mentees to see potential mentors.
STEP 4: PROVIDE TRAINING TO PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS
After determining mentor-mentee matches, it is often useful to provide training to program participants. Training can mean providing partners with simple strategies or resources like discussion guides and partnership guidelines, providing training on using the tool itself, or both. One of our customers described the value of having their mentors work with an external coach to improve things like listening and inquisition skills noting, “Our mentors reacted very positively to the coaching and say that it changed the way they were talking to mentees.” Whether to provide formal or informal training and whether this training is mandatory or voluntary will vary depending on the organization and type of mentoring program. General best practice however suggests that, at a minimum, partners be given basic guidance on creating and managing a learning partnership. For example, partners should be encouraged to define their individual and collective goals, clarify each other’s roles and responsibilities, and set a concrete plan for realizing these goals before the “mentoring” begins.

STEP 5: MEASURE PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS
It’s difficult to know whether a learning partnership has been effective without some metrics to measure its success. Different types of partnerships will necessitate different types of metrics. A partnership aimed at skill improvement for example should utilize a pre- and post-partnership comparison of that skill. But quantitative measures of effectiveness will not always exist or make sense. In some cases, a subjective measure of perceived improvement may suffice. Participants should be surveyed throughout the program on general components of success such as satisfaction with their partner match and with their overall participation, as well as on more specific topics like degree of goal completion or personal takeaways. For time-bound programs, participants might be interviewed before, half way through, and after the program. If a program has no specified end date, program administrators should determine an appropriate schedule for gathering feedback (i.e., distribute a survey every 6 months).

Organizations may also want to measure the effectiveness of their mentor program more broadly. This generally involves identifying key performance indicators (KPIs) such as the number of participants, median participation satisfaction rating (determined from individual partnership surveys), and specific organizational outcomes associated with the program over time. For example, have a group’s performance ratings improved after their participation in a role development mentor program? Or, have retention rates of minority employees improved following the creation of diversity and inclusivity focused partnerships? To be able to evaluate program health and drive ongoing improvements, it’s important that you determine and agree on the right set of metrics. Technology can often be used to help monitor and measure program success.
Mentoring is a well-established approach to promote development and support employee engagement, commitment and job satisfaction. Moreover, today’s technology makes it possible for organizations to maximize the value of mentoring in ways that were not possible before. Mentoring tools have the potential to provide extraordinary value to organizations by making mentoring less manual and more efficient, measurable and scalable. This makes it easier for companies to leverage mentoring to support a variety of HCM initiatives such as career development, succession management, performance management, and diversity and inclusion efforts, among others.

Using mentoring tools can help mentoring programs succeed but cannot by themselves create this success. There are important decisions that must be thought through and steps that must be followed to ensure that a mentoring tool provides full value to your organization. We hope this paper provides insights into critical steps and decisions to think through when using a mentoring tool, and a clear guide to effectively leveraging technology to maximize the power of mentoring.